



People & Politics



When Representative **Milo Smith** grew his beard in protest over the five-week walkout by Indiana House Democrats he probably didn't foresee the charitable aspect of the gesture. But Smith in April submitted to being shaved by Governor Mitch Daniels, known as The Blade when he was federal budget director under President George W. Bush, to help raise some \$5,000 for two staffers recently diagnosed with breast cancer. Smith went on the auction block as a number of House members bid for the chance to shear off the whiskers, and then two constituents promised \$1,000 if the governor would do the honors. The governor agreed, and the House members donated their highest bids to the cause. They also held a bake sale to help the women.

It's been a particularly long election season for Texas Representative **Donna Howard**. She won in November against opponent Dan Neil, but by the slimmest of margins—16 votes. A recount dropped the number to 12, and Neil contested the election, sending it to the House where Speaker **Joe Straus** appointed Representative **Will Hartnett** to conduct a hearing. He threw out more votes until the margin eroded to only four votes. But a win is a win, and Hartnett recommended Howard retain her seat. A special House Committee then took up the matter and made the same recommendation. Neil withdrew his challenge before the next step—sending the matter to the House floor for members to vote on who would fill the seat.

New Hampshire House Majority Leader **D.J. Bettencourt** has apologized to Catholic Bishop John B. McCormack for calling him a “pedophile pimp who should have been

led away from the State House in handcuffs with a raincoat over his head in disgrace” on his Facebook page. The bishop had appeared at a rally at the Capitol to protest budget cuts he said would hurt the most vulnerable citizens. Bettencourt said he will not step down from his leadership post and has the support of House Speaker **William O'Brien**.

In Arizona, Senate Republicans voted to oust Senator **Scott Bundgaard** from his post as majority leader following a domestic dispute with his girlfriend involving the police. The woman was arrested and jailed, but Bundgaard claimed legislative immunity. Charges against her have since been dropped, but prosecutors say they are considering charges against him. The GOP selected Senator **Andy Biggs** the new majority leader.

It seems to be a trend.

- ◆ A Democrat joined the ranks of Louisiana Senate Republicans in March giving the GOP a two-seat majority in a chamber that just months ago was under Democratic control. Senator **Jody Amedee**, first elected in 2003, announced he was switching parties. He is the third Senate Democrat to change parties in the past five months. The others are Senators **John Alario** and **John Smith**. The Republicans took control of the chamber in March following a special election won by Republican **Jonathan Perry**. And in the House, Representative **Billy Chandler** also switched parties to join the GOP majority. “We do not expect he will be the last. This is a continuing sign of the shift in philosophy toward conservative principles across this state,” said Senator **Danny Martiny**.

- ◆ In Mississippi, Senator **Ezell Lee** switched

from Democrat to Republican, giving the GOP a 27-25 majority.

- ◆ In Tennessee, Republican Kerry Roberts won in a landslide against his Democratic opponent in a special election to fill the seat vacated by U.S. Representative Diane Black.
- ◆ And in Arkansas, Republican **Bruce Cozart** won a special election to fill the House seat of **Keith Crass**, who died about a week before the general election, but nevertheless was elected posthumously. A new election was set after the seat was declared vacated. His victory gives the GOP 45 votes to the Democrats' 54.

Florida Representative **Will Weatherford** has been designated speaker of the House for 2012 through 2014. He will succeed Speaker **Dean Cannon** in November 2012. Praised as “the real deal” by Governor Rick Scott and “a natural born leader” by Representative **Gary Aubuchon**, Weatherford is the son-in-law of former Speaker **Allan Bense**, and brother of Florida State University quarterback Drew Weatherford.

The Stoning of Sally Kern: The Liberal Attack on Christian Conservatism and Why We Must Take a Stand” will be released in July. Written by Oklahoma Representative **Sally Kern**, the book relates her experiences after gaining national attention in 2008 for stating that “the biggest threat our nation has, even more so than terrorism or Islam” is homosexuality. According to the description on Amazon, Kern made her comments while talking about the principles of the Founding Fathers. Clips of the speech were posted on YouTube, which generated more than 2 million hits and what she characterizes as a “stoning” by the media.

Scholarship Tax Credits

Scholarship tax credits—programs that allow kids to attend private schools in kindergarten through 12th grade—are growing in popularity. The way it works is that individuals or corporations donate money to an organization that then awards scholarships for tuition, fees and other private school expenses.

Because the donated money never actually reaches the state government, proponents believe the programs don't violate the church-state separation, nor do they redirect money from the state's education budget away from public schools. In this way, they differ from voucher programs. Some lawmakers find the programs particularly attractive

in tough financial times. Florida's program, for example, is estimated to save the state's education budget \$39 million annually.

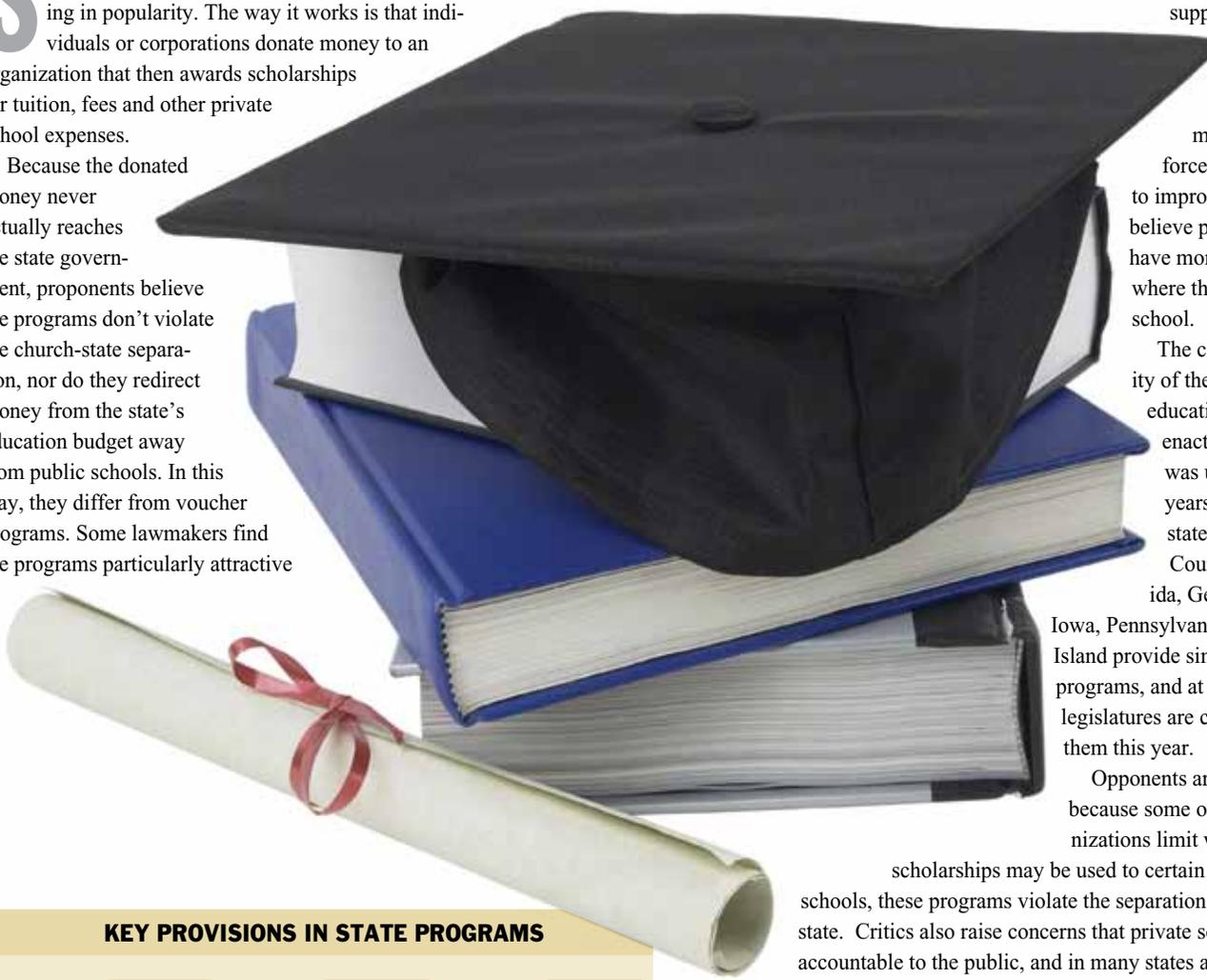
School choice supporters argue making private schools an option for more parents will force public schools to improve. Many also believe parents should have more choices in where their kids go to school.

The constitutionality of the Arizona education tax credit, enacted in 1997, was upheld two years later by the state Supreme Court. Now Florida, Georgia, Indiana,

Iowa, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island provide similar tax credit programs, and at least 19 state legislatures are considering them this year.

Opponents argue that because some of these organizations limit where their scholarships may be used to certain religious schools, these programs violate the separation of church and state. Critics also raise concerns that private schools are not accountable to the public, and in many states are not required to disclose financial information. They may have lower qualification standards for teachers and often do not have to administer state-required standardized tests that measure student performance. Opponents also argue that the state should not give tax breaks to subsidize private schools while it continues to reduce K-12 funding.

The U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments last November in a case brought by four taxpayers challenging Arizona's program on the basis that it relies on funds owed to the state. The program allows contributions of up to \$1,000 to the nonprofit scholarship organizations. The lawyer for the group of four argued that many of the organizations distributing the scholarships are dedicated to a specific faith. On April 4, the Supreme Court threw out the lawsuit by a 5-to-4 vote, saying taxpayers had no legal standing to challenge the Arizona tax credit program because the state is not funding the religious schools directly.



KEY PROVISIONS IN STATE PROGRAMS

	Individual Tax Credit	Corporate Tax Credit	Limited to Public School Students	Limited to Low Income Students	Requires Private School Assessments
Arizona	●	●			●*
Florida		●	●	●	●
Georgia	●	●	●		
Indiana	●	●	●	●	●
Iowa	●			●	●
Pennsylvania		●		●	
Rhode Island		●		●	

* Only schools accepting corporate scholarships
Source: NCSL, March 2011.

Bagging Plastic



States are considering taxes, fees and bans on plastic carry-out grocery bags. And, as the debate over which is better—paper or plastic—continues, a few lawmakers have included paper bags in proposed legislation in an attempt to keep all bags out of the waste stream.

Supporters believe limiting bags promotes conservation and curtails road, beach and water pollution, while alleviating harm to wildlife. According to various environmental organizations, it takes about 12 million barrels of oil to make the 380 billion plastic bags and approximately 14 million trees for all the paper bags used each year in the United States.

Opponents argue that, to decrease litter and conserve valuable resources and energy, policymakers should focus instead on promoting plastic bag recycling, rather than taxing consumers. They argue that plastic bags are popular with consumers and can be recycled into pipes, storage containers, flower pots and other products.

No state has yet enacted a statewide ban, fee or tax. In 2009, North Carolina banned plastic bags for the Outer Banks region, a chain of barrier islands off its coast. The District of Columbia in early 2010 enacted a ban on disposable, non-recyclable plastic carry-out bags and set a fee of 5 cents each for use of all other disposable bags.

So far this year, lawmakers in 11 states have considered legislation for taxes, fees and bans on bags. Hawaii legislators are considering seven different proposals. The legislation varies. The bill in Arkansas, for example, would prohibit a store from providing a single-use carry-out bag to a customer. A bill in Connecticut would require all retailers to charge 5 cents on each paper or plastic bag, and a bill in Oregon would ban single-use checkout bags, except in certain cases.

A World View of Elections

Everyone interested in politics is an election observer in one way or another. But few of us have had the chance to be an official election observer in another country. The Helsinki Commission, made up of members of Congress, and its partner, the Organization for Security and Cooperation's Parliamentary Assembly, are changing that, one election at a time, both here and abroad.

Legislators, legislative staff and election administrators are especially sought after as observers abroad, says Neil Simon, communications director for the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, which manages most international election teams.

Vermont Representative Rachel Weston has served as an observer in Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan and Belarus over the last few years. "It provides a good basis for understanding the strengths and weaknesses of citizen participation," she says. "Every country has a different way of running elections, and democratic structures are both similar and different everywhere. We shouldn't take our strong democracy for granted."

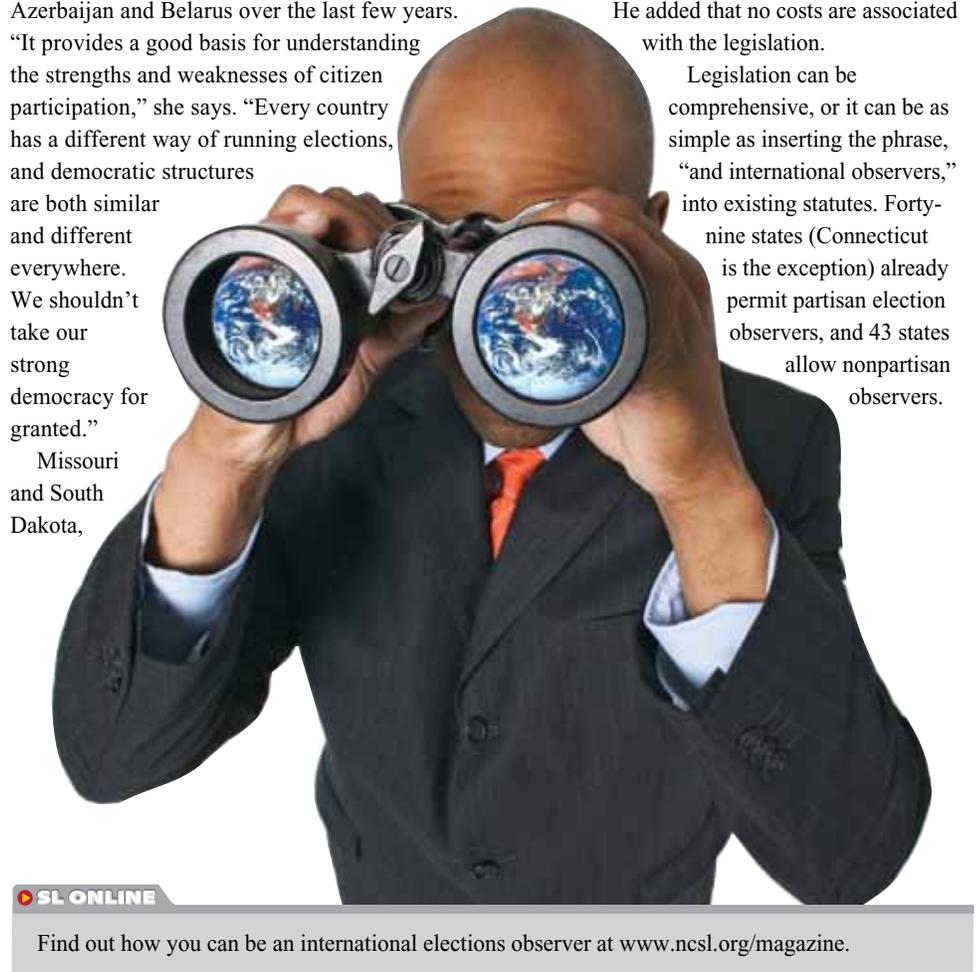
Missouri and South Dakota,

plus the District of Columbia, explicitly permit international observers at polling places. When international observers have come here and spent time at the polls with election administrators, the response from both sides has been overwhelmingly positive, according to the Helsinki Commission. The National Association of Secretaries of State recently adopted a resolution to encourage more international observers here at home.

This year, lawmakers in New Mexico and North Dakota have passed, and in South Carolina are considering, proposals to allow international observers during elections. North Dakota Senator Ray Holmberg introduced the legislation to "make it as clear as possible that we would welcome observers in our state."

He added that no costs are associated with the legislation.

Legislation can be comprehensive, or it can be as simple as inserting the phrase, "and international observers," into existing statutes. Forty-nine states (Connecticut is the exception) already permit partisan election observers, and 43 states allow nonpartisan observers.



SL ONLINE

Find out how you can be an international elections observer at www.ncsl.org/magazine.

A Bait and a Hook

Across the country, people head into the outdoors every year for an undertaking as old as man himself. Carrying rifles or bows, they scour the forests and wait in blinds to hunt deer, duck, moose, elk and other animals.

Hunting, however, has been losing its luster since the early 1990s. Fewer hunters means fewer licenses and less money for state wildlife agencies, which often rely on license fees and the federal matching funds for 80 percent to 90 percent of their budgets. A lack of hunters hinders the ability of these agencies to manage game, other animals and their habitats.

Things may be looking brighter, however. Individual hunting licenses increased 3.6 percent from 2008 to 2009, the largest increase since 1974. State legislation supporting hunting may be helping.

In the past, states focused on recruiting young hunters. But, more recently, states have offered inexpensive licenses to novice adult hunters. These licenses usually allow a person to hunt alongside a licensed adult hunter and get a feel for the activity, before investing the time and money in a regular license and the required safety course.

In 2010, for example, Vermont created a license that allows novices to hunt alongside a licensed veteran hunter over age 21; those under age 16 must have their guardian's permission. The license is \$10, while regular licenses can be \$20 and more, depending on the type. The state Department of Fish and Wildlife reports the number of these licenses issued, game taken, and any injuries or incidents to the General Assembly every year.

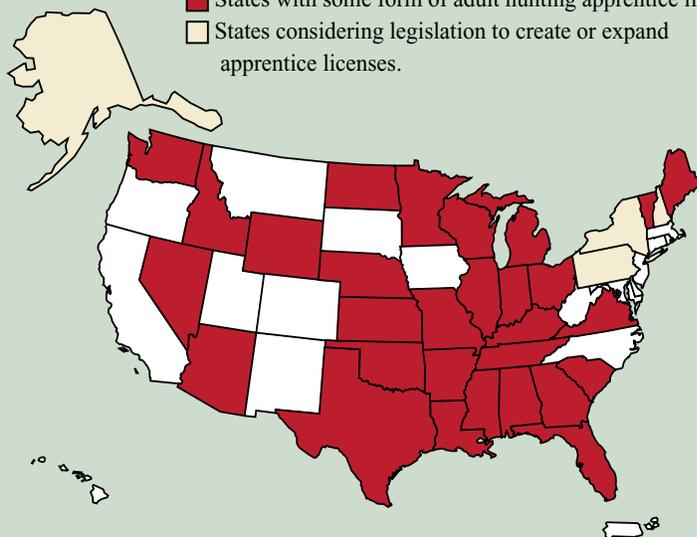
The apprentice licenses have been popular and are translating into more full-time, regular licenses. In Ohio, almost 50 percent of the more than 8,000 people who bought apprentice licenses in 2006 bought some form of regular hunting license in 2008. And in Minnesota, women now buy 28 percent of apprentice hunting licenses, compared with only 10 percent of regular hunting licenses.

"Licensed apprentice programs have the potential to be another important tool for state agencies to help connect more Americans to the outdoor experience," says Ron Regan, executive director of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

THE APPRENTICE STATES

States are trying to hook adult novices on the joys of hunting with cheaper licenses.

- States with some form of adult hunting apprentice license.
- States considering legislation to create or expand apprentice licenses.



State Quakes

The United States experienced 21,080 earthquakes (3.5 and greater), between 1974 and 2003. Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Iowa, Maryland, North Dakota, Vermont and Wisconsin all stood on solid ground, however, with none.

Alaska	12,053
California	4,895
Hawaii	1,533
Nevada	778
Washington	424
Idaho	404
Wyoming	217
Montana	186
Utah	139
Oregon	73
New Mexico	38
Arkansas	34
Arizona	32
Colorado	24
Tennessee	22
Missouri	21
Texas	20
Illinois	17
Oklahoma	17
Maine	16
New York	16
Alabama	15
Kentucky	15
South Carolina	10
South Dakota	10
Virginia	10
Nebraska	8
Ohio	8
Georgia	7
Indiana	6
New Hampshire	6
Pennsylvania	6
Kansas	4
North Carolina	3
Massachusetts	2
Michigan	2
Minnesota	2
Mississippi	2
New Jersey	2
Louisiana	1
Rhode Island	1
West Virginia	1

Note: Tied states are listed alphabetically.

Source: USGS, March 2011.