FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

State legislatures deliver

Welcome all new and returning members elected to serve in our state legislatures. The decisions you make in the next two years will affect the daily lives of your constituents far more than those of your colleagues in Congress. As you convene in capitols across the country and begin the difficult work of solving some of the nation’s biggest challenges, NCSL is here to help. From education and energy to transportation and taxes, we have thorough, unbiased and comprehensive resources to help you navigate complex policy issues.

Ironically, during the midterm elections we read and heard the least about the people who matter the most: you, the country’s 7,383 state legislators and your staffs. The hard work you will be tackling in 99 chambers across our great country has far-reaching consequences. State legislatures decide how to fund road repairs, which crimes send offenders to prison, how teachers are evaluated, what the minimum wage should be, who must get a background check before buying a gun, how to protect people from identity theft. The list goes on.

Americans have made it clear: They want action, not impasse, from their government. And state legislatures, the laboratories of democracy, deliver. You respond first to new issues and emerging concerns. You seek real solutions to difficult problems. You reach across the aisle to find common ground. You negotiate and compromise to get things done. You innovate.

Despite all the noise surrounding the 116th Congress, we would do well to remember that state legislators play second fiddle to no one, not to high-profile governors, not to your federal counterparts in Washington, D.C. It’s true that state lawmakers spend less on campaigns, are not as well-paid and may have a harder time being seen and heard. But you—just like your congressional peers—have power. The only difference is, you use it.

The contributions you and your staffs make to American democracy cannot be overstated. Remember, through NCSL, you are part of the community of all legislators across the country—Republicans and Democrats. Turn to us often. We are committed to your success.

—William T. Pound, NCSL executive director

EDITOR’S NOTE

The magazine’s new look

Nearing middle age often brings about a desire for change—perhaps a sporty new car, a new job or even just a new hair color can avert a midlife crisis. As State Legislatures approached its 45th year as “the magazine of state politics and policy,” we knew it was time for a makeover, a refresh. And this issue is the great unveiling.

We’ve updated the look and name, shortened some articles, simplified the design and will now publish six issues a year. The online version is getting updated as well.

What hasn’t changed is the great content. Focus groups held last year and a random survey of our members showed a high percentage of you like reading our stories. We value your opinions and strive to make each issue helpful to you in your challenging job. Behind the bold, clean new design, you’ll discover solutions you can adapt to your state, insight to challenge your assumptions, facts to bolster your positions, people you can relate to, ways to become more effective, and, we hope, a phrase or story to make you chuckle, all written in clear language that helps you digest it the first time through.

Let us know when you question or disagree with an opinion expressed in a story. Call when you want to know more about an article. Even better, let us know when reading State Legislatures prompted you to act, perhaps introducing legislation or reaching out to your constituents. Let us know what you think. It’s your magazine.

—Julie Lays, editor, State Legislatures magazine