Vermont House Speaker Is NCSL’s Newest Executive Officer

Vermont Speaker Mitzi Johnson (D) was elected immediate past president of NCSL to serve the remaining term of former Illinois Senator Toi Hutchinson (D), who was appointed her state’s new cannabis regulation oversight officer. Johnson will serve in the post through the Legislative Summit in Indianapolis in August, when the officers’ terms rotate. NCSL’s officers alternate between parties annually. “I’m thrilled to join the officers’ team at this transition point for the organization to help set a strong course supporting good government around the country,” Johnson said.

“This is a liberty guy but there has to be a limit when there’s other people’s lives and safety at risk, and distracted driving is an incredible risk to drivers out there.”

Iowa Senator Zach Whiting (R) on his bill to prohibit drivers from using hand-held cellphones while driving, from The Associated Press.

“Superman’ Legislator’s Story Soars to Oscar Nod

In truly rarefied air, the story of a former Missouri legislator was a finalist for an Academy Award in February. “St. Louis Superman” tells the story of rapper and activist Bruce Franks Jr. and his journey to the statehouse. It was one of five nominees chosen from the 96 films up for best short documentary.

Franks became best known locally for his political activism in Ferguson, Mo., after the police shooting of 18-year-old Michael Brown in August 2014. On the day of the shooting, Franks was about 15 minutes away from the scene, preparing to celebrate his son’s first birthday. Elected in 2016, he served parts of St. Louis in the Missouri House before resigning last spring.

The documentary covers Franks’ struggles with the shooting deaths of close friends and constituents. Primarily, he is haunted by the memory of witnessing the shooting death of his older brother, Christopher Harris, in 1991. Christopher was 9 years old when he died. Franks recounts that it was the first of many funerals he attended in his young life.

“We either invest in efforts on the ground right now or we pay a lot more down the line.”

California Senator Ben Allen (D) on ways to mitigate the effects of natural disasters, in Stateline.
NCSL’s Executive Officers Are All House Speakers

In a twist, all of NCSL’s current executive officers are speakers of their states’ house chambers. Wisconsin Assembly Speaker Robin Vos (R) is NCSL’s president. Hawaii House Speaker Scott Saiki (D) is president-elect. Idaho Speaker Scott Bedke (R) is vice president. And Vermont Speaker Mitzi Johnson (D) is immediate past president and serves as president of the NCSL Foundation for State Legislatures.

“We basically are surrounded now.”

Alabama Representative Steve Clouse (R) on his bill to allow a lottery in Alabama, the only state in the Deep South not to have one, from The Associated Press.

“The long-term lesson of American democracy is that having different political parties is important because there are other perspectives in the room, but ultimately they have to work together.”

Colorado Senator Kerry Donovan (D) on today’s hyper-partisanship, in The Hill.

“Obviously, we’re concerned about the public health impact, but there’s an economic impact on that too. I’m hearing a lot from the tourism industry on that.”

Wisconsin Representative Joel Kitchens (R) on the coronavirus, from fox6now.com.

Virginia House Speaker Receives Arts Award

NCSL and Americans for the Arts recognized Virginia House Speaker Eileen Filler-Corn (D) with the Public Leadership in the Arts Award for State Arts Leadership. The annual award acknowledges state lawmakers who distinguish themselves by advancing pro-arts legislation in their region. Filler-Corn has regularly sought funding increases for the Virginia Commission for the Arts. She was named the 2019 award winner during NCSL’s Capitol Forum in December.

Illinois Senator Don Harmon (D) will be the chamber’s new president

He succeeds Senator John Culerton (D), who stepped down in mid-January after nearly four decades in the legislature, the last 10 of them as Senate president. Harmon was first elected to the Senate in 2002 and most recently served as assistant majority leader.

Pennsylvania’s top leaders plan to step down

Senate President Pro Tem Joe Scarnati (R) will not seek reelection after five terms in the House and 14 years as leader of the Senate. House Speaker Mike Turzai (R) also plans to step down. Turzai was first elected to the House in a special election in 2001. He served as majority leader from 2011 to 2014 and as speaker since 2015.

Louisiana elects new House and Senate leaders

Senator Page Cortez (R) will lead his colleagues as chamber president. Cortez, elected in 2012, succeeds outgoing Senator John Alario (R), who served in the legislature for 48 years. Representative Clay Schexnayder (R) will lead his colleagues as speaker. Elected in 2011, Schexnayder succeeds outgoing Representative Taylor Barras (R), who reached the end of his term.

Massachusetts Representative Robert DeLeo (D) is the longest-serving speaker in state history

After more than 4,000 days as House leader, he has topped a record set by a 19th-century Federalist. With 15 House terms behind him, he plans to run for reelection this fall.