

## **CSG Conference Offers Opportunity to Showcase our State**

Opinion Piece by Senate President Gene Therriault

As chairman of the Alaska Host Committee, it is my pleasure to welcome an expected 1,500 state officials, families and others to Anchorage Sept. 25-29, 2004. That's when The Council of State Governments (CSG) and *CSG-WEST* convene joint annual meetings here.

This September meeting is the only national gathering of elected and appointed officials from all three branches of state and territorial government, and includes representatives from every party, all 50 states, some Canadian provinces, and the private sector. This is the first time Alaska has hosted a national CSG Annual State Trends & Leadership Forum and the fourth time Alaska has hosted the *CSG-WEST* annual meeting.

The conference will culminate more than five years of planning. Alaska was scheduled to host the national meeting in September 2001, but it was cancelled due to the events of September 11. We are excited about showcasing our state and welcoming delegates from all over the country.

CSG is a national, nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that has championed excellence in state government for more than 70 years by sharing innovative solutions to common problems across state borders. CSG also promotes the role of states in our federal system and offers leadership training. The private sector joins the public sector in developing creative solutions to challenges facing the states.

*CSG-WEST*, one of the four regions of CSG, provides a platform for regional collaboration among the legislatures of the 13 Western states. *CSG-WEST* focuses on issues unique to the region, such as water, public lands, energy, trade and transportation. Idaho Senate Majority Leader Bart Davis leads the western region of CSG.

Hosting the event in Alaska provides not only an important chance to share our state's culture, heritage and spectacular scenery, but also to emphasize economic and policy matters unique to the largest and northernmost state in the union.

Selection of Alaska as host state is particularly opportune this year with Gov. Frank Murkowski serving as CSG President. He will deliver the keynote address on the conference theme, "The Pacific Rim: Leading the Way," highlighting Alaska's growing role in this increasingly significant market. Alaska legislators also hold key positions on CSG committees and task forces.

Among other officials expected to attend are Gov. Mike Huckabee from Arkansas; Gov. Ruth Ann Minner from Delaware; and Gov. David Freudenthal from Wyoming. Alaska Attorney General Gregg Renkes will moderate a session on emerging trends in U.S.-Asia relations with speakers Ong Keng Yong, secretary general of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and Deanna Oku, vice chair of the United States International Trade Commission.

The event offers a full agenda of informative sessions for delegates. John Zogby, one of the most influential and respected pollsters in the country, will offer survey research of the American political landscape. Other speakers include Peter Hutchinson, founder and president of The Public Strategies Group, Inc., on improving results in state services while cutting budgets; James Flanigan, internationally syndicated business columnist for the Los Angeles Times, on the Politics and Economics of Globalization; Cheryl Matheis, state legislative director for AARP; Dewayne Matthews from the Education Commission of the States; and Bennett Raley, assistant secretary for water and science at the U.S. Department of Interior.

CSG conferences are typically funded through registration fees, sponsorships and host state funds. This year, the generous donations of more than 175 individuals and businesses will re-pay in full the state's contribution, meaning no public money will be used for the event. We would particularly like to recognize and thank our platinum and gold sponsors: CIRI Alaska Tourism Company & Kenai Fjord Tours, the Alaska Railroad Corporation, Altria, BlackRock, The Bank of New York, and TransCanada Pipelines Ltd. for helping sponsor the conference.

The impact to the local economy is expected to be \$1.5 million in sales from the 1,500 delegates coming to our great state.

Please join us in offering a warm reception to our neighbors from around the country. The Alaska Host Committee and staff of CSG, CSG-*WEST* and the Alaska Legislature have worked diligently to make this conference a success.

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