POLICY SESSION 1
Sunday, July 21 | 2:00 – 3:30 PM
Adapt and Survive: Artificial Intelligence and EdTech in the Classroom
To succeed in the global, innovation economy, students – and staff – must be knowledgeable and prepared to harness the power of education technology and tools, such as artificial intelligence. While much focus has been on the pitfalls of devices and technology on student attention and performance, there is much potential in cutting-edge tools, personalized tutoring services, and equitable access to technology and devices. For many students in rural or impoverished areas, access to reliable high-speed internet, devices, and other technology may only be accessible at school. In preparing students for future success – whether in the workforce or postsecondary education – computer and technology literacy is necessary. Participants will hear from experts in the technology and education space on how to prepare their state for the future of education and work.

PRESENTERS |
• Amy Cyphert, Director, ASPIRE Office and Lecturer in Law, College of Law, West Virginia University, West Virginia
• Donna Hoylman Peduto, Executive Director, West Virginia Public Education Collaborative, West Virginia University, West Virginia
• Erika Klose, Ed.D., Director of PK-12 Academic Support, West Virginia Department of Education, West Virginia

POLICY SESSION 2
Sunday, July 21 | 2:00 – 3:30 PM
Southern State Approaches to Mitigating the Childcare Crisis
Across the region, economists, industry experts, and parents alike have been raising the alarm about the childcare crisis in America. In most states, one year of childcare exceeds the cost of in-state tuition at local public colleges and universities. Recognizing that the inability to access affordable, quality childcare can stymie economic growth and limit the available workforce, states are beginning to explore options to make childcare more affordable and accessible for families. Not only does access to affordable childcare make it possible for parents to participate in the workforce, but quality care is also essential to prepare the workforce of tomorrow. This session explores the data behind the childcare crisis, and steps Southern states are taking to support access to high quality, affordable childcare.

PRESENTERS |
• Representative Samara Heavrin, Kentucky

• Amy Atkinson, Executive Director of the Virginia Commission on Youth, Virginia
• Dr. Heather Hanna, Director of the System Change Lab at the Social Science Research Center at Mississippi State University

COMMITTEE BUSINESS BREAKFASTS
Monday, July 22 | 9:00 – 10:00 AM
• Energy and Environment Committee
• Fiscal Affairs and Government Operations Committee
• Economic Development, Transportation, and Cultural Affairs Committee

GOVERNMENT STAFF TRACK 1
Monday, July 22 | 9:00 – 10:15 AM
Communication Excellence - Even When Communication is Hard
In today’s short attention-span, multi-generational workplace, communicating effectively is difficult enough. But how much more difficult is it when you have to have a “hard conversation”? Who has trained you how to have a Hard Conversation? A conversation where you must:
• Deliver bad news
• Discuss poor performance or a poor attitude
• Confront bullying or passive aggressive actions
• Mediate conflict between others
• Lay-off or fire someone

If you are looking for the skills, tools and techniques to grow your leadership and professionalism in the area of having hard conversations, this session is for you! If you are looking for a solid track to run on to successfully navigate and deliver a hard conversation this session is for you.

PRESENTER |
• Jay McChord, President, McChord Inc., KY

POLICY SESSION 3
Monday, July 22 | 9:00 – 10:00 AM
Crisis, Interrupted: Implementing Successful Intervention Programs
Crisis intervention programs are specialized services designed to provide immediate and short-term assistance to individuals and communities facing acute and potentially overwhelming psychological, emotional, or social crises. These programs aim to stabilize individuals in crisis, reduce immediate distress, and connect them with appropriate resources for ongoing support. State and local governments and communities across the country are redesigning their crisis response systems to better serve the needs of those who experience crises related to behavioral health —
including mental health and substance use. These programs aim to connect people to the services they need while reducing reliance on law enforcement and hospitals as the first line of response when such crises arise. This session highlights evidence-based best practices and successful models in Southern states.

PRESENTERS |
• Representative Timothy Reeder, MD, North Carolina
• Representative Carla Cunningham, RNBS, North Carolina
• Stephen Lloyd, MD, Chief Medical Officer, Cedar Recovery, Tennessee

POLICY PLENARY
Sunday, July 22 | 12:00 – 1:30 PM
The South’s Got Something to Say: Advancing Policy Despite Congressional Gridlock
The 118th Congress has been the least productive Congress in decades. In 2023, the House voted 749 times, but only enacted 27 laws. Even compared against sessions that also featured a divided government, this count remains low. Meanwhile, Southern states have successfully advanced key policy priorities – making substantial progress where their federal counterparts have not. This panel discussion featuring state leaders from across the region will explore the many ways in which Southern states are the tip of the spear, and how they have advanced important policy solutions to issues impacting the region.

MODERATOR |
• Elizabeth Whitehouse, Principal, Whitehouse Strategies, Kentucky

PANELISTS |
• Speaker Roger Hanshaw, West Virginia
• Senator Mamie Locke, Virginia
• Cam Ward, Director, Bureau of Pardons and Parole; Chair, CSG Justice Center, Alabama

GOVERNMENT STAFF TRACK 2
Monday, July 22 | 2:00 – 3:30 PM
Mastering Stress: Powerful Techniques to Boost Your Calm and Confidence
Are you tired of feeling overwhelmed by stress? Do you want to enhance your coping skills and boost your performance? If so, you won’t want to miss this session on stress management led by Dr. Mary Anderson, a leading clinical psychologist and author. Using science-based strategies and skills, Dr. Anderson will show you how to become consistently high-performing in the short term and sustainably high-achieving in the long term.

You’ll learn actionable techniques to strengthen your self-talk and optimize your self-care, tailored specifically to help you cope better with stressful situations and busy schedules. Don’t let stress hold you back any longer - join us at this session to boost your calm and confidence and become a happy high achiever!

PRESENTER |
• Dr. Mary Anderson, Psychologist & Author, MA

POLICY SESSION 4
Monday, July 22 | 2:00 – 3:30 PM
The Kids Aren’t Alright: Student Behavioral and Mental Health Strategies from the States
With the shift to remote and hybrid school and learning, educators and support staff have reported that today’s youth are more comfortable with virtual or remote counseling services. The privacy and accessibility provided by counseling via device can be a powerful intervention tool to keep students engaged, enrolled, and successful. From state efforts to expand telehealth access, governance of student devices, and social media, to West Virginia’s nearly two decades of school-based health center support and other states’ initiatives connecting nonprofit and community-based organizations to at-need youth, policymakers have a plethora of options to intervene and improve youth mental and behavioral health.

PRESENTER |
• John G. Kennedy, Director of School Based & Behavioral Health Services, West Virginia Primary Care Association, West Virginia
• Brenna Leasor, Tech Policy Counsel, Common Sense Media, Virginia.
• Alicia Ziman, School-Wide PBIS Coordinator, WV Behavior/Mental Health Technical Assistance Center, Marshall University, West Virginia

POLICY SESSION 5
Monday, July 22 | 2:00 – 3:30 PM
This Land is Whose Land: Foreign Ownership of Agricultural Land
U.S. agricultural land owned by foreign individuals or entities has recently raised new debates around the country. Some highlight concerns about its proximity to key infrastructure, while others raise questions about decreasing availability. Several state legislatures have proposed related bills with caps and bans on such ownership. Some of these measures seek to restrict ownership by nationals from countries considered hostile to American interests, whereas other bills
offer blanket restrictions. This session will explore the different approaches across the South and discuss the potential effects of such legislation.

PRESENTER |
• Tillman Breckenridge, Partner at Stris & Maher LLP, Virginia
• Ryan Owsley, Chief Deputy Attorney General at the Arkansas Office of Attorney General, Arkansas
• Senator Jay Collins, Florida

POLICY SESSION 6
Monday, July 22 | 2:00 – 3:30 PM
The Rest is History: Historic Preservation Tax Credits and Economic Development
Preserving our history can be an economic development engine. Redeveloping older buildings can drive new business activity into previously forgotten areas. Old warehouses can be redeveloped into thriving business centers, old motels can become boutique hotels, and even an old jail can become a brewery. All the while, these redevelopments can preserve the historic look and feel of the original structures. How can states keep their history alive and thriving while catalyzing economic development? How do these credits work, and how can states maximize their impact on the community while minimizing the impact on their budget?

PRESENTER |
• Eric Nelson, Senator, West Virginia
• Charles Wendell, Founder and Chairman, Mountain Shore Properties, South Carolina

COMMITTEE BUSINESS BREAKFASTS
Tuesday, July 23 | 9:00 – 10:00 AM
• Agriculture and Rural Development Committee
• Human Services and Public Safety Committee
• Education Committee

SUPREME COURT UPDATE
Tuesday, July 23 | 9:00 – 10:00 AM
The Supreme Court has once again been busy issuing several important rulings during its current term that began in October and is due to decide its remaining cases by the end of June. This SLC favorite session will also cover other interesting and important cases and how the SCOTUS decisions can impact our Southern states.

PRESENTER |
• Tillman Breckenridge, Partner at Stris & Maher LLP, Virginia.

GOVERNMENT STAFF TRACK 3
production options, and how states can boost energy capacity through the power of the atom.

PRESENTER |
• Emil Avram, Vice President of Business Development, Dominion Energy, Virginia
• Dr. Allison Macfarlane, Director of the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs, the University of British Columbia, British Columbia, Canada

POLICY SESSION 9
Tuesday, July 23 | 2:00 – 3:30 PM
No Strings Attached: State Solutions to Crafting Better Tax Incentives
State legislators face a critical challenge: ensuring taxpayer dollars allocated through incentive programs yield tangible economic benefits for the state and individual communities. The past several years have witnessed bidding wars as states – including neighbors in the South – competed to attract the likes of Amazon, Microsoft, Oracle, Toyota, and other large multinational corporations. While each public-private deal requires its own evaluation and cost-benefit analysis, the fact remains that more legislators are raising concerns regarding how to better allocate these finite resources and tax relief to local and small businesses already in their communities. Instead of one-size-fits-all approaches, lawmakers and researchers nationwide have embraced performance-based incentives to craft a strategic strategy aligning state investment with measurable outcomes. This session will feature a moderated bipartisan panel exploring practical tools and real-world examples to implement evidence-based programs that future-proof state’s tax incentive framework and sustain responsible economic growth and investment.

MODERATOR |
• Senator Kerry Roberts, Tennessee

PANELISTS |
• Senator Blake Tillery, Georgia
• Senate President Pro Tem David Givens, Kentucky
• Representative Jason Hughes, Louisiana
• Delegate Luke Torian, Virginia

GOVERNMENT STAFF TRACK 4
Wednesday, July 24 | 10:30 – 12:00 PM
AI Efficiencies: Lessons Learned from Congress’s Internal Adoption of AI
This 90-minute presentation provides actionable skills and steps to incorporate AI tools into the day-to-day work of a legislative office. The presentation covers the history of AI development, key players, and examples of AI use cases for governments worldwide. Additionally, it highlights how AI tools have been adopted for legislative operations in Congress, including institutional security assessment, upskilling, streamlining workflows, and increasing staff capacity.

The presentation includes a live demo on how to use AI tools for common legislative tasks, strategic considerations for state legislative offices around AI use, and an opportunity to ask questions and discuss state legislative staffers' experiences with AI tools.

PRESENTER |
• Anne Meeker, Deputy Director, POPVOX, OH

COMMITTEE SITE VISITS
Wednesday, July 24 | 11:00 AM – 4:00 PM
The Schoolhouse Hotel
The Schoolhouse Hotel is the world's first fully accessible property, in which every room and public space exceeds ADA standards and showcases first-of-its-kind design choices to provide comfort and access for all. Constructed in 1912 as the White Sulfur District High School, more than 100 years later, this iconic building has transformed from the former White Sulfur Springs schoolhouse into a boutique hotel. The hotel further invests in the West Virginia business community by supplying locally produced goods. Participants will tour this innovative property and receive a briefing on the innovative design, historic preservation, funding mechanisms, and how this full-service boutique hotel drives economic development in White Sulphur Springs.

WV Great Barrel Company and Smooth Ambler Distillery
Participants on this tour will learn about the distilled spirits supply chain – from barrel to bottle – and enjoy a whiskey tasting. First, participants will tour WV Great Barrel Company, where, nestled in the heart of Appalachia, they boast the world’s most advanced whiskey barrel cooperage. Here, participants will learn how these industry-leading barrels are dried, manufactured, toasted, and charred. Next, participants will enjoy a tour and tasting at Smooth Ambler Distillery. From grinding their own carefully selected regional grains to labeling and signing each bottle, Smooth Ambler does everything by hand, the old-fashioned way. Participants will learn how these spirits are crafted, before enjoying a private tasting.
Grandview, New River Gorge National Park

Grandview, located within the New River Gorge National Park and Reserve in West Virginia – the nation’s newest national park, offers a stunning overlook of the New River, known for its breathtaking vistas and vibrant seasonal colors. This area is significant for its rich natural beauty and geological history, attracting thousands of visitors and nature enthusiasts annually. The West Virginia Economic Development Agency estimates a $5 million annual boost in tourism revenues from the new park designation, creating jobs in the tourism, hospitality, and conservation industries with salaries, on average, $20,000 higher than the median income for the region. The state plans to offer reskilling and retraining programs for adults alongside K-12 educational initiatives as part of a comprehensive workforce development approach. Students throughout the state will have the opportunity to earn high school credit through work- and project-based learning experiences in the hospitality, tourism, and conservation industries. Participants will learn more about these initiatives to ensure the protection of the area’s natural resources and foster job creation and economic growth, deepening the community’s connection to its environment while enjoying scenic views of the park. Additionally, attendees will have the opportunity to receive Leave No Trace certification, promoting responsible conversation and economic stewardship.

International Relations Forum

Wednesday, July 24 | 12:00 PM – 1:30 PM

The Republic of China (Taiwan) and the United States enjoy a strong relationship. Taiwan is the United States’ seventh-largest merchandise trading partner, tenth-largest export market, and eighth-largest source of imports. Several Southern states have established trade offices in Taiwan in recent years, further solidifying economic ties. Beyond this, Southern states are also engaging with Taiwan on important educational initiatives, as evidenced by a recent Memorandum of Understanding signed with the West Virginia Department of Education. The forum will focus on the importance and benefits of these sub-national engagements in the Southern region for trade, security, investments, economic development, and education.