



POLICY SESSION 1

Saturday, July 19 | 2:30 - 3:30 PM

AI-gricultural: How AI Will Affect Ag

Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology is cropping up in various industries, and agriculture is no exception. As a useful tool, AI can be used for crop and soil monitoring, harvesting crops at quicker speeds, and managing production. According to market analysts, AI in agriculture is projected to grow to \$4.7 billion by 2028, so now is the time for state leaders to learn more about how technology will affect farming in their states. This session will cover what aspects of agriculture are expected to be affected by AI and what lawmakers should consider when discussing the industry's future and possible regulations.

POLICY SESSION 2

Saturday, July 19 | 2:30 - 3:30 PM

Thank You For Your Service: Tangible Support Programs to Support the Needs of Veterans

The Southern region is home to the largest concentration of veterans, active-duty military personnel, reserve or guard service members, and their families in the nation. While the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) provides essential services, state governments play a crucial role in bridging service gaps by expanding benefits and ensuring veterans receive the support they have earned. This session highlights successful, state-driven programs across the South that support veterans' reintegration into civil society through enhanced healthcare access, workforce integration, housing stability, family support, and benefits navigation. Policymakers will gain actionable insights into strengthening veteran-focused legislation and programming within their state.

POLICY SESSION 3

Saturday, July 19 | 2:30 - 3:30 PM

Hiring Career Ready: Building a Stronger Workforce Through Skill-Based Approaches

Across the Southern states, workforce demands are shifting rapidly, with many industries experiencing critical labor shortages. As the economy evolves, the need for career-ready workers with in-demand skills has never been greater. Traditional degree pathways remain valuable but are not always the most practical or accessible option to meet today's and tomorrow's workforce needs. Employers and policymakers increasingly turn to skills-based hiring—an approach that prioritizes competencies and experience over formal degree requirements—to build a more inclusive, agile, and skilled workforce. This session will explore the policy innovations and strategic initiatives Southern states are

deploying to expand skills-based hiring and promote alternative credentialing pathways, such as industry-recognized certifications, apprenticeships, and certificate programs. With many high-growth industries—such as manufacturing, healthcare, information technology, and skilled trades—requiring specialized skills rather than four-year degrees, state leaders are rethinking how to remove barriers to employment and create more opportunities for career advancement.

POLICY SESSION 4

Saturday, July 19 | 2:30 - 3:30 PM

If You Recruit Them, They Will Teach: Innovative Approaches to Address the Educator Shortage

The Southern states face a growing crisis in recruiting and retaining qualified educators, particularly in STEAM, Advanced Placement, English Language Learners (ELL), and Special Education. The teacher pipeline is under immense strain due to high turnover, low compensation, rural staffing challenges, and certification barriers. Innovative strategies, such as grow-your-own programs, co-teaching and residency programs, licensure reforms, earn-while-you-learn, apprenticeships, and affordable teacher housing, have been proposed and studied nationwide. By utilizing these innovative methods to recruit and retain educators for high-need schools, policymakers can ensure that any efforts are more than a Band-Aid for this crisis. This session will highlight replicable and scalable strategies that Southern policymakers can implement to rebuild and sustain a robust educator workforce. Panelists will discuss state-specific case studies, funding mechanisms, and policy frameworks designed to transform recruitment and retention efforts into long-term solutions rather than temporary fixes.

POLICY SESSION 5

Sunday, July 20 | 9:00 - 10:00 AM

Escaping the Road to Rural Ruin: Healthcare Access, Medical Debt, and the Urgent Needs for Rural Support

According to a recent study by the University of Minnesota Rural Health Research Center, led by Dr. Carrie Henning-Smith, Rural Residents More Likely to Struggle with Medical Debt, rural communities have the highest percentage of medical debt in the country and have the least access to adequate healthcare. These rural healthcare deserts are primarily an issue in the South, and lawmakers have worked across the aisle to address the unique needs of rural communities, such as medical vending machines for common low-risk prescriptions, mobile healthcare clinics, incentivizing grow-your-own medical staff, and even examining licensure



reciprocation to encourage international doctors to relocate to rural communities. This session will provide an overview of steps states can take to address rural healthcare access and ease the burden of medical debt in these areas.

POLICY PLENARY

Sunday, July 20 | 12:00 - 1:30 PM

Smart Growth for a Stable Workforce: State Strategies Pairing Workforce Housing and Economic Growth

The intersection of housing, economic development, and state policy is more critical than ever as states work to ensure that their workforce has access to safe, affordable housing. A scarcity of workforce housing—designed for middle-income workers who earn too much for traditional affordable housing but struggle to afford market-rate housing—has emerged as a pressing issue in many states, exacerbated by rising housing costs, limited inventory, and regulatory challenges. At the same time, states play a crucial role in shaping land use policies, infrastructure investments, and property insurance markets, directly impacting housing availability and affordability. Smart growth principles offer a sustainable, community-focused development framework that balances economic expansion with housing accessibility. By integrating workforce housing initiatives with smart growth strategies, states can create dynamic, livable communities that attract and retain a strong labor force (while retaining the unique local character).

POLICY SESSION 6

Sunday, July 20 | 2:00 - 3:00 PM

Two-Score and No More: Updating Decades-Old School-Funding Formulas

Across the country, more than half the states have a web of decades-old per-pupil funding formulas that are stagnating and in dire need of change. From Georgia's nearly 40-year-old Quality Basic Education (QBE) program to Virginia's 52-year-old Standards of Quality (SOQ) resource-based formula to Texas's enrollment-based model, these calculations fail to account for present state conditions. The complexities surrounding state funding formulas impact a district's ability to support student needs and prevent schools from responding to demographic changes. However, change is on the horizon as lawmakers across the region – and country – have prioritized a comprehensive review of existing formulas and deficiencies by starting the process of overhauling outdated models. Since 2000, at least nine states have overhauled their funding systems. Participants will learn more about trends and innovations in school funding and perspectives from lawmakers currently reviewing their formulas.

POLICY SESSION 7

Sunday, July 20 | 2:00 - 3:00 PM

Healing an Ailing Industry: Addressing the Shortage of Rural Vets

Across the country, only 3.6 percent of veterinarians focus on animals raised for food or fiber, down from 40 percent in the early 1970s. Even including veterinarians specializing in equines and wildlife, the number today is only 7.8 percent. Yet, these professionals are vital to ensuring food security by caring for animals essential to agriculture. States across the South have tried to address the shortage of rural vets by opening higher-education programs for training rural vets, with many offering financial incentives if graduates commit to staying in the industry. However, rural veterinarians still struggle with obtaining the funds needed to establish their practices. In addition, youth outreach plays a significant role in generating interest among the next generation of rural vets. Therefore, states wanting to increase the number of rural veterinarians may need to look beyond simply funding college programs and consider ways to assist these professionals in starting their practices or encouraging the next generation of rural veterinarians. This session will consider what options (beyond rural vet higher-education programs) Southern states might need to consider to address the current shortage.

POLICY SESSION 8

Sunday, July 20 | 3:30 - 4:30 PM

(Don't Fear) The Data: Embracing Evidence-Based Policymaking

As state leaders find themselves revisiting similar policies that become perennial issues, it is more important than ever for legislators and support staff to craft a thoughtful approach to introducing and reviewing legislation and solutions to critical issues affecting their state. However, lawmakers and legislative staff often lack the information to know whether select policies are successful or where areas exist for further improvement. Access to and better use of the vast array of data available to state governments is essential as lawmakers attempt to keep up with the rapidly changing state of the economy and technology. This session will feature a moderated panel discussion on the implementation of and successful results from state leaders who embrace evidence-based decision-making.



POLICY SESSION 9

Sunday, July 20 | 3:30 - 4:30 PM

Power Users: State Considerations for Data Centers

New and expanding technologies like Generative AI and cloud storage services usher in new possibilities for the future and increased power demands. Further complicating the issue, data centers have longer operating hours than traditional industries and require more heating and cooling than other commercial buildings (though new technology may improve data centers' heating and cooling needs). Some states, like Mississippi, continue offering incentives to lure in more data centers, while other Southern states, like Georgia and Virginia, are reconsidering their approach. As data centers' energy use continues to be a major issue and more facilities are built across the region, this session will give state leaders an overview of how to deal with increasing energy needs and whether to consider offering continued incentives.

POLICY SESSION 10

Monday, July 21 | 2:00 - 3:30 PM

From A(I) to C(ybersecurity): Innovating State Operations

In just a brief nine-month period from late 2022 to early 2023, more than 5.5 billion American users accounted for nearly 19 billion visits to the most popular generative artificial intelligence applications on the web – representing more than 22 percent of the worldwide user base. While widespread in the cultural zeitgeist, these tools are still in a state of infantile enmeshment in business work, with the United States Census Bureau's Business Trends and Outlook Survey reporting that, as of May 2024, fewer than 6 percent of U.S. businesses report using artificial intelligence to produce goods or services. Recognizing the urgent need to study how existing regulations apply and what new guardrails are needed for AI, state leaders have realized there is no time to lose in the race to understand this complex topic before its usage gains widespread commercial appeal. In response to this firestorm of popular and general usage, state lawmakers across the U.S. introduced more than 200 measures addressing AI in 2023 alone. Nearly every state has proposed at least one bill examining or mentioning artificial intelligence since 2009 – including all 15 CSG South member states. Accordingly, attendees will benefit from the insights of tech leaders, legislators, and researchers as they embrace and add much-needed guardrails to this new technology.

POLICY SESSION 11

Monday, July 21 | 2:00 - 3:30 PM

Greater Grid Growth: States' Role in Advanced Transmission

Advanced transmission technologies are tools that can help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of electricity grids and increase the reliability and resilience of the system. However, they require funding and lengthy timelines to be rolled out effectively. In addition, each state will likely want to know how much of a positive effect implementing advanced transmission could have and how much of an impact it will have on consumers. This session will give participants an understanding of the technologies available, the associated costs, and how rolling out advanced transmission will improve Southern states.

POLICY SESSION 12

Monday, July 21 | 2:00 - 3:30 PM

Strengthening the Foundation: Policy Pathways to Resilient Infrastructure

Amid increasingly severe natural disasters and deteriorating public assets, resilient infrastructure remains a priority for states. Inadequate infrastructure threatens public safety and imposes substantial economic costs on communities. State policies promoting the resilience of roads, bridges, utilities, and other critical infrastructure will be key as federal programs like the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) do not have sufficient funding to respond to these situations. Some Southern states like Louisiana and Florida have enacted resiliency plans and programs to organize and fund resiliency efforts. This session will explore the critical role of resilient infrastructure in addressing the challenges posed by natural disasters and aging public assets, highlighting key state-level efforts to improve infrastructure sustainability and mitigate economic risks and show lessons learned from interstate cooperation.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS FORUM

Tuesday, July 22 | 12:00 - 1:30 PM

Navigating Global Trade Shifts: Southern States' Strategies for Economic Resilience

The international trade landscape is evolving rapidly, with increased tariffs, shifting geopolitical alliances, and supply chain disruptions presenting challenges and opportunities for Southern states. As the federal government recalibrates trade policies—particularly with China, Canada, Mexico, the European Union, and key energy partners—state legislators must proactively position their economies to withstand economic turbulence while capitalizing on emerging markets. With most Southern states' largest trade partner being one of



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Canada, China, or Mexico, this session will provide a deep dive into the latest trade developments, discuss their implications for Southern state economies, and offer strategies for fostering economic resilience through targeted international partnerships, foreign direct investment (FDI), and state-level trade diplomacy.

Stay tuned for more updates- Presenter Names, Government Staff Tracks, and Site Visits!