

## Critical Issues Adventures in Boston

The Lawn On D (across street from Boston Convention Center). The opening reception, which had a "Bostonopoly" theme, took place among

*As an organization, we believe that it is absolutely critical that we communicate the importance of geoscience for informed decisionmaking at the regional, state, and local levels. So from August 6-9, AGI's Critical Issues Program Manager Cassandra Rose attended the National Conference of State Legislatures Annual Legislative Summit and coordinated a booth with several partners from AGI Member Societies. With Geologic Map Day tomorrow and a geologic mapping themed Pardee Symposium on October 25, now is a great time to think about the impact our science has on communities across our Nation. Thanks for sharing, Cassy! –Joe Lilek, AGI Member Society Liaison*

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by Cassandra Rose, CIP Manager

On August 5, I packed my bags and headed north to Boston for the annual meeting of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). Enroute, memories of my one visit to a wintry Boston as a teenager came back to me... memories of trying to stay warm, seeing my first 3-foot blizzard, and having a blast making snowmen and exploring the historic city with my classmates for an extra five days while the airports dug out from the storm. Fortunately, as I stepped off the plane this time, the weather was mild and dry –a great start to the five days I would spend in Boston promoting the geosciences to lawmakers from around the U.S. and the world.

In the Critical Issues Program, we have a mission to connect decision makers at all levels with impartial, expert information on climate, energy, mineral resources, natural hazards, and water. Our target audience, however, is state and local decision makers, who are often overlooked in traditional outreach efforts by the geoscience community, but have a large role to play in crafting policies that affect our communities and daily lives. To learn more about the issues state and local decision-makers care about, the Critical Issues team seeks out opportunities to meet and talk with state and local decision makers in person – and so I traveled to Boston to attend one of the largest meetings of state legislators in the country.

The NCSL annual conference is a bustling nexus of activity with thousands of legislators and legislative staff hurrying to and from sessions on every conceivable issue that could affect a state, including energy, education, federalism, budgets, taxes, and much more. While you can find people from every state and many territories in the U.S., there are also representatives from around the world – Canada, Africa, South America, Europe, and more – coming together to discuss different approaches to common issues. For much of the conference, I talked with conference attendees at our exhibitor booth, which was coordinated by AIPG and shared with several other AGI member societies, including GSA, AASG, AEG, and ASBOG, to promote the geosciences. However, I did take time to roam the conference and attend several conference sessions.

A few geoscience-related topics were the subject of sessions at NCSL, including a half-day Energy Summit, and sessions on water quality, natural hazards, agriculture. There was also a really fantastic session on efforts to place scientists as policy fellows within state legislatures around the country (my home state of California has made great strides in this effort). Here are a few things that I took away from these sessions and my conversations with people at the conference:

1. Legislators and electricity providers are thinking hard about sustainably and reliably diversifying electricity production in their states, with many wrestling with more distributed sources (think rooftop solar), consumer demand for renewables, and balancing those factors with having a reliable electricity grid.

2. Natural hazards and hazard mitigation is an ongoing topic of concern across the country. In the last five years, all 50 states have had natural disasters declared at the federal level, with associated federal spending increasing over 200% over the last 20 years. Flooding was reported as the biggest natural hazard of concern in a poll of attendees.
3. The looming expiration of the National Flood Insurance Program authorization on September 30th is of great concern, and there is widespread agreement that this is an important program that needs to continue. (Read more on the NFIP Reauthorization process in AGI's Policy program news brief [here](#).)
4. AASG provided geologic map postcards of every state in the country for the booth, and we discovered that everyone LOVES having a geologic map of their state!
5. I was surprised and gladdened by the number of people who came up and said that they know a geologist, whether it was a sibling, parent, friend, or significant other.
6. Many people who approached the booth wondered how the geosciences benefited them or their state, and were very surprised to discover that the geosciences are very important! A great example of this was one person who didn't think geoscience was very important or necessary, but who worked in the construction industry where a lot of sand, gravel, and water resources are used to make concrete. After discussing link between the geosciences and the natural resources used in construction, that person realized how fundamental geoscience is to what they do on a daily basis, and that made a powerful impact.

As geoscientists, we are very used to thinking about the importance of the geosciences to society, which can sometimes lead us to conclude that this is an obvious connection. I came away from the NCSL meeting with the realization that the majority of people aren't aware of or just don't think about the importance of the geosciences to them or to their communities. Perhaps because they are so fundamental, the geosciences are easily overlooked. Talking with legislators and staffers and understanding their priorities and concerns is a great first step to begin bridging the gaps in understanding, and to help them find reliable information for policy-making. I look forward to continuing the conversation at NCSL's annual meeting next year.

## Tags:

- geotimes, critical issues, policy
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