

Publisher's Letter

Contributed by PT Editors
Wednesday, 23 May 2007

The conversation on strengthening the states' role in the federal model was one worth having--and pursuing.

HOW DO YOU DO IT?

This week's issue features the PT Breakfast Roundtable held during the recent NCSL Spring Forum in Washington. Top state legislative leaders met over breakfast to discuss the states' role in the federal model. The discussion was thoughtful and far-reaching. If one theme dominated others, it was that strengthening the states role in the federal system is a conversation worth having—and pursuing.

Everyone seemed to agree, "the states have to stand together" to move beyond today's largely hat-in-hand approach to working with Washington. But the unanswered question remains, how? How do state leaders mobilize the concerns of 7,382 elected officials across 50 states into a cohesive force that addresses legitimate political, economic and social policy objectives? It's an important topic, both in its own right and for its implications for our overall system of government.

Why do we care about the state legislatures' reasserting their role—however broadly defined—in the constitutional system? At the end of the day, economic and societal problems that should be fixed aren't being fixed. Certainly, there are many reasons. North Carolina Speaker of the House Joe Hackney suggests, "it all comes back to the money." While Washington is spending hundreds of billions of dollars on a conflict that the United States could never really win, the states have been handed the bill for battles they must win—among others, education, health care and immigration reform. And while the threat of global terrorism is real, REAL ID represents an unwieldy—and many say, un-necessary—response, again at the expense of the states' limited financial and human resources. The list doesn't end here. As they were 220 years ago, the state legislatures may well represent the last reserve of political authority standing to uphold the principles of republican democracy upon which the country was founded and the Constitution enabled. To be continued...