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LEGISLATORS SEEK STRONGER VOICE IN TRADE NEGOTIATIONS,
PRESERVATION OF STATE AUTHORITY

Troy, New York, July 19, 2012—On July 15, the NCOIL Executive Committee—looking to protect state regulation in a growing world economy—moved to strengthen state legislators’ role in U.S. trade talks. After more than a year of dialogue with United States Trade Representative (USTR) officials and other key parties, lawmakers at the NCOIL Summer Meeting adopted a resolution that highlights legislators’ now-limited opportunities to comment, asserts the importance of state legislator input, and calls for greater transparency, as appropriate, in trade negotiations.

Legislators at the Burlington Summer Meeting also—in order to facilitate broader legislative participation—committed to send the USTR the names of lawmakers wishing to join a key USTR advisory group, the Intergovernmental Policy Advisory Committee (IGPAC).

According to Sen. Travis Holdman (IN), chair of the NCOIL International Insurance Issues Committee, which adopted the resolution on July 13 and will submit names to the USTR:

It is deeply unfortunate that state legislators are almost completely unable to weigh in during the negotiation process. Of the 700 members on various USTR advisory committees, just two are legislators—a disturbing fact that NCOIL will work to change. We do not think that all aspects of negotiation should be public, of course, but we do think there’s room for a more open process that respects state public policy.

Rep. Kathie Keenan (VT), sponsor of the Resolution Urging Support for State Authority in U.S. Trade Negotiations, said that “Time and again states have been frustrated in their efforts to add state legislators to IGPAC—our best chance to protect state rights before it’s too late. We appreciate that USTR officials have participated in NCOIL debates, but the reality is that our voice has not been heard.”

Isaac Faz, Deputy Assistant for Intergovernmental Affairs & Public Engagement at the USTR, said at the International Committee meeting the USTR welcomes receiving names of potential IGPAC legislative members. He said the USTR was working to streamline its process for broadening IGPAC membership so that state lawmakers could join more easily.

Rep. Sharon Treat (ME), an IGPAC member, also spoke, advocating for more legislator participation and for additional transparency.

The NCOIL Summer Meeting took place from July 12 through 15 in Burlington, Vermont.

NCOIL is an organization of state legislators whose main area of public policy interest is insurance legislation and regulation. Most legislators active in NCOIL either chair or are members of the committees responsible for insurance legislation in their respective state houses across the country. More information is available at www.ncoil.org.
For further details regarding NCOIL trade agreement activity, please contact the NCOIL National Office at 518-687-0178 or by e-mail at cthorson@ncoil.org.