

National Conference of State Legislatures – Legislative Summit 2024

Louisville, Kentucky | 5–7 August 2024

Setting the Scene

The **National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)** is the backbone of U.S. sub-national governance, providing research and a neutral convening space for the 7,500 legislators and 30,000 staff who shape policy across 50 states, territories and commonwealths. The 2024 Legislative Summit—returning to Kentucky for the first time since 2010—drew more than **5,000 delegates** from every U.S. jurisdiction and 21 overseas parliaments, including Wales and New Zealand for the very first time. The gathering also marked the start of NCSL’s year-long **50th-anniversary** celebrations.

Louisville’s Kentucky International Convention Centre became a sprawling “laboratory of legislatures” for three days, its concourses humming with simultaneous break-outs, learning-hub pop-ups and an exhibition hall of 268 policy and technology vendors—the largest in the Summit’s history.

Why It Mattered for Wales

Although the Senedd operates in a different constitutional context, U.S. statehouses grapple with many of the same issues facing devolved Wales: fiscal resilience in volatile times, rapid advances in artificial intelligence, the high cost of healthcare, and the practicalities of decarbonising transport in rural areas. The Summit therefore offered a comparative window on innovative approaches, potential pitfalls and bipartisan deal-making at the sub-national level—an invaluable complement to the Senedd’s own scrutiny and legislative work.

Themes and Take-aways

1. Artificial Intelligence, Democracy and Skills

For the first time the Summit devoted an entire policy **track to AI**, underscoring legislators’ urgency to get ahead of disruptive technologies. Sessions examined deepfakes and election integrity (*“It’s Not All Deepfakes: AI Can Be Useful in the Election Process”*), the ethics of automated decision-making, and strategies for building an **AI-ready workforce** with “durable skills” that complement automation.

Relevance to Wales: The Senedd’s preparations for the 2026 Welsh elections mirror U.S. concerns about synthetic media. Insights on watermarking, disclosure rules and transparency could inform Welsh Electoral Commission guidance and approaches

Disinformation. The emphasis on lifelong, transferable skills dovetails with our Commission for Tertiary Education and Research's agenda.

2. Fiscal Resilience in an Uncertain Economy

Amid forecasts of a “soft landing” yet slower growth, a series of workshops (co-hosted with the Pew Charitable Trusts) walked delegates through **stress-testing state budgets** against recession scenarios and natural-disaster shocks. Legislators compared rainy-day-fund rules and automatic stabilisers that trigger spending caps when revenue falls.

Relevance to Wales: With devolved budget settlements exposed to fluctuations in Barnett-driven block grants, the case-study method showcased in Louisville offers a template for the Senedd Finance Committee when interrogating Welsh Government reserves and contingency planning.

3. Climate, Transport and Rural Equity

A session entitled “**Charge! States Forge Ahead on EV Expansion**” outlined the federal-state push to place fast-charging stations every 50 miles along interstate corridors, alongside grants aimed at community chargers for small towns. Speakers—from Colorado, Florida and the new Joint Office of Energy & Transportation—stressed that electrification must be coupled with reduced vehicle miles and fair cost-sharing.

Relevance to Wales: Rural connectivity is an equally pressing issue in Wales; the U.S. model of overlaying charging infrastructure on legacy road networks—and the debate over road-user fees to replace declining fuel-tax revenues—offers useful pointers for Transport for Wales' EV strategy and the Senedd Climate Committee's inquiry into infrastructure funding.

4. Health-Care Affordability

Several break-out sessions spotlighted **state prescription-drug affordability boards**, importation waivers and bulk-purchase negotiations—mechanisms Maryland, Colorado and Washington are piloting to curb spiralling costs. While U.S. healthcare structures differ, the legislative architecture (price-setting boards, transparency mandates, re-importation pilots) provides comparative evidence for Welsh efforts to secure fairer medicine pricing within the NHS.

5. Civility and Inclusive Democracy

Echoing the Senedd's own diversity ambitions, historian **Doris Kearns Goodwin** opened the Summit by reflecting on leadership lessons from Lincoln to Johnson, arguing that empathy is the wellspring of bipartisan progress. Other sessions drew on brain-science research to counter cognitive bias in political debate, while international panels traded experiences on digital-first engagement tools that broaden participation.

Personal perspective: As a long-time advocate for inclusive representation as the Senedd Commissioner responsible for the Official Languages Scheme I was struck by practical demonstrations of AI-assisted captioning that can instantly switch between English, Spanish and ASL on committee webcasts.

Concluding Reflection

The Louisville Summit reaffirmed the value of sustained engagement with fellow sub-nation-state legislators. In an era of overlapping crises—economic, technological and climatic—statehouses and devolved parliaments serve as agile policy laboratories. From AI safeguards to climate-smart infrastructure and fiscal shock absorbers, the ideas exchanged in Kentucky offer concrete, actionable insights for Wales. Equally important was the spirit of pragmatic bipartisanship and curiosity that suffused the corridors—reminding us that, whatever the jurisdiction, democracy flourishes when lawmakers learn from one another.

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