



**West**

THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS

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## Alaska State Visit

On March 10 and 11, CSG West Director Edgar Ruiz and accompanying staff visited state legislators and legislative staff in the Land of the Midnight Sun. While the temperatures were low, CSG West was warmly welcomed in Juneau.

Members of the Alaska Senate and House had already received a briefing on the Covid-19 pandemic and measures to promote personal and public safety. Hand sanitizers, handwashing stations, and reminders about how to stay safe were widely available throughout the building. Concern was evident about the cruise ship industry and other hospitality sectors of Alaska's economy, as well as the welfare of the communities and people who make their living from tourism. This concern was compounded by the drop of oil prices – a significant source of revenue for Alaska, as well as other Western states.

Throughout the visit, CSG West staff were able to meet with members to learn about the challenges facing Alaskans and the legislative priorities of members as they work to address those challenges. Discussions included issues ranging from rural broadband, the Permanent Fund, economic development, revenue diversification, Gas to Liquid Fuels (GTFs) technology, transboundary water issues, including abandoned mine pollution risks, agriculture, and declining forest health due to climate change and destructive pests. Conversations provided an opportunity for CSG West staff to share measures taken in other Western states to address the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as member programming planned for 2020.

Western Legislative Academy Alumni gathered for a lunch offering CSG West staff to provide updates on the program and review the current roster of eligible legislators for



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the 2020 class. Many alumni had already approached their colleagues about applying and shared plans to reach out and encourage those that have not yet applied.

The Senate and House quickly passed [HB 206](#), which was amended to include authority to spend anticipated emergency federal funding to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Senate and House Rules Committees also studied a variety of proposals to keep members, staff, and the public safe. Measures taken included closing the Capital Building to the public for the duration of the session.

On March 10, many members were engaged in legislative hearings on Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl (PFAS) pollution related to [SB 176](#), which seeks to address PFAS pollution in drinking water and in firefighting materials. A number of advocates and experts were on hand to testify, including Mr. Rob Billot, an attorney who won the first case fighting “forever chemical” pollution. There was also a special community screening of *Dark Waters*, a 2019 film based on the true story of Mr. Billot and his advocacy journey through the courts.