



Scott Pattison

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to joining NGA, Scott Pattison served for over 14 years as director of the National Association of State Budget Officers. He started his career in the federal government at the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in the late '80s. At the FTC, Pattison held roles as attorney-advisor, special assistant, and staff attorney. Following his tenure at the FTC, Pattison served as the executive director for the National Consumer Coalition. Pattison also served as state budget director and head of the Virginia Department of Planning and Budget, as well as counsel in the office of the Virginia Attorney General. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of George Washington University, Pattison went on to receive his law degree from the University of Virginia.

ORGANIZATION BRIEF Founded in 1908, the National Governors Association (nga.org) is the collective voice of the nation's governors and one of Washington, D.C.'s most respected public policy organizations. Its members are the governors of the 55 states, territories, and commonwealths. NGA provides governors and their senior staff members with services that range from representing states on Capitol Hill and before the Administration on key federal issues to developing and implementing innovative solutions to public policy challenges through the NGA Center for Best Practices. The NGA also provides management and technical assistance to both new and incumbent governors.

Has the National Governors Association stayed true to its mission over the years?

The mission is twofold: to share ideas, information, and best practices among the governors so they don't have to reinvent the wheel, where they can learn from each other. It creates a wonderful opportunity to share ideas and promote ideas, and move the ball forward in policy across the states.

The second part is being an advocate collectively of the states and their leaders, the governors, to the federal government. That is a critically important function, especially now, because there is such an important intersection between federal programs and state activities. They're very much intertwined.

States Solving Problems

An Interview with Scott Pattison, Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer, National Governors Association (NGA)

It's critical today that state interests and governors' views are heard at the federal level. If not, the federal government can do a lot of things that either don't solve a problem or create unintended consequences.

At day's end, regardless of political party or ideology, governors just want to solve problems.

Would you touch upon the most important issues NGA is focused on?

Governors and states are interested in economic development. There are so many aspects to this – they want to bring in as many jobs as possible, and they also want to deal with skill gaps, which come from very rapid changes in technology, globalization, and trade. It's critical that the workforce has skills that match the type of economic activity that is going on in states.

This is a universal issue so, at the National Governors Association, we conduct all kinds of activities to share information and assist governors and their staffs on how to achieve their goals of improved economic development and job creation.

Some other issues are state focused but others, like healthcare, involve the federal government. We're doing everything we can here to facilitate dialogue between the governors and senators and members of Congress so they can gain an understanding of how the states are impacted as healthcare legislation changes and develops.

We try to get as directly as possible to results, but this is difficult given the unfortunate political rhetoric and polarized views today. We always say that governors want healthcare results – efficient healthcare, global access, and improved health outcomes in their states.

They also want improved education and cybersecurity. Over the past year, we've raised the awareness of the importance of these issues to state officials and governors and have seen an increasing focus on them.

You focus on creating innovative solutions. Do you attempt to approach this in an entrepreneurial fashion?

There is innovation taking place. At the governor and state level, we're seeing that they're now thinking several years ahead about how technology is going to cause big changes. We have an initiative from Nevada Governor Sandoval called Ahead of the Curve, which is to ensure NGA is informing and assisting governors in identifying the types of innovations that will come about in the near future.

We have quite a few younger, entrepreneurial governors who don't look at these innovations in technology as something scary that immediately have to be regulated; they look at how things can be approached to take advantage of these developments.

How important is it for governors to build public/private partnerships in their states?

It's critical, and across states we are seeing sophisticated relationships developing between the governor and the state, and then with the business community and those who are providing jobs.

These governors are often either businesspeople themselves or they are familiar with the business community and understand what hampers economic development and what encourages it.

Will you discuss the NGA Center for Best Practices and the Corporate Fellows Program?

The concept behind the center is that it's absolutely critical to have an entity with NGA that is ensuring we're keeping an eye out for the innovative and creative activities that states are undertaking. We then need to make sure these activities are shared, and get state officials together to solve problems. We do almost 100 events per year, many under the auspices of the Best Practices Center. The idea is to get states together and share what works and what doesn't.

We also have a health reform learning network, with 14 states involved, seven of which have governors who are Democratic and seven that are Republican. It's a focus group to talk about what works in health and what doesn't. We're also using these events to gather information to share with the administration and Secretary Tom Price and his staff about how states see certain proposed changes or regulations on healthcare and about what works and what doesn't and should be changed.

The idea behind the Corporate Fellows Program is that rather than shunning business, we should be finding out what their interests are and what ideas they have. We need to address if there are things we're doing at the state level to hamper job growth and if there are things they may have ideas about.

Is it difficult to be optimistic when there are such extremes in politics?

I'm optimistic long term and working with the governors reinforces that – they are making a difference. ●