Tuesday, August 9

Conference Registration
7:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. | First Floor Foyer

General Breakfast | Breakfast Discussion
Consent-Based Siting for Nuclear Waste
7:30-8:30 a.m. | Porte Kent, First Floor

Concurrent Committee Breakfast Meetings
Agriculture & Rural Development
7:30-9:15 a.m. | Dufferin, Lobby Level
Health
7:30-9:15 a.m. | Beaumont, Belair, Second Floor
Education
7:30-9:15 a.m. | Beauport, Second Floor
CSG Justice Center
7:30-9:15 a.m. | Plaines, 23rd Floor

Nominations Committee Breakfast Meeting
8:00-8:30 a.m. | De Tourny, Lobby Level

Plenary Session
9:45-11:45 a.m. | Porte du Palais, First Floor

Luncheon Plenary
12:00-1:30 p.m. | Porte Kent & Porte St. Louis, First Floor

Off-Site Policy Field Excursions
1:45-5:00 p.m. | Meet at Lobby Level
• Visit to Ile d’Oleans
• The Citadelle of Quebec
• National Optics Institute
• Quebec City Green Buildings Tour

Fiscal Roundtable | Budget & Tax Chairs
2:00-4:00 p.m. | De Tourny, Lobby Level

Roundtable | Criminal Justice Reform
2:00-4:00 p.m. | Beaufort, Beaumont, Belair, Second Floor

2017 Connecticut Reception
6:00-7:00 p.m. | Musee national des beaux-arts du Quebec

2016 Quebec Dinner
7:30-10:00 p.m. | Musee national des beaux-arts du Quebec

Charlie Cook Sees Tight Race in 2016 Swinging Clinton’s Way

Entrepreneurship is still alive and well in North America, regardless of the political climate, veteran political observer and prognosticator Charlie Cook said Monday.

“I was in Charleston,” said the writer and editor of The Cook Political Report, “and I saw a billboard with a picture of Hillary Clinton (Clinton) and Donald Trump (Trump) with an advertisement for Canadian real estate.”

While the line drew laughs, the U.S. presidential campaign is serious business with ramifications on both sides of the border.

Clinton currently holds a commanding lead over Trump in most polls, something Cook attributes to a combination of a post-political convention boost for Clinton along with a fairly disastrous political week for Trump. But barring an unforeseen event, Cook predicted the race will end up with Clinton claiming the White House by a narrow margin of 4 percent or less.

Part of that is reflected in polling data that show concerns about Trump’s qualifications and fitness for office. Cook also bases his prediction on Clinton’s superior campaign organization, which was built to run a national campaign, while Trump has a different model.

“You’ve got the people in Trump Tower, then, there are the people on the airplane with Trump. Then there are the people who go out, scout the location for his rally, set up the stage, then move on to the next town,” Cook said. “It’s a Ringling Brothers’ model.”

Cook believes Democrats will pick up seats in the House of Representatives and might swing the Senate, partly because Republicans have more seats to defend this year. If the GOP senses looming disaster in Senate races, he said, they may call on voters to support their down ballot candidates to avoid giving Clinton a blank check for running the country.

But whether Congress is split or remains in Republican hands, Cook predicted Clinton may enjoy greater success on Capitol Hill than President Obama because, unlike the president, she has demonstrated as a former senator the ability to work with colleagues on policy issues.

Cook said Trump has left GOP diehards with a big unanswered question regarding whether the American people believe conservatism is the best way to run the country.

“For the people who thought (U.S. Sen. John) McCain and (former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt) Romney weren’t conservative enough,” he said, “Trump’s nomination’s kicked that can down the sidewalk for another four years.”

— Patrick Jackson
The North American Opportunity
An Island of Calm in an Unsettled Global Economy

Despite a slow economic recovery and national security concerns, North America remains well positioned to lead the global economy.

That was the message of economist and author Daniel Altman, who delivered Monday’s keynote on the North American trading bloc’s opportunity to excel as other global economic powers face uncertainty. The European Union’s fiscal crisis, China’s slowdown, continued weakness in Japan, and corruption in Brazil and Russia all put North America—despite its challenges—in a position to set the pace on trade.

The amount of new wealth created in the Canada, Mexico and the U.S. over the last four years rivals the amount created in the four years preceding the Great Recession. Meanwhile, U.S. markets continue to yield strong returns, while Canada and Mexico are seeing significant upticks in direct foreign investment, according to Altman.

Taking advantage of this opportunity will require critical coordination among NAFTA nations, Altman said. While the flow of capital, goods and services between the three nations is generally strong and the logistical infrastructure to manage cross-border trade largely in place, the federal governments must work more closely on economic policy and should take steps to increase the free flow of labor across borders, Altman said.

That comes with challenges.

“There has been a backlash to international trade because there are winners and losers,” Altman said.

He said opponents miss the point that trade “helps the winners more than it hurts the losers,” making government-levied redistribution not only possible, but also intrinsic in terms of making trade agreements work for everyone. During a panel discussion that followed, Christopher Sands, director of the Center for Canadian Studies at Johns Hopkins University, said opposition to free trade deals center on governments not doing enough to help those who have struggled as a result of NAFTA.

America did not do enough through Trade Adjustment Assistance to help people and a lot of Americans were left worse off, he said. But younger Americans who are beginning to grab the political power don’t have the same history with the economy as their parents.

“They don’t debate globalization as something the can turn on or off,” he underscored. “It’s about coping with it, not reversing it.”

That shift could help drive the politics behind enhancing the intra-continental economy, Sands said. The global economy is here to stay, and trade deals that strengthen geographical blocs are a critical part of that.

“International trade is critical to increasing competition and fostering innovation,” said former Quebec Premier M. Pierre-Marc Johnson. “There’s a new economy out there and new challenges—like the environment—that are common to (all of us).”

— Jesse Chadderdon

Speakers: Communities Need Tools to Battle Blight

Alan Mallach looks at issues of crumbling infrastructure and urban blight from 50,000 feet while East Orange, N.J., Mayor Lester E. Taylor III looks at them from street level.

But the two agree that state governments need to empower cities to deal with the issue and that cities need to aggressively use the tools their statehouses give them to breathe life into communities.

Mallach, senior fellow at the Center for Community Progress, said state governments need to provide cities options, such as land banking vacant properties for redevelopment, graduated penalties for landlords and residents who neglect their properties, and programs to convert some vacant lots into green space. Local governments could be proactive, rather than complaint-driven, in code enforcement programs, he said. He pointed to New Jersey as a state that has provided its communities with many of those tools.

In some cities, those tools are working in some parts of town, while other areas languish. Mallach said that message is often misunderstood and can lead to resentment.

“Most cities don’t have money,” he said. “They might be able to get private investment in areas where the investors can see a return. But those investors won’t come to areas where they don’t think they’ll get their money back.”

While blight-fighting tools are vital, Taylor said cities also need to resist the increasingly popular notion of turning public assets over to private interests. In his case, that was the city’s water utility. When he took office, the utility, which is operated by a separate commission, was facing a $3 million deficit, $20 million in unmet repair and maintenance needs, and commission leadership that was under indictment for falsifying reports to the EPA.

Gov. Chris Christie’s administration didn’t want to extend credit to the utility and pushed hard to have the city give it up, but Taylor’s administration pushed back.

Taylor ultimately got the credit he needed and began taking steps, including a dramatic, temporary 2015 rate hike that was partially rolled back this year. The city also hired an outside consultant to help improve operations, and the utility is again solvent.

— Patrick Jackson
Clockwise from top left: Delaware Rep. Deborah Hudson, pictured with her family, received the W. Paul White Award during the luncheon plenary Monday. Pennsylvania Rep. Chris Ross was presented a clock for his many years of service to CSG and ERC, including as chair of the Energy and Environment Commission, where he received the award. Ross is retiring from the House of Representatives. Connecticut General Assembly staff members Beverly Henry, Olivia Puckett and Teri Gavigan shared information about the location for the ERC 57th Annual Meeting and Regional Policy Forum Aug. 13-16, 2017. Nebraska Sen. Beau McCoy, CSG chair, and Jacques Chagnon, president of the Québec National Assembly, chatted during the Opening Event at the Parliament Building Sunday night. Sabrina Ferland sang the national anthems of the United States and Canada during the Opening Ceremony Monday. Delaware Senate Minority Leader Gary Simpson moderated the discussion during the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee meeting Monday. Photos by Sebastian Marquez
Building an Even More ‘Special Relationship’ Between U.S., Canada

U.S. presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump have come out against the proposed multi-national Trans Pacific Partnership trade deal and have called for revisiting the landmark North American Free Trade Agreement during stops along the campaign trail.

While that’s a cause for concern among the 39 states claiming Canada as their biggest trading partner and the estimated $3 billion in commerce that passes between the U.S. and Canada every day – Christopher Sands says it’s not time to hit the panic button quite yet.

“Remember, in 2008 President Obama ran as a NAFTA critic,” Sands, director of the Center for Canadian Studies at Johns Hopkins University, said Monday during the Canada/U.S. Relations Committee meeting. “But ... he has done a lot to strengthen ties between the U.S. and Canada.”

Sand said that’s typical because as presidents take office and gain an understanding of the relationship, they tend to value and try to improve on the U.S.-Canadian partnership in everything from trade to national security.

Sands noted Obama changed course from President George W. Bush and developed separate national policies for relations along the Canadian and Mexican borders. For the U.S.-Canadian relationship, that strategy included actions such as trying to expand preclearance, which makes border crossings easier and more efficient, ending the process of dual luggage screenings for international flights and developing a system to better track who’s coming and going from the two countries.

In March, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Obama announced an agreement in principal expanding preclearing to Toronto’s Billy Bishop City Airport, Quebec’s Jean Lesage International Airport and Montreal’s Central Station. The Canadian Parliament and Congress still have to approve the agreement.

Serge St. Laurent, vice president for operations at Jean Lesage, said the airport is building a preclearing facility that’s scheduled to open in late 2018.

Expanding the preclearing process remains a major focus of concern and members of the ERC’s Canada-U.S. Relations Committee approved forwarding a resolution calling on Congress to approve legislation doing just that.

— Patrick Jackson

Panel Examines Roles, Needs of Military Families

The family plays an important role in the life of a military member, whether in the United States or in Canada. In both countries, the issues facing veterans are similar, as attendees at the ERC Military and Veterans Affairs Task Force learned during a discussion Monday morning.

 Officials on both sides of the border are working to recognize the needs of military families.

In the U.S., for instance, all 50 states have adopted the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children in an effort to ensure children in military families receive the help they need when transitioning with a move.

Dave Splitek, a director at the Military Child Education Coalition and an ex-officio member of the Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission, or MIC3, said about 1.1 million school-age children of military families face the difficult transition when their parent is moved. The member of the military, he said, have the same uniform and often the same role when they move from post to post.

“When kids move, school systems are vastly different,” Splitek said. More than three-quarters of those students are enrolled in public schools, making the need for transition assistance important. That’s why the MIC3 is important.

So is identifying the students so they can get the help they need; 19 states have passed laws to identify military children.

Chief Warrant Officer Guy Parent, veterans ombudsman of Veterans Affairs Canada, said Canada also is looking at issues related to the military family. One issue, for instance, is defining who is that family and what benefits do they need.

“If an 18-year-old soldier goes to Afghanistan and gets injured, who takes care of him?” he said. “There need to be programs in place for parents who are looking after the injured soldier.”

The same is true for spouses. In Canada, he said, spouses cannot access benefits in their own right. Delaware Rep. Earl Jaques Jr., Task Force chair, said military spouses face similar challenges in the U.S.

Jaques said he hopes the task force becomes a standing committee in ERC because of these and other important ongoing issues related to veterans.

— Mary Branham