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Convention at UIS to star former governors

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Four former governors will headline a national political science convention to be held June 3-5 at the University of Illinois Springfield.

Except for an evening banquet, all events are free and open to the public.

Included is a round-table discussion to be presented from 8 to 10 p.m. June 3 at the Old Capitol State Historic Site. Featured will be former governors Jim Edgar of Illinois and Bob Taft of Ohio, both Republicans, and Democrats Madeleine Kunin of Vermont and Parris Glendening of Maryland.

This is the first time that the State Politics and Policy Conference, sanctioned by the Washington-based American Political Science Association, will be held in Illinois. Last year, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University co-sponsored the event. Next year, it will be at Dartmouth College.

Chris Mooney of UIS, professor of political science with the U of I's Institute of Government and Public Affairs, said holding the 10th annual conference at the Springfield campus is a "major boost to the prestige and national standing of UIS."

"It's great," he said. "It's national recognition in an area where we really excel."

Mooney and Barbara Ferrara, associate director of the Center for State Policy and Leadership at UIS, are co-chairing the conference. At least 150 participants are expected.

Mooney, who came to UIS in 1999, was founding editor of State Politics & Policy Quarterly, the official journal for that area of study within the APSA. The kickoff conference for that journal a decade ago at Texas A&M University was "so successful that everybody said (they) wanted to do it every year," he said.

Panel discussions at the Springfield conference will cover such topics as the linkage between public opinion and public policy; explaining state spending; federalism; governors and policymaking; legislative reform; and gay rights policy in the states.

A preliminary program lists a panel on the afternoon of June 4 on the topic: "How can political scientists contribute to politics and government? Four views from statehouse reporters." The panel chair is Charlie Wheeler, director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at UIS, and panelists are David Yepsen, director of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University; Mike Lawrence, former director of that institute; and Peggy Boyer Long, former editor of Illinois Issues magazine. All four panelists have extensive experience reporting on government and politics.

Mooney said the cost of hosting the conference, not including some non-cash help, is about \$50,000, but the money does not come from state appropriations. Instead, the meeting is supported by corporate sponsors, various university-related units and the national political science group.

The website for the conference, www.sppc2010.org, shows backing from groups including UIS, its Center for State Policy and Leadership and its College of Public Affairs and Administration; the U of I's Institute of Government and Public Affairs; and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

Alan Ehrenhalt, director of information for Pew Center on the States and former editor of Governing magazine, will speak at the June 4 banquet, which is open only to conference registrants. His topic will be "Governors: Success and Failure."

Ironically, that's the day after former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich is scheduled to go to trial in Chicago on corruption charges.

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