Olsen and Rhoda Honored with ECS 2008 Chair’s Award

DENVER, CO — As the 2006-2008 Education Commission of the States (ECS) Chair, Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius recognized Luther Olsen and Richard Rhoda for playing significant roles in the advancement of ECS. The Chair’s Award was presented to both leaders this summer at the ECS National Forum on Education Policy in Austin, Texas.

"ECS is positioned to be a major player in the education policy arena because of the steadfast commitment of these individuals," Governor Sebelius stated. "The leadership of Olsen and Rhoda reinforced the sustainability and unmatched potential of this organization."

Wisconsin Senator and 2006-08 ECS Vice Chair Olsen and Tennessee Higher Education Commission Executive Director and ECS Treasurer Rhoda assisted Governor Sebelius in reviewing the operational and strategic footing of the organization. Both leaders helped direct a presidential search committee, selecting the current ECS president and former Alaska chief state school officer, Roger Sampson. Olsen and Rhoda aided in re-focusing the organization’s mission and finances during this transition period.

According to Sampson, "Olsen and Rhoda were critical in the overall assessment of our organization’s viability and provided recommendations for growth and sustainability."

Luther Olsen was elected to the Wisconsin State Senate in 2004, after serving in the State Assembly for 10 years. Senator Olsen serves on the Joint Committee on Finance and is also a member of Senate Committee on Education and the Joint Committee on Retirement Systems. He has been a champion of education issues in Wisconsin and was named "Legislator of the Year" in 2005 by the School Administrators Alliance. Engaging with ECS for nearly a decade, he’s served as a commissioner since 2003. Olsen also serves as a member of the Wisconsin Education Communications Board.

Richard Rhoda has served as an ECS commissioner since 2003 and was appointed to the steering committee in 2004. He recently began his second term serve as ECS treasurer for 2008-2010. He served previously with the Tennessee Board of Regents in numerous staff capacities, including chief academic officer and acting chancellor. Rhoda has taught on the undergraduate and graduate levels at Vanderbilt University where he continues as an adjunct professor.

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The Education Commission of the States (ECS) is the only nationwide, nonpartisan interstate compact devoted to education. ECS helps governors, legislators, state education officials and others identify, develop and implement public policies to improve student learning at all levels. A nonprofit organization, ECS (www.ecs.org) was formed in 1965 and is located in Denver, Colorado.