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NEWS RELEASE

Senator Vargas of Omaha Receives National Leadership Award from America's Service Commissions



OMAHA, NE – Nebraska Senator Tony Vargas of Omaha received the 2020 State Service Leadership Award last night at a virtual awards ceremony held by America's Service Commissions (ASC) at the association's annual Innovation and Leadership Awards.

The awards program is held each year to recognize the leadership and accomplishments of state service commissions and their commissioners, staff, service programs, and legislative champions from across the United States and its territories. This marked the first year the event was celebrated virtually due to COVID-19.

The son of Peruvian immigrants and a first generation college graduate, Vargas has devoted his life to public service. He began his career as a public school teacher, serving as an AmeriCorps member with Teach for America for two years. Elected to the Legislature in 2016, Senator Vargas has focused his efforts on championing equity in education, juvenile justice, and college affordability to help the most vulnerable, especially children and families from low-income backgrounds. Previously, Senator Vargas was a school board member of the Omaha Board of Education and has also been named a Presidential Leadership Scholar by the Presidential Libraries of Presidents George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George H.W. Bush, and Lyndon B. Johnson.

In 2019, Senator Vargas introduced Legislative Bill 477 (LB477) to provide a state tax exemption for recipients of the AmeriCorps education award, making sure that AmeriCorps members who serve tirelessly to better Nebraska are awarded in full for their service. Throughout the process, Senator Vargas consulted with local AmeriCorps programs and the ServeNebraska Commission to ensure the final bill would be as beneficial as possible to AmeriCorps members on the ground. On August 17, 2020, LB477 was signed into law by Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts and will take effect with the next tax season.

Senator Vargas was honored along with the following awardees:

2020 ASC Innovation & Leadership Award Recipients:

Friend of America's Service Commissions: Senator Chris Coons (Delaware)
Friend of America's Service Commissions: Senator Roger Wicker (Mississippi)
Friend of America's Service Commissions: Congressman Dave Loebsack (Iowa)

State Service Leadership Award: State Senator Tony Vargas (Nebraska)

State Service Leadership Award: State Representative Matt Wilhelm (New Hampshire)

State Service Leadership Award: Mayor Michael Tubbs (California)
Outstanding Commissioner: Paul Calistro (Delaware)
Outstanding Commission Executive Director: Renee Bade (Idaho)
Outstanding Commission Staff: Jaclyn Kolar (Texas)
Outstanding Commission Staff: Sarah Sadowski (Montana)
Outstanding Service Program: United Way of King County (Washington)
Outstanding Service Program Staff: Gail Klearman (Iowa)
Honor Roll: Stacy Higa (Hawaii)
Honor Roll: Bill Hulterstrom (Utah)

“It’s an honor to recognize Senator Vargas for his innovation and dedication to strengthening service and leveraging the power of AmeriCorps in Nebraska, especially at this critical juncture in our nation’s history,” said Kaira Esgate, CEO of America’s Service Commissions. “We are grateful for his tireless work to meet the moment through service, in spite of a global pandemic and greater challenges than we ever could have imagined a year ago.”

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About ServeNebraska

ServeNebraska is governed by a 24-member, bipartisan board appointed by the Nebraska governor. Its mission mobilizes Nebraskans to strengthen their communities through collaboration, volunteering and national service. ServeNebraska oversees AmeriCorps programming, hosts the state’s most prestigious volunteer awards – the Governor’s Step Forward Awards, and provides training and technical assistance. To learn more, visit www.serve.nebraska.gov.

About America’s Service Commissions

America’s Service Commissions (ASC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan association representing and promoting the 52 state service commissions across the United States and territories with the mission to lead and elevate the state service network. State service commissions are governor-appointed public agencies or nonprofit organizations made up of more than 1,200 commissioners, private citizens leading the nation’s service movement and administering nearly 80 percent of the federal AmeriCorps funds to address pressing community needs. Learn more at statecommissions.org.