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THE URBAN OPPOSITION
Big-city mayors have a lot to lose by confronting the new Republican government in Washington. Many of them are planning to do it anyway.
By Alan Greenblatt

A THOUSAND CUTS
In much of the country, state help to localities has been slashed. That won’t change anytime soon.
By Mike Maciag and J.B. Wogan

COUNTING DOWN TO ZERO
Can cities end pedestrian deaths?
By Daniel C. Vock

A LITTLE LEARNING
Universal pre-kindergarten is widely admired. But it’s hard to find—and even harder to fund.
By Mattie Quinn

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Philadelphia

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Women and Power

My wife used to be a doula and childbirth educator. In her classes, she would begin by asking the women to describe a previous birthing experience. Most of the ones they described were negative, thanks to bad interactions with doctors or hospitals. As the women told their stories, they began to see that personal experiences they had thought were unique were actually common. They were engaged in what feminists in the 1960s and 1970s called “consciousness raising.” They were discovering that the personal is political.

The deep connections between personal experience and larger social structures have real consequences when you consider that women are greatly underrepresented in our political leadership. Institutional sexism is embedded in our culture and politics. Gender balance isn’t about optics or symbolism or even simple fairness. It is about the exercise of power on the lives of individuals.

Increasing the number of women holding state and local elected office is the goal of the Governing Institute’s Women in Government Leadership Program, which launched three years ago. Each year the institute chooses 25 elected officials to participate in a year of leadership development. Membership is not meant to be merely an award or recognition. In selecting individuals for our program we consider performance, leadership, integrity, commitment to public service and concern about the role of women in government. The program’s class of 2017 brings to 75 the membership of this network of people committed to “paying it forward” by working to help other women win elected office.

The academic adviser for the program is Kelly Dittmar, an assistant professor at Rutgers University and scholar at the Eagleton Institute’s Center for American Women and Politics. As she reports, research shows that women in leadership positions prioritize different issues than men do, particularly those that involve children and families. They take a more collaborative approach to leadership and a more bipartisan approach to governing, and they often are the public officials most accessible to marginalized or underrepresented populations.

“The conversations really are different when women are at the table,” says Betty Yee, California’s state controller and one of the members of this year’s Women in Government Leadership class. By helping us to identify outstanding women to include in our ongoing program, you can help to change the conversation. To nominate an individual, please visit governing.com/womeningov.
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LETTERS

Coping with Coal’s Decline

In the December feature “Life After Coal,” staff writer Alan Greenblatt explored the industry’s decline in Eastern Kentucky and what local leaders were doing to diversify the economy. He looked at the various forces hurting coal, including natural gas and environmental regulations, and he discussed the toll these forces have taken on coal communities.

I think it was a profound observation on the part of the author to notice that [coal communities] are going through the stages of grief. They are experiencing a loss of a way of life. Until they work through that, even good solutions may not be effective.

And in response to a comment that once upon a time auto and steel plants went through a similar upheaval as coal communities:

As a generalization it could also be argued that auto and steel plants tend to be in urban areas, so there are a few more opportunities. Meanwhile, much of coal country is rural and so options are limited. Urban areas also have more transitory populations to begin with, so perhaps they are more accustomed to disruption. In many rural places, families have lived there for generations. We sociologists describe a condition called anomie, a state of normlessness. It happens when change is so great, the societal rules break down. People and communities in places where change is slow to happen may be more vulnerable to it than those who have adapted to a high rate of change. At any rate, I still think it was a profound point the author made and can help explain other recent phenomena as well.

—Sherie Sanders on Governing.com

Very smart overview of the macro forces at play in the coal industry for many years. Too bad neither candidate for president could discuss the realities in such terms.

—Tom Looney on Facebook

Parks for Everyone?

In December’s Behind the Numbers, “Struggle in the Park,” Mike Maciag researched how states fund their park systems. In most cases, the lion’s share of state park operations is paid for either through the general fund or money the parks generate through fees. Due to budget shortfalls, most state park systems have been forced to make cuts and, as a result, have begun seeking new funding models.

The primary beneficiaries of state parks are the people who visit them. It is entirely appropriate to finance the bulk of park costs based on the prices charged to these users. If there are environmental benefits on top of those direct-use benefits, then those can be supported by general revenue. But in no way should general revenue be the primary means of financing state parks.

—fiscalwiz on Governing.com

About 10 years ago, I was the director for the Tennessee Environmental Council. Tennessee parks have been underfunded for decades, and we sought a way to bolster annual budgets. One of the biggest annual revenues in the state was the Highway Trust Fund. We utilized the same logic as the revenue stream for the Land and Water Conservation Fund: Draw funds from an environmentally destructive activity (driving) to support conservation efforts. We sought one penny from each dollar in the fund. That would have directed $3 million toward the park budget each year to help address backlogs. Despite broad statewide support for the initiative, the road building industry was able to kill the measure in the legislature. Had there been an opportunity for a state referendum, we would have put it on the ballot and won.

This is not a success story, but it did bring attention to the plight of state parks. I would encourage others to look for alternative funding measures that are logical, sustainable and will have broad public support.

—Will Callaway on Governing.com
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The Pruitt Backlash

SCOTT PRUITT is about to get a big dose of his own medicine.

As attorney general of Oklahoma, Pruitt was often first in line to sue the Obama administration over a broad range of environmental policies, notably efforts to curb greenhouse gases. Now that he’s President Trump’s pick to head the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Pruitt will find himself on the receiving end of a lot of lawsuits from his former colleagues. “Democratic attorneys general are going to be very active, suing a number of regulatory agencies,” says Paul Nolette, a political scientist at Marquette University. “They will be prepared to use a kitchen sink strategy against everything coming out of the EPA.”

In his book Federalism on Trial, Nolette found that recent Republican AGs such as Pruitt were far more likely to file lawsuits than earlier generations of attorneys general. By his count, Republican AGs filed a total of five partisan briefs with the Supreme Court during the Clinton administration, compared with 97 during the first seven years of the Obama presidency. Now that the partisan shoe is on the other foot, Democrats will try their best to block much of what they don’t like coming out of the new Washington.

The number of Democratic attorneys general has ticked down with recent Republican successes at the state level. But there are still 21 of them—more than the number of Democratic governors or legislatures. Many are already accustomed to working closely on litigation with liberal groups such as the Sierra Club.

And it isn’t really the number of Democratic AGs that matters. A single activist attorney general such as Eric Schneiderman of New York or Xavier Becerra of California can command a small army of lawyers. “I won’t hesitate to take Donald Trump to court if he carries out his unconstitutional campaign promises,” Massachusetts AG Maura Healey pledged in a fundraising pitch last year.

When fighting the administration on labor, immigration and health, Democrats are likely to borrow from the GOP playbook in seeking to block new federal rules through every step of the process. In addition, they’ll try to do something Republicans generally won’t—use their leverage to win multistate court settlements that increase regulation of targeted industries. They could be especially active in areas where Republicans in Washington might be inclined to let corporations off the hook, such as banking and securities.

Trump doesn’t come to office with a clean slate when it comes to relations with attorneys general. Schneiderman helped negotiate a $25 million settlement immediately after the election regarding allegations of fraud involving Trump University. He’s still looking into the question of whether Trump’s foundation violated New York law, notably with a $25,000 campaign donation to Florida AG Pam Bondi.

“Donald Trump, citizen, not Donald Trump, president, enters the world of AGs on a watch list,” says James Tierney, a former Maine attorney general who now teaches at Harvard University. “He ran a routine, garden-variety fraud—Trump University—and he was caught. Every attorney general I’ve talked to has had complaints in his state. Everybody opened files. When somebody’s a fraudster, they get on everybody’s agenda. It changes the way you look at him or her.”

With Trump just settling into office, there’s no telling exactly which administration policies will trigger legal challenges. Tierney believes that attorneys general won’t automatically assume a combative stance against the administration. When federal policies intrude on state sovereignty, he says, AGs will be fiercely protective—regardless of their own partisan affiliations.

But with prominent Democratic AGs threatening to challenge Trump before he even has made many policy pronouncements, it’s clear that legal briefs will be among the most powerful weapons progressives will be able to deploy against him.
NUMEROUS STATES HAVE taken steps in recent years to reduce punishment for nonviolent offenders and roll back mandatory minimum sentences. They’ve sought to reserve prison space for the worst criminals while stepping up re-entry programs for prisoners returning to their communities. The results have been impressive. “The states have been the proverbial labs of democracy and shown that it’s possible to reduce crime and incarceration at the same time,” says Adam Gelb, who works on criminal justice issues at the Pew Charitable Trusts.

The reductions in both cost and imprisonment at the state level have drawn the attention of federal lawmakers. Prominent members of Congress, including John Cornyn of Texas and Richard Durbin of Illinois, respectively the majority and minority whips in the U.S. Senate, favor the passage of legislation modifying some harsh federal penalties. Iowa Republican Charles Grassley, who chairs the Senate Judiciary Committee, has reiterated his desire to move on the issue.

It’s clear that criminal justice reform is a rare subject that can attract bipartisan support. But even with backing from the Obama White House, getting a bill through Congress proved impossible last year. It’s still tough for many politicians to support something that appears to be giving criminals a break.

Now the question is what sort of stance the new administration will take. President Trump sought office as a “law and order” candidate, one who would seek to make life tougher for criminals. To a certain degree, it was a throwback to the approach that dominated discussion throughout the 1980s and 1990s, when the driving idea seemed to be locking up criminals and throwing away the key. These are the very policies that the criminal justice reform movement is seeking to rethink.

Supporters of change point out that some of the key players on Trump’s transition team have signed reform pledges, such as Kenneth Blackwell, who headed the domestic policy transition. But Jeff Sessions, Trump’s anointed attorney general, was hostile to criminal justice reform efforts while he served in the Senate. So it’s far from clear where the administration will ultimately land.

The president is committed to the creation of a task force on serious and violent offenses, and has called for mandatory minimum sentences for people who repeatedly enter the country illegally. His rhetoric, at least, suggests skepticism about the idea that the right way to combat crime is shorter but more certain prison terms, which is what the reformers are calling for. “It’s easy to fall back and say that locking more people up for public safety is a good thing,” says Kara Gotsch of the Sentencing Project, a progressive advocacy group.

In the meantime, states are continuing to press ahead on reforms. Voters in California, New Mexico and Oklahoma cast favorable votes on criminal justice reform ballot measures in November. This year, at least nine states will consider comprehensive bills, including Arkansas, Georgia, North Dakota and Pennsylvania.

“We feel like those are moving forward strongly,” Gelb says, “and are not getting any sense that the election has suggested to people at the state level that there’s any need to return to a more law-and-order type of posture.”
Fracking and Reality

**HYDRAULIC FRACTURING** generates a lot of low-cost energy, but as has been widely reported, it carries with it troubling liabilities. Most of those involve an environmental price paid by the areas where the drilling takes place and oil or natural gas is transported. Localities have limited ability to do anything about them.

In December, the Environmental Protection Agency released a study that found fracking can have a negative impact on local drinking water. Injection wells used in fracking have also been linked to earthquakes. The U.S. Geological Survey says the earthquake issue has been overrated, but such concerns drive down local home values and, with them, property tax receipts.

Given all the headaches, supervisors in Winneshiek County, Iowa, decided to call a time out a couple of years ago. The county put an 18-month halt on new fracking in order to study potential harmful effects and come up with regulations to deal with them. “I don’t think the board ever thought that it would be appropriate or legal, probably, to permanently ban it,” says County Auditor Ben Steines. “They used a temporary moratorium to make sure it was appropriately regulated.”

Winneshiek County was lucky. Lots of local governments that have sought to bring fracking to a halt, even temporarily, have had their actions blocked. Oklahoma and Texas, for example, have passed preemption laws to take regulatory authority over the fracking process away from localities. Last year, the Colorado Supreme Court said that the state was acting within its rights when it took similar steps. Notably, the court found that even the temporary moratorium approved in the city of Fort Collins was subject to preemption. “The most important thing is that this is an issue that’s decided state by state,” says Deborah Goldberg, an attorney with the advocacy group Earthjustice. “If there’s a locality thinking about trying to address oil and gas development, they really need to understand the legal landscape in their state.”

The technology and operations of the energy industry are for the most part regulated at the state level, as the Colorado court found. Local governments may have more luck if they approach fracking as a land use issue. Courts will look more favorably on local jurisdictions that decide they don’t want to allow heavy industry at all, as opposed to those that single out a particular industry such as fracking.

Of course, this question isn’t always decided in court. Legislatures often step in, which means the trend of states blocking local regulation of fracking is unlikely to stop. Companies with substantial fracking operations, such as Devon Energy, Marathon Petroleum and Noble Energy, spent heavily on last year’s elections, including six-figure checks to the Republican State Leadership Committee. Energy companies were major donors in drilling states such as Pennsylvania and North Dakota.

When it comes to fracking, the pain may be felt locally, but many of the decisions will be made elsewhere.

**THE BREAKDOWN**

$10.4k

Amount four cannabis growers paid to the Alaska Department of Revenue—the first-ever revenue from commercial marijuana taxes to hit the state treasury. Recreational marijuana was approved by voters in Alaska in 2014.

$690k

The amount spent on lobbying in Missouri in 2015—a decline of more than $200,000 from the lowest figure recorded in any previous year.
SOMETIMES, WHEN a politician says he’s leaving office to spend more time with his family, he really means it.

Lately, lots of legislators have been saying just that. The officeholders giving up their seats aren’t just those ready to quit after a dozen terms in office, or back-benchers who never experienced a taste of real power. Quite a few of those leaving are relatively new to the job or hold leadership positions.

Matt Murphy, a deputy Republican leader in the Illinois Senate and a key ally of Gov. Bruce Rauner, stepped down in September, citing “family obligations.” He has four kids. Tom Dempsey was president pro tem of the Missouri Senate when he left in 2015, citing the pressure on family time. Charles Jeter was chairman of the GOP conference in the North Carolina House when he resigned last summer, saying that while the title he held meant a lot, “the titles of husband and father are much greater and I must devote the time to my young family while I still have that opportunity.”

In fact, Jeter was one of 18 members of the North Carolina House who opted not to run again last year, along with seven state senators. Most of them belonged to the majority Republican Party, with their ranks including committee chairs, chamber leaders and promising newcomers. “Our legislature used to be a bunch of old retired Democrats who had the time and funds to be what is essentially a full-time legislator in a part-time legislative system,” says Tim Boyum, who hosts a political TV program in Raleigh called “Capital Tonight.” “When we had the Republican wave and takeover in 2010, a lot of young or middle-aged Republican business owners were elected. After four or six years, they are now discovering it’s challenging being away from their young families and making a living all at the same time.”

A legislator earning a salary of $13,951 (the base compensation in North Carolina) must find or maintain other sources of income. That can be difficult when the nominally part-time job of legislator means near-constant demands on their attention. It’s not a surprise that many find it more lucrative to take jobs lobbying their former colleagues or accepting a permanent, full-time slot in the executive branch.

In Florida, the state House has just adopted a rule that aims to prevent legislators from quitting to take government jobs. That could have the effect of limiting legislative ranks to those wealthy enough to devote half the year to a demanding job that doesn’t pay too well, warns Oscar Braynon, the Democratic leader of the Florida Senate. If you want to prevent legislators from using their positions as stepping stones, he says, you need to pay them a full-time salary. The current amount, $29,697, doesn’t come close to that.

But in a state with some of the strictest term limits in the country, the idea of giving legislators what would amount to a promotion and a raise isn’t likely to gain much traction among the electorate.
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Utility costs account for 11% of local government expenditures. The EPA estimates energy costs in existing buildings can be reduced by more than 35%. Government office buildings, schools, water treatment facilities, and multifamily housing can all benefit from energy efficiency.

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2. Create jobs and contribute to the local economy
   Investing in energy efficiency boosts the business of local contractors and suppliers. The DOE estimates 60% of energy efficiency investments go toward labor costs, and half of equipment upgrades are purchased from local suppliers.

3. Improve health in public buildings
   Making buildings more efficient can reduce indoor air pollution, resulting in healthier students, employees, and residents.

4. Cause a ripple effect
   A visible commitment to energy efficiency generates buzz, causing residents, local businesses, and neighboring communities to reduce their own energy usage, creating even greater gains.
If you’ve ever been a stranger in downtown Minneapolis or St. Paul, there’s a good chance you’ve done the same thing I’ve done: wandered into the maze of glass-enclosed second-floor skywalks that crisscross the city center, then found it impossible to work your way out again. It’s a unique form of urban panic. You worry about getting locked in for the night—then manage to escape only through the Minnesota kindness of a local who leads you to the street by a virtually unmarked exit.

In a situation like that, you may also have had the thought that I’ve had: Why would any city, especially one in the midst of an urban revival, want to trap its residents in nine miles of faded and monotonous corridors rather than encouraging them to create a vibrant street life down below? There’s one simple answer, of course: It gets cold in Minnesota in the wintertime. That’s why the skyways were built in the first place.

But it isn’t a very good answer. People in Minnesota are used to the cold; if they couldn’t take it, they wouldn’t live there. Besides, winter clothing is a lot more efficient now than it was a half-century ago. If you’re dressed right, you can be comfortable on most days even when the temperature is in the single digits.

I was interested to learn recently that there are genuine Minnesotans who agree with me. They have created an organization called the Skyway Avoidance Society, which asks citizens to sign a simple pledge promising “to avoid using the skyway system at all times and in all conditions.” The society’s motto is explora foris—Latin for “explore outside.” Its ringleader is Eric Dayton, owner of a ground-level apparel store in the heart of downtown Minneapolis. He offers a 10 percent discount to anyone who signs the pledge. (Dayton is the son of Minnesota’s governor. Whether that helps or hurts his cause, I don’t know.)

Dayton’s crusade may be a little gimmicky, but he is plugging into a debate that has been gaining traction for a good while now. In 2011, a committee of local planners in Minneapolis released a report declaring that the glass-enclosed corridors were an anachronism that “pulls the life and energy off the street, leaving sidewalks barren and storefronts empty.”

None of this is to suggest that the skyways are going to disappear anytime soon. Thousands of people have grown used to them over the past 50 years and aren’t eager for drastic change. What it does suggest is that a reassessment of the values of indoor and outdoor life is taking place in cities around the country, even in Frost Belt cities where you might not expect it.

About the time that the Skyway Avoidance Society started attracting attention in Minneapolis, owners of the Grand Avenue Mall in Milwaukee were pondering what to do with a property that was seen 35 years ago as the savior of downtown but has turned out to be a major civic embarrassment.

When it opened in 1982, Grand Avenue Mall boasted major department stores, 80 specialty shops and an enormous food court. The skywalk in Minneapolis
court in a building that covered 367,000 square feet of retail space over three blocks of downtown land. From the beginning, however, sales in many of the stores were disappointing. The retail mix and clientele gradually slid downslope, and by the first decade of the new century quite a few of the spaces were empty. The developers who bought Grand Avenue in 2015 for the fire-sale price of $24 million candidly admitted that they did it mainly to acquire the parking garage.

There are plenty of conventional explanations for the plight of Grand Avenue Mall. The project’s opening coincided with a substantial exodus of shoppers to the suburbs, and the recession of 2008-2009 spoiled an ambitious and costly effort to modernize and re-brand the enterprise. But many Milwaukeeans bring up a different problem: Grand Avenue Mall was and is an indoor edifice. It turned its back on the street and sidewalk where an increasing number of city residents were interested in spending their time. Commerce with an outdoor connection began to do well in many neighborhoods of Milwaukee in this decade; Grand Avenue Mall wasn’t in a position to benefit from that.

This was hardly unusual for a downtown mall built in the 1980s. Many cities modeled their projects in those years after two successful “festival malls” of the previous decade, Boston’s Quincy Market and Baltimore’s Harborplace. Those two, the last time I looked, were still doing well. But they provided something that most of their successors didn’t: a textured indoor-outdoor experience. Visitors to Quincy Market strolled in and out of a legendary 18th-century building. Those in Baltimore explored a working dock and the boats parked there.

Not every city has the natural advantages that Boston and Baltimore have. But very few of them even tried to grasp the lessons that were there to be learned. Instead, they built big square boxes with all the action inside and, in many instances, blank walls facing the street. Nearly all of them were saddled with great parking and predictions of a downtown commercial renaissance. Some of them have managed to stay afloat. Others have found office tenants to take over the retail spaces. The least fortunate ones are half empty or, in some cases, closed altogether.

These disappointments occurred in the context of a much more familiar event in modern commercial life—the gradual decline of the garden-variety enclosed mall. Roughly 1,100 of these malls are still in business, but the number shrinks every year and virtually no new ones have been built anywhere in the country in the last decade. There are numerous explanations for this phenomenon, led by the last recession, the growth of online retailing and the fact that there were just too many malls built for all of them to succeed. But another reason is equally important: People have stopped going to enclosed malls because they would rather shop outside.

The evidence for this proposition is the health of “lifestyle centers,” the outdoor projects that generally seek to recreate elements of a traditional Main Street shopping experience. There are now nearly 500 of these centers in the United States, many of them on the sites of former enclosed malls that have either been retooled or gutted and replaced in an effort to cater to the sensibilities of the next generation of customers. In Arlington, Va., a few blocks from where I live, the long-sailing Ballston Common enclosed mall will be replaced next year by Ballston Quarter, a facility built around an open-air plaza where, the developer says, “people will want to come together to create a life as unexpected, singular and true as they are.” The symbolism is over the top, but the project is consistent with what is going on in virtually every major market in the country.

S  

o people want to do business outside. But why? And why now? A better question might be, why not? Commerce has been largely an outdoor activity for most of the past thousand years of Western history, from the fairs of medieval Europe to the boulevards of 19th-century Paris to the main streets of every town of every size in the United States. Throughout all this history, streets and plazas were seen as much more than thoroughfares to travel through. They were open-air gathering spots not only for the transaction of business but also for the cultivation of sociability and the quotidian enjoyment of ordinary life.

There were plenty of positive reasons to be outside; there were negative ones as well. In most neighborhoods of most cities, home interiors were dingy, crowded, stiflingly hot in the summer and cold in the winter. When you look at a photograph of New York’s Lower East Side in the 1890s, it’s important to realize that the overcrowded street was the habitation of choice because the inside was barely livable—a place fit for eating and sleeping and not much else.

By the mid-20th century in most cities, interiors had graduated to decency. Soon they were enhanced by television and air conditioning, powerful inducements to spend leisure hours sitting inside rather than strolling down sidewalks. Even more important was the drive-up commerce that cars made possible. Shopping came outside than it took to get from home to parking lot to store and back.

This is how many of us have been living for as long as we can remember. But we need to look at it as a departure from historical custom.

A generation is emerging that has decided enclosed mall corridors are boring and busy streets and plazas are enticing. Why exactly millennials have made this judgment is an intriguing question. Perhaps they are reacting not just to suburban shopping but also to the indignities of the auto-dominated life in general. Maybe a generation affixed to mobile phones and social media is struggling to regain some of the everyday human contact that technology has cost them.

I don’t pretend to know. What I do know is that the return to outdoor life has already taken down some big ugly commercial buildings that were supposed to last many more decades. In time, it may even take down the skyscrapers of Minnesota. G

Email aubrenhalt@governing.com

February 2017 | GOVERNING | 15
Clarksville Light & Water Co. (CLW) is a very progressive utility. New infrastructure, a fiber optic network, groundbreaking cybersecurity — these are just a few items CLW is using to improve services for its customers in Clarksville, Ark. Clarksville is home to nearly 10,000 people, but John Lester, general manager of CLW, doesn’t think small. “Even though we’re a small community, automation is just as important for us as it is for a multi-billion-dollar private utility,” said Lester.

The desire for top-level automation led CLW to Ignition by Inductive Automation®. Ignition is an industrial application platform with fully integrated tools for building solutions in human-machine interface (HMI), supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA), and the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT).

Ignition is so versatile, CLW will use it across three departments. It’s already working for water and electric, and will be used for waste water too. CLW was introduced to Ignition by systems integrator Brown Engineers.

Success with Water

“The first project was SCADA remote sites for the water utility,” said Dee Brown, principal and co-founder of Brown Engineers. “That included all the remote pump stations and tanks, and remote-operated valves. They had new infrastructure in place, but weren’t communicating with it yet.”

Lester gave Brown 30 days to get the project done. With the aid of Ignition, Brown Engineers was able to get the sites up and running within that timeframe. CLW won an Engineering Excellence Award for the speedy SCADA upgrade. The award came from the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC).

Lester inherited a less-than-mature system when he arrived in 2013. “When I moved here, I realized the technology in the marketplace hadn’t been fully utilized,” he said. “We had some SCADA technologies and control technologies, but they were being used very sparingly. I realized we needed to do a major upgrade.”

Another project, which involved Brown Engineers, was a $10 million expansion of the water treatment plant. The project was completed under budget and on time, in 14 months. CLW won an ACEC award for that project also. The expansion gave the plant a capacity of 16 million gallons per day. “Ignition was a good fit for that project too,” said Brown. “We knew it could handle the big increase in I/O points while keeping costs down. Ignition’s unlimited licensing was a big benefit for Clarksville.”
Next Up: Electric

“We have a 55-megawatt peak electric utility,” said Lester. “We’re a 100-percent purchaser of our power supply, so the use of that power is critical. There had been no SCADA system before, which is highly unusual for a municipal electric. But it gave us the chance to build from the ground up.”

A unique aspect of the project is the creation of a fiber optic network. That network is part of the SCADA system, but it could support a variety of other uses as well. The fiber loop is nearly 17 miles long. And the cable has 288 strands, so the capacity is huge. “We now have the capacity to do a lot of things to serve the community,” said Lester. “We could create a government network, an education network — and it could be used by business, and public safety. There are many possibilities that can add value to our community.”

The fiber optic network could help the region attract more businesses. “We’re getting a visit soon from the Arkansas Economic Development Commission,” said Lester. “They’ve asked me to make a presentation on this project, and what we’re doing with the SCADA system and the fiber.” Additionally, Brown and Lester were invited to speak about the project at the Smart Industry 2016 conference in Chicago.

Secure Foundation

CLW is also going the extra mile on cybersecurity, installing new cyber-secure controllers from Bedrock Automation. Brown Engineers suggested Bedrock™, and Lester saw the value immediately. “In today’s utility environment, cybersecurity is becoming a big concern,” said Lester. “Whether you’re a small utility or a large one, threats are hammering on your network every day. So we decided to move ahead with the Bedrock controllers.”

CLW also has a new Network Operations Center (NOC) with large-screen displays and a weather-resistant vault for its servers. There is also a plan for continued improvements at the NOC.

The SCADA improvements have helped CLW reduce costs, improve efficiency, and have greater flexibility for the future. “We’ve been very pleased with Ignition,” said Lester. “We really like that we can use it for all three utilities.”

Brown Engineers is based in Little Rock, Ark. The award-winning firm designs mechanical, electrical, fire protection, HVAC and plumbing infrastructure; automation controls; and monitoring systems. For more information, visit brownengineers.net

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Advertisement
Once-Great Society
The Trump era will bring a tough rethinking of the governmental house LBJ built.

The next time you drive by a nursing home, you might want to take a look inside. You’ll be staring at the front line in an emerging battle over the future of Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society.

If it’s a typical nursing home, Medicaid covers the expenses of half the residents. Those average $91,000 per year, because these residents need long-term care and don’t have enough assets of their own anymore to pay for it. Long-term care accounts for one out of every four Medicaid dollars. As the Trump administration pursues the Republicans’ long-sought goal of turning the program into a block grant to the states, it’s where the toughest decisions lie.

Republican governors, who now number 33, have increasingly bridled against the program’s rising costs and requirements. In most states, Medicaid is the largest and fastest-growing slice of the budget. Republican governors think they can better hold the line on costs if they have more control over the program.

Despite the lure of the strategy, however, there are huge long-term risks for the states. In 2050, the American population over 65 will be twice what it is now—and the number of seniors over 85 will triple. The costs of caring for an aging population will soar. Moreover, since most baby boomers haven’t saved enough for retirement (which will last longer, thanks to better health care), many of them are likely to need Medicaid for long-term coverage.

Moving to block grants will make it much easier for the feds to cap their share of the costs. And that will push the program’s spiraling expenses onto state budgets, which are already strained. It might seem attractive to governors now to take the block grant deal, rein in short-term costs and break free of federal rules. But the long-term prospects for the states under block grants are ominous.

That is, unless we completely rethink the promises of the Great Society. In fact, such rethinking is at the core of the Republican agenda. A reexamination is surely overdue—long-term entitlement costs are breaking the back of federal and state budgets, and no one really likes the growing collection of rules and mandates.

But the debate could lead to a slide away from the Johnson legacy, toward what might be called a “Once-Great Society.” Do we want to shift more of the financial burden to the states? And are we prepared to accept big variations among the states in how they treat the needs of the poor and elderly?

At the same time, big questions will be coming up in debates over infrastructure. The feds once provided large direct grants to states and cities to deal with their infrastructure needs. The Trump administration plans to tackle these needs not with traditional on-budget grants but through off-budget tax breaks to support public-private partnerships. Are we capable of managing such big programs through such complex tools—and ready for the prospect that it will be easier to raise private money to expand big airports than to attract investors to rebuild aging water systems in poor communities like Flint, Mich?
The core issues are in play on other Great Society programs as well. The feds have backed away from discretionary federal grants for model cities. We’ve moved from a national campaign for voting rights to debates over locally rigged elections. And the frontier of civil rights is now police behavior, over which the feds have limited leverage.

So the front door of the nursing home is the opening to much more than a debate about the future of health care. It’s the entrance to a sweeping conversation about the legacy of LBJ’s governmental edifice—which of its promises to keep, which of its strategies to change, how much inequality among the states to accept, and how the fundamental balance of power between the states and the feds might change. It’s as fundamental a debate as we’ve had in 60 years.

The Great Society programs are on borrowed time, at least as originally conceived and currently executed. The consensus among analysts of all stripes is that the entitlement programs are unsustainable. We need a new generation of approaches to deal with income inequality and break away from the stagnant wages and lack of opportunity that have trapped the middle class in the past few decades.

It’s unlikely that Americans will really want or accept a wholesale dismantling of the Great Society. It’s hard to imagine walking away from aging boomers who need long-term care—but equally hard to imagine how millennials will be able to pay for it, given Medicaid’s current trajectory. We need a new generation of approaches to deal with income inequality and break away from the stagnant wages and lack of opportunity that have trapped the middle class in the past few decades.

And that’s the central dilemma facing the Trump administration on the domestic front: a reset of the Great Society, finding the uneasy balance between programs we aren’t prepared to abandon and a budding ideology trying to redefine society’s promise. “Making America Great Again” will collide with the Great Society, and one of the first collisions will be inside the doors of those nursing homes. 

Email lettifi@um.edu

POLITICS WATCH

By Alan Greenblatt

Household Names

Will Trump’s win tempt other celebs to seek office?

During his career as quarterback of the Denver Broncos, John Elway led the team to five Super Bowls, winning two of them. He threw for at least 3,000 yards in each of a dozen seasons, and at the time of his retirement had won more games than any quarterback in NFL history. Elway now serves as the GM of the Denver Broncos.

The core issues are in play on other Great Society programs as well. The feds have backed away from discretionary federal grants for model cities. We’ve moved from a national campaign for voting rights to debates over locally rigged elections. And the frontier of civil rights is now police behavior, over which the feds have limited leverage.

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February 2017 | GOVERNING 19
The Medicaid Effect
Has expanding the program made people healthier?

For all the debate about whether states should expand eligibility for Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, it's unclear whether doing so actually makes people healthier. Initial research into the impact of expansion is at the same time exhaustive and scarce, as well as seemingly contradictory in some cases.

But what we do know for certain is that as a result of the federal law about 16 million Americans have gained health coverage through Medicaid. And for the states that chose to expand their programs, there is ample evidence of increased usage of health services and improved affordability of care. For example, a study last year in The Journal of the American Medical Association looked at outcomes in Arkansas, Kentucky and Texas. Arkansas used Medicaid funds to offer private insurance to low-income individuals, Kentucky opted for a conventional Medicaid expansion and Texas did not expand its program. In the two states that did expand, people had more access to primary care, paid lower out-of-pocket health-care costs and rarely skipped medications.

One of the problems expanding Medicaid was supposed to address was the abuse of emergency care services. The same study found that ER usage declined in Arkansas and Kentucky. In Oregon, however, it increased soon after the state expanded Medicaid, particularly in the Portland area. Even after the first two years, usage has continued to grow, according to the Oregon Health Insurance Experiment, which has been tracking health outcomes in the state since its Medicaid expansion began.

There are several theories for why this is happening. For the newly insured, one explanation is that there's typically "a lot of catching up that needs to be done," says Ben Sommers, the lead researcher on the study. "While we knew that ER use would probably be pretty high after a state expanded Medicaid, the popular theory was that it would taper off in a couple years. But now my hunch is that's not always the case."

To overcome the spotty research that's out there and to determine the impact of enrolling more people in Medicaid, Louisiana is putting a lot of resources into tracking the expansion's effect. The state expanded its program last year and has implemented what it calls a Medicaid expansion dashboard. In mid-December, the dashboard was showing that under the expanded program nearly 360,000 Louisianans had obtained health coverage, more than 4,000 women had been screened for breast cancer, more than 3,600 people had received colon cancer screenings and more than 700 adults had been diagnosed with diabetes.

But not every state is willing or able to devote the resources Louisiana has to measuring the program's impact. That's especially true now that the future of the Affordable Care Act is up in the air with a new administration and Congress in Washington.

What's more, it's really too early to definitively answer the question of whether Medicaid expansion makes people healthier in the long run. Expansions are only a few years old. But for Rebekah Gee, who is Louisiana's health and human services secretary, the dashboard makes one thing completely clear. "This shows that there is a demand for care," she says, "and we do have the supply for it."

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2017 EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

- **SEP. 10−13**
  - Memphis, TN
  - SNAP/TANF
  - INTEGRITY

- **SEP. 17−20**
  - Savannah, GA
  - ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

- **SEP. 22−24**
  - Cambridge, MA
  - APHSA Leadership & Finance HSS Summit

- **OCT. 7−11**
  - Austin, TX
  - LEGAL

- **OCT. 22−25**
  - National Harbor, MD (Washington, DC)
  - TECHNOLOGY

- **SEP. 22−24**
  - Baltimore, MD
  - APHSA Leadership & Finance HSS Summit

- **APR. 30−MAY 3**
  - Baltimore, MD
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- **MAY 19−23**
  - Portland, ME
  - INTERSTATE PLACEMENT

- **JUNE 21−23**
  - San Diego, CA

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Seeing Climate Change

Emissions data can register as mere numbers. But illustrating it can give it meaning.

In 2012, the U.S. added over 39 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. That’s equivalent to a pile of 33-foot-diameter one-metric-ton spheres stacked 2.3 miles high and 4.6 miles across.

Got it? Of course not. But thanks to the image above, you now have a sense of the scope of these numbers. Governments have hundreds of thousands of data sets available for public use—the feds alone offer nearly 200,000. But much of that information can be difficult to comprehend or visualize. As a result, companies aiming to make data more accessible have begun to emerge.

Real World Visuals is one of those companies, and its mission is to help people better understand climate change. For example, it created visualizations to illustrate the Climate Action Plan, or give insight into the scale of a methane leak in California in 2015.

Antony Turner, managing director of Real World Visuals, talked to Governing about the importance of making data relatable. This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

How can visualizations of data help cities?

Many of the big challenges faced by cities are ones where invisibility is a major factor. Energy use, carbon emissions and local air pollution are critical issues that we don’t “see.” Our brains are not good at engaging with pure data and numbers. That’s where good data visualization comes in, whether to help policymakers with better decision-making or keep citizens informed and engaged.

Why do you think visualizations encourage engagement?

People are more likely to engage with data if it can be presented in a way that is simple, intriguing and uses the landscape or cityscape. Most data visualization is abstract—bar and pie charts. They are useful, indeed vital for people who are familiar with data. But our specialty is creating “concrete” visuals where we turn mass into volumes and place those in familiar landscapes.

A great example of our work is an experimental animation film that took a report about the carbon footprint of New York City and turned a number—54 million tons of carbon dioxide—into something real and tangible. The film says, “If you could see the emissions, this is the size they would be.”

What is different about what your organization does?

We only create visualizations; we do not create data ourselves. We rely on scientists, government agencies and respected commercial sources for that. Governments are often, for regulatory reasons, the very best sources of high-quality data.

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I present this first idea—pool the wealth—as one of five that community leaders might contemplate as they face a federal government led by a new, unpredictable president and a similarly unpredictable political environment. In such times, it’s good to look for paths that can be pursued on the ground and that don’t require begging for big appropriations from the state or from Washington.

That brings us to Idea 2: Work with what you have. Sometimes leaders accomplish a lot not by finding new assets but by using the old ones in new ways. Mayor Jaime Lerner of Curitiba in Brazil famously did this when he decided he could get many of the benefits of building a subway much more cheaply by giving buses their own lanes and a train-like boarding infrastructure. Now bus rapid transit has been replicated all over the world, and it started with rethinking some of the building blocks of the city—streets and buses—and using them in new ways.

In New York City, former transportation commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan did this when she sent crews out with cans of paint to stripe some streets for trial pedestrian plazas and bicycle lanes. In so doing, she sidestepped the elaborate institutional structure of commissions, the city council and the state legislature, and got a lot done. The projects really were trials: Some of the changes were scrapped, but most of them became permanent in one fashion or another.

By comparison, her boss at the time, Mayor Michael Bloomberg, personally spent millions of dollars and at least a year of political capital in an unsuccessful effort to get the state legislature to let him try charging people to drive into Manhattan, aiming to put in place congestion pricing like London’s. His traffic commissioner accomplished much more with some cans of paint and brushes.
Jammed Cities

Sun Belt metro areas look for a low-cost solution to congestion.

Urbanites generally consider Austin the coolest city in Texas, if not America. It has a great university, great music, hip and trendy restaurants and bars, unique shops and a booming tech economy. It also has god-awful traffic for a city its size.

Metro Austin has 2 million people. All of them seem to be driving on Interstate 35 all the time. Getting across town east-west is even worse because there's really no main route. Bus service is just OK, and there's only one light rail line. (Voters shot down an expansion of the rail system a couple of years ago.)

No matter how cool it is—and how urban its core may be—Austin is really just an overgrown suburb. And it's not the only one. Nashville has many of the same problems. Atlanta's traffic problems are legendary. And in Southern California, Orange County may be an economic powerhouse, but it's also a transportation backwater with the same population as neighboring San Diego but only half as many freeway miles.

As the United States becomes both more prosperous and more urban, this is a real problem. Half of America's population growth is currently going to 20 Sun Belt metro areas. And like Austin, most of them are overgrown suburbs. The urban cores are cool and the exurbs are bucolic, but in between most people are stuck in a kind of endless slab of congested, high-density suburbia.

A couple of generations ago, we would have solved this problem pretty simply, by foolishly spending a lot of money to plow new freeways through existing communities. But attitudes have changed: Nobody wants to spend that much money anymore, and even if they did, most suburban neighborhoods are powerful enough to resist.

President Trump is promising to spend a trillion dollars on infrastructure, but most of that will be private investment in public-private projects like toll roads. Austin is a case study in the limitations of that approach. The state built a new north-south tollway around Austin a few years ago. But, understandably, most people are not willing to pay money to go the long way around.

Which brings us to proximity. One of the few ways around this problem is to build more housing close to the urban cores—or, at least, close to the dense suburban job centers. Urban planners often argue for locating more housing along high-frequency transit lines, which makes sense because many people can commute by transit.

What's not well understood, however, is that well-located housing can cut down on the amount of driving—and hence the need for additional road space—even if people are still tethered to their cars. One famous study in the San Francisco Bay Area found that people living in Berkeley and Oakland drive only half as far as people in the outer suburbs—not because they take transit more, but because the places they have to go are closer together.

This isn't a solution that easily lends itself to traditional government action. It's not something you can do with conventional big-ticket government spending projects. And it's not something that's popular with the current residents of their well-located areas. What's more, because of land prices and availability, this approach makes more sense for flats, townhomes and small-lot single-family homes, rather than sprawling homes. But there's no question that one way out of the traffic box in overgrown suburbs is to figure out how to reduce the distances you have to drive.

By William Fulton

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The Urban Opposition
Big-city mayors have a lot to lose by confronting the new Republican government in Washington. Many of them are planning to do it anyway.

By Alan Greenblatt

Greg Fischer did a lot of business with the Obama administration. The Louisville mayor got White House help in modernizing the city's police force, connecting residents to technology jobs and implementing programs aimed at helping minority youth, among other efforts. As late as December, Louisville received a $29.5 million federal Neighborhood Choice grant, which the mayor hopes to leverage into $200 million worth of redevelopment.

All this collaboration led Fischer to fly to Washington at least once every other month. And that wasn't at all unusual for a big-city mayor over the last eight years. “The Obama White House worked very closely with different mayors in a lot of different ways,” Fischer says.

Now with a new administration in power, Fischer, like a lot of his urban counterparts, is wondering if he should find some other way to spend his frequent flyer miles. President Obama turned to cities as partners to a large extent because he found mayors far more receptive to progressive policies, such as raising the minimum wage or mandating paid sick leave benefits, than a Congress controlled by Republicans. The new president won't be looking in that direction.
Even before he took office, President Trump and many of the nation’s big-city mayors found themselves at odds over issues such as climate change and immigrant rights. Baltimore, San Francisco and Seattle were among cities that approved resolutions either castigating Trump and his rhetoric or calling on him to condemn the instances of hate speech that followed his election. Numerous mayors pledged that their cities would remain sanctuaries for undocumented immigrants and minority groups, including Muslims who may be threatened by coming shifts in federal policy. “It’s clear Trump cannot fulfill his desire to have mass deportation without using local police departments,” says Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton.

“I’m not going to do that.”

Politically, Trump and leaders in the nation’s major metropolises inhabit separate worlds. That sets up a dynamic that’s likely to be more combative than collaborative. In contrast to their weakness at the state and federal levels, Democrats dominate cities, especially large ones. Democratic mayors—most of them quite liberal—control city halls in 22 of America’s 25 largest cities. As the only remaining stronghold of progressive political power in the country, they will be called upon by left-leaning interest groups to pursue policies that are now complete nonstarters in Washington and most state capitals.

All of this might jibe with their personal inclinations, but mayors know it puts them at risk of undermining their relations with Washington. Cities can’t constantly oppose an administration’s policies in the way an outside group such as the American Civil Liberties Union can. Cities depend on other levels of government for funding and to a large extent their authority is constrained by them. There aren’t as many federal dollars flowing directly to cities as there once were, but mayors don’t want to put the remaining millions at risk. Already Trump has threatened to cut off funding for cities that don’t play ball when it comes to immigration. And there’s the additional fear that the federal government might emulate a game actively played by Republican states—namely, passing laws that preempt liberal local policies.

But mayors are eternal optimists. They are hoping that Washington will not view them as an enemy. There’s a big difference, Stanton says, between campaign rhetoric and governing. Mayors may be at odds with Trump on certain issues, but they believe that Trump—himself a creature of New York City, with significant real estate holdings in other large urban centers—understands that cities are the economic engines of the country. Picking too many fights with cities will do nothing to further his agenda of creating highly paid jobs. “It doesn’t make sense,” says Louisville’s Greg Fischer, “to have super-negative consequences on areas that are driving the economy right now.”

Trump’s talk of a major infrastructure package—with a price tag as high as a trillion dollars—has mayors hopeful about at least one form of federal investment. They’ve been trying to make the case to administration officials that sending money directly to cities, rather than funneling everything through state transportation departments, would get shovels in the ground much faster. “I do think cities are going to benefit from the administration’s work,” says Mick Cornett, the mayor of Oklahoma City. “They’re intent on growing a strong economy, and that economy is going to be centered, of course, in cities around the country.”

Still, the fact remains that Trump was elected by a vote that seemed to pit major metropolitan areas against practically everyone else. In the presidential voting last fall, Hillary Clinton carried 88 of the nation’s 100 largest counties, but little else. Trump’s strongest regions of support were ones that have been left behind by a global economy tilted toward major cities. Republicans in Congress also mostly represent nonurban areas with different values from those of the major population centers.

The disconnect between cities and the new government in Washington has the potential to make life a lot harder for many mayors. And the domestic policies being discussed at the dawn of this administration, especially cuts to health-care programs, would have a big negative impact on urban areas. “Most of the federal money flowing into cities flows to individuals in the cities, not to cities themselves,” says Erika Poethig, director of urban policy initiatives at the Urban Institute. “When we think about the policy changes under consideration—the Affordable Care Act repeal, block grantierung—there’s no big-money urban initiatives coming out of Washington, along the lines of the HOPE VI housing program of the 1990s. “Cities have enjoyed a close relationship with the Obama administration, but the administration was looking to cities as places that were producing results that could be replicated,” says Simone Brody, executive director of What Works Cities, which consults with mayors.

Yet while partisan gridlock prevented Washington from accomplishing very much over the past six years, the country, if not booming, certainly performed better economically than most other rich nations. A huge share of that was due to the increased dynamism of cities. They thrived under Obama, not because of federal assistance but because of a confluence of market forces. It wasn’t dollars from Washington but rather corporate and philanthropic investment and tens of millions of individual choices that brought jobs and new residents back into the centers of major cities.

The metropolitan economy is now not just dynamic, but wholly dominant. Metropolitan areas account for a majority of economic activity in nearly every state. Three-quarters of the nation’s gross domestic product is generated in the 100 largest metro areas alone. In Arizona, greater Phoenix makes up 70 percent of the economy. Tucson accounts for half of the rest. The pro-city combination of market forces and demographic change will continue, even if Washington becomes uninterested or even hostile. “I don’t expect the trend of corporations and entrepreneurial startups moving
would strip federal funding from states or localities that are not in compliance with federal immigration law.

That kind of bill should sound painfully familiar to leaders of major cities. Numerous states have stripped away the authority of local governments to set their own policies when it comes to transgender rights, minimum-wage levels, plastic bag bans and a host of other issues. Most federal preemption laws have been comparatively modest—blocking local requirements for restaurant menu disclosures, for instance, or reserving regulation of certain chemicals at the federal level. But constitutional authority exists for a federal preemption wave that could equal or even exceed the one launched so far by Republican state governments.

Hence the dilemma for mayors. Their constituents and reliable political allies will be pushing them to oppose Trump, who elicits special levels of fear and loathing among millions of city dwellers. “In this new world of Trump being president of the United States and Republicans having one-party control of Congress,” says Phoenix’s Stanton, “mayors are going to have to step up to the plate big time and be strong, not be afraid to adopt public policies that are often progressive public policies.” But, as the mayor of a city targeted for preemption by his own state, Stanton knows as well as anyone there are risks involved with such a strategy.

All of this leaves many mayors adopting a familiar posture when it comes to federalism. If you’re not going to help us, they’re saying to Washington, please just leave us alone. But that may be wishful thinking. Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti notes that his city is a net donor when it comes to federal funds, getting back only 72 cents for every dollar sent out. It would be “unfair” if that distribution got any worse, he says. It could, though. Just before Christmas, the city and county of Los Angeles announced a multimillion-dollar legal defense fund for immigrants facing deportation. Other major cities are setting up or considering similar funds. Almost simultaneously, legislation has been introduced in Congress that would strip federal funding from states or localities that are not in compliance with federal immigration law.

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Islands of Opposition The counties that voted Democratic in the 2016 presidential race were confined almost exclusively to the nation’s biggest urban areas. Many of the leaders of those areas plan to push hard against a Republican agenda from the White House.
In December, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti announced a multimillion-dollar legal defense fund for immigrants facing deportation.
n the campaign, Trump said that “our inner cities are a disaster,” painting a dire picture through inaccurate statistics about poverty, crime and employment. Trump's numbers may have been off, but they spoke to a dispute against cities that resonated with his voters. The more cities brag about being economic engines, the more they can fuel resentment among those who feel abandoned by the contemporary economy—the people Trump spoke to directly with pledges to bring back jobs in mining and manufacturing.

All of this leaves cities scrambling to find areas of common cause with the administration and its rural and small-town loyalists. Some mayors are already making the case that the cuts to programs benefiting large cities will also hurt residents of smaller cities and rural areas. They hope that issues such as raising the national minimum wage will be seen less as liberal causes and more as a means of addressing the grievances of the struggling working class. They’ll seek to frame debates over education and housing in a similar light. “The common ground will be the issues the stereotypical rural, white, blue-collar voters are concerned about,” says Louisville’s Fischer. “These are the same issues our urban Hillary voters have been complaining about for decades.”

In order to make their case, cities are hoping to find allies within the administration. They don’t know yet whom Trump will appoint to many of the agency and White House jobs that interact most closely with other levels of government. In contrast with the Obama administration, which had a former mayor as its last director of intergovernmental relations, it’s not clear who—if anyone—will speak from an urban perspective when decisions are being made. “[We] have made a forceful case to the president to maintain a strong voice for local officials inside the White House,” says Michael Wallace, federal lobbyist for the National League of Cities. “At least have someone with the city’s point of view [help shape] policies before they’re really public.”

Mayors are convinced they’ll need to network more among themselves, figuring out how best to speak to Washington. Since the election, there have been coordinated efforts on immigration policy involving mayors from cities such as Atlanta, Chicago and New York. But going forward, working with Washington could require some self-effacement on the part of the highest-profile mayors. Even as big-city mayors keep the progressive flag flying on a variety of issues, they may turn to leaders of smaller communities to speak for them on some issues before Congress and at the White House. They don’t want the dynamic to be Manhattan and San Francisco versus farm country.

This sort of thing already happens in many states. The major city may not have great relations with the legislature, but its suburbs often do. The mayor of the second city may therefore speak for the metropolitan area as a whole, lending it a more favorable face. “I get asked a lot of times to speak for the region,” says Jim Brainard, the longtime mayor of Carmel, Ind., an exurb of Indianapolis.

Such a strategy requires cooperation within metropolitan regions. All too often, cities within a metro area view each other suspiciously as competitors for jobs and residents. It will now be more in their interest than ever to see themselves as partners on a larger stage, one that includes their rural neighbors. It’s easy to forget that half the country’s rural population lives within metro areas.

Rather than simply deriding the main city as a place that’s perverse on cultural issues and sucks up all the jobs, rural residents and leaders have to be convinced that the city is in the transportation hub and major market for agriculture and rural manufacturing products. “Even though cities and suburbs and rural areas rise and fall together, that hasn’t resulted in true collaboration in most places,” says Bruce Katz, an urban scholar at Brookings. “There’s a real question from this election of whether cities and their surrounding counties and municipalities can focus on a shared and common vision. If they can’t, states and the federal government will continue to divide them. They’ll be hijacked by partisans at higher levels of government.”

Metropolitan cooperation may require a change in rhetorical approach. Politicians in major cities are fond of proclaiming their commitment to values such as tolerance and inclusion. They aren’t going to abandon those principles, but they will have to talk about them in a different way, suggests Nick Licata, a former member of the Seattle City Council. Progressives may want to borrow a page from the playbook of same-sex marriage proponents, who sought to cast their cause conservatively, not as an act of personal liberation, but as falling squarely within traditional family values, including the protection of children.

“The need for sanctuary city policies, for instance, might be framed not as protection for vulnerable individuals, but rather as a way of maintaining public safety. “The internal dynamics within the cities are not going to change,” Licata says. “If they want to get elected, they’re still going to be promoting progressive issues. But that’s not necessarily a winning strategy for turning the country around.”

Without an obvious friend in the White House, city leaders are going to have to improvise. Lacking much financial support from Washington, they’ll be more on their own than in the past when it comes to innovation and service delivery. But most seem determined to continue the policies that they believe have contributed not only to their citizens’ well-being, but their economic success. “The partnerships we’ve relied on out of Washington for 70 years may go, but the resolve of cities will remain,” says Pittsburgh Mayor William Peduto. “If it makes us adapt as cities, there will be opportunities when the pendulum swings in the other direction. This century is the century of cities, not just in this country, but globally.”

—Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton

“Mayors are going to have to step up to the plate big time and be strong, not be afraid to adopt public policies that are often progressive public policies.”

Email agreenblatt@governing.com

February 2017 | GOVERNING 31
A THOUSAND CUTS

STATE of the CITIES

GOVERNERN | February 2017
In much of the country, state help to localities has been slashed. That won’t change anytime soon.

By Mike Maciag and J.B. Wogan

The fire department in Springfield, Ohio, has grown accustomed to frugal times. Calls for service keep climbing, but staff levels are frozen. Firefighters themselves fix vehicles and breathing equipment in order to save money on repair contracts. Recently, when a fire engine's generator failed and they couldn't afford to replace it, they had to mount a portable generator and rig it to work.

Springfield's revenue is below the levels of a decade ago, not even counting inflation. The city has responded by eliminating administrative staff, deferring maintenance and taking other measures intended to be least burdensome for residents. “The last five or six years has been nothing but one cut after another,” says Warren Copeland, the city's mayor. “We've reached the point where any of the cuts we make from here on out are much more noticeable.”

City officials pinned their hopes on passing an income tax levy in November to replenish revenues. They warned that if it didn't pass, the only option would be more painful—service reductions, including the closure of a fire station and cuts to overtime pay by more than half. The measure failed by 227 votes.

While the financial picture for most of Ohio's localities isn't as bleak as it is in Springfield, it certainly isn't rosy. Most municipalities have needed to make substantial cuts in their budgets as well. Last year, 367 Ohio municipalities asked voters to approve new tax levies or replace existing ones, many for the first time in decades. Ohio's gradually declining industrial economy is part of the reason for the budget squeeze, but there's a more direct culprit: a sharp reduction in financial help from state government. In many states besides Ohio, state assistance remains well below pre-recession levels. Governing compiled data on this funding as reported to the U.S. Census Bureau, comparing the most recent fiscal 2014 totals to averages between 2007 and 2009 when revenues peaked. Local governments and school districts in 16 states incurred inflation-adjusted cuts exceeding 10 percent. Going back further, real intergovernmental revenues from states have grown nearly three times slower than localities' own-source general revenues since fiscal year 2000.

Local officials have held out hope that the cuts would be temporary. But sluggish state revenue growth doesn't bode well for a return to pre-recession aid levels. The latest fiscal survey by the National Association of State Budget Officers found that more states were expecting revenue numbers to come in below projections than in any year since 2010. Most local officials now say they've come to view the current environment as the new normal, and are developing new strategies to cope.

Maine is a good example. Four years ago, the state municipal association produced a TV ad that aired in many communities. In a voiceover, an official from the town of Waldo explained in plain English what revenue sharing was and why proposed cuts mattered to the average Mainer. “From Kittery to Caribou,” the announcer said, “your town gets help from a 40-year-old revenue sharing law between the state and towns to provide basic services.” The spot showed a montage of those basic services, including a snow plow, ambulances and trash removal. It finished with a kicker: “Politicians in Augusta are ignoring this law by shortchanging our towns and cities the money promised for these...
services. And worse, without that state money, property taxes will go up.”

The ad was an attempt by municipal leaders to protect an obscure but important source of local government funding: “To the lay person, the term ‘revenue sharing’ is abstract,” says Geoff Herman, executive director of the Maine Municipal Association. “It doesn’t mean anything.”

Herman’s staff created a website on revenue sharing with banner ads warning of higher local property taxes and shrinking services. They armed local leaders with talking points for media interviews, town halls and meetings with state lawmakers. Ultimately, the legislature set revenue sharing disbursements below their historic levels, but protected them from deeper cuts proposed by the governor. The media campaign paid off, Herman says, “and showed that we were pretty serious about this issue.”

Such tactics by municipal groups are becoming more common in battles over revenue sharing. In Michigan, mayors and county executives have launched an initiative called “saveMIcity,” which includes a statewide tour, a new blog, interviews with local press and a research page detailing the reasons the state’s municipal finance system is broken. Much of the campaign is focused on restoring cuts to state aid, although it’s also about finding ways to finance system is broken. Much of the campaign is focused on restoring cuts to state aid, although it’s also about finding ways to contain public employee retirement costs and lift limits on local tax collections.

Mayors of Ohio’s 30 largest cities recently formed the Ohio Mayors Alliance to give them a greater voice at the state Capitol. As in many states, urban areas aren’t well represented among the legislature’s Republican leadership. When lawmakers negotiated the arrangement functioned as a partnership: States were the tax collectors and local jurisdictions used some of the money to pay for essential services, such as road repair and emergency response. Since the recession, many governors and legislatures have come to view the funds as discretionary items in the budget and obvious places to trim state spending. It’s more than a philosophical shift—it’s a function of long-term state budgetary pressures. Baby boomers leaving the workforce aren’t helping income tax collections. Antiquated revenue systems that fail to tax services and online transactions have created a further fiscal hole. Meanwhile, Medicaid is eating up an increasing share of state budgets.

Nationally, inflation-adjusted state support to localities and schools dipped 6 percent when compared with averages from 2007 to 2009. Localities in Arizona (-24 percent) and Ohio (-19 percent) suffered the largest reductions, with Massachusetts and West Virginia not far behind. And that was mostly on earmarked funds—the cuts in unrestricted dollars flowing from those states were even greater.

The cuts in state funding couldn’t have come at a worse time for localities. In Michigan, when the housing bubble burst, most homeowners’ property values dropped, as did local property tax collections. And because of a quirk in Michigan state law, when the values rebounded, property tax revenues did not. In the 1990s, voters had capped annual property tax increases at 5 percent a year. As a result, many Michigan municipalities today receive less in state aid and property tax revenue than they did in 2006. “No one would argue that we shouldn’t do our fair share in a tough economy, but we have no upward mobility in a strong economy,” says Anthony Minghine, executive director of the Michigan Municipal League. “If you talk to the average person on the street, there’s probably a belief that, ‘Well, my 401(k) is doing better; I’m assuming my city is doing better.’ And it’s not.”

What’s happening in Michigan is happening, one way or another, in different parts of the country. Revenue sharing laws are full of obscure but important sources of local government funding. “To the lay person, the term ‘revenue sharing’ is abstract,” says Geoff Herman, executive director of the Maine Municipal Association. “It doesn’t mean anything.”
loopholes. In Maine, the 1971 law calls for 5 percent of state income and sales taxes to go to local governments. Last year, that amounted to $158 million. But another provision in the law allows the state to spend less in order to balance the budget, so local governments got only $62 million, or about 2 percent of the tax receipts. And they considered themselves lucky to receive even that much. In Augusta, the debate isn’t about restoring cuts; it’s about whether to preserve the aid that’s left.

In his first two budget proposals, Maine Gov. Paul LePage has called for eliminating the revenue sharing program altogether. In part because of effective lobbying by municipalities, the legislature has met him only part of the way. But in nearby Rhode Island, the state has stopped sending any of its designated $130 million a year in general revenue sharing to localities, and nearly all of the $120 million a year in motor vehicle excise taxes. At the same time, as in Maine and Michigan, Rhode Island’s municipalities are hampered by state restrictions on what they can tax.

In Ohio, the shift away from state funding for localities began with a 2005 law eliminating tangible personal property taxes. Six years later, facing a nearly $8 billion budget shortfall, Gov. John Kasich initiated sizable reductions to the state’s tax revenue sharing program. The Local Government Fund, while only a small part of the state’s general revenue, is one of the few states where localities can levy both income and property taxes. In Springfield, state revenue and aid accounted for 4.7 percent of its general fund last year, down from 13.3 percent a decade earlier. So the city has trimmed its staffing over the years through attrition, layoffs and doubling up on positions. With the failure of last November’s tax levy, officials expect further layoffs, along with the closure of two public safety substations. “Cuts from the state have been devastating to us,” says City Manager Jim Bodenmiller.

Nearby Dayton, Ohio’s sixth largest city, has shed roughly 30 percent of its workforce since 2007. In all, the city reports that it has lost out on approximately $10 million annually in state funding since 2010. Officials have sought new revenue by raising fees, such as an assessment for street lighting improvements. Shelley Dickstein, Dayton’s city manager, says she doesn’t foresee new funding from the state anytime soon. “We’re just hopeful we can continue to manage through the next two or three years,” she says.

One way local leaders in Ohio are managing, if reluctantly, is by raising their own taxes. Last year, 291 new tax levies and 134 replacement levies ended up on Ohio ballots. A review of election results shows about 68 percent passed. Cleveland voters approved a 0.5 percent increase, which is expected to raise about $80 million a year. The city had already cut back on street sweeping, reduced the frequency of moving abandoned lots, left police vacancies unfilled and consolidated two departments. “We had no more rabbits [to pull out of a hat],” says Cleveland City Council President Kevin Kelley. “No elected official likes to be involved in something that raises taxes, but in the state of Ohio, whether it’s the state or the city, people need to pay more for services. Stuff doesn’t happen for free.” Dayton passed its own tax increase, which included funding for a new pre-kindergarten program. Emphasizing the state cuts wasn’t a major part of the city’s pitch. Mayor Whaley says the need for additional revenue was visible to voters with such noticeable neglect as peeling paint on the sides of police cruisers. It wasn’t as visually apparent in Springfield, which likely hurt the levy’s chances.

“We’re past the point where additional reductions can easily be absorbed.”

An income tax levy to fund street repairs and police officers in Springfield narrowly failed.
### WHERE STATE FUNDING IS DECLINING

Across the country, many local governments and school districts have seen money from state capitals start to dry up in recent years. Nationally, total inflation-adjusted state intergovernmental funding dipped 6 percent in fiscal year 2014 from averages between 2007 and 2009, when revenues peaked in most states. Localities in some places were hit much harder than others. Arizona (-24 percent) and Ohio (-18 percent) recorded the largest drops in real state intergovernmental revenue for local government and school districts, followed by Massachusetts, Hawaii and West Virginia. Only Alaska and North Dakota—two states benefiting from substantial energy revenues during that time—reported sizable increases.

### State Intergovernmental Revenue: Total intergovernmental revenue to all local governments and school districts. Duplicative intergovernmental transactions are included. Figures, reported by the Census Bureau, are estimates derived from a sample of local governments in each state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>FY 2007–2009 Average</th>
<th>FY 2014</th>
<th>Change</th>
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<td>South Dakota</td>
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**Table Note:** Figures adjusted for inflation, shown in FY 2014 dollars.
STATE OF THE CITIES: A THOUSAND CUTS

in a few states with strong economic gains, these are the exceptions. The National League of Cities’ past two annual surveys of finance officers indicate more localities experienced cuts in state aid than increases. And state budgets themselves are showing new signs of weakness.

Ohio’s recent tax collections came in well below forecast, and state Office of Management and Budget estimates released in January indicated receipts were down 1.3 percent from last year. “Anybody that expects a significant infl ow of new resources is going to be in for a rude surprise,” says Keen, the state’s budget director.

Many taxpayers wanting to take advantage of anticipated federal tax revisions will push income out of tax year 2016 into 2017, lowering states’ tax receipts for fiscal 2017, says the Rockefeller Institute of Government’s Don Boyd. On top of that, states will face greater pressures to spend more on health care and pension plan contributions. “It’s going to be very strained over the near-term period,” Boyd says. “It’s not an environment in which you should expect states to restore aid cuts to localities.”

In Springfield, the city government has adapted as best it can. Some agencies have opted to cancel contracts with private vendors and bring work in-house to save money. Instead of paying a contractor to mow all of the city’s abandoned lots, Springfield turned to mapping software to deploy its own crews more efficiently, and city employees now complete most of the work themselves.

But there’s a limit to how far a government can go with less, and Springfield officials contend they’re past that point. Chris Moore, who oversees public works for the city, says attracting and retaining employees is increasingly difficult as most city workers, already saddled with a bigger workload, have gone several years without a pay raise. “We do everything we can to make sure the citizens see zero reduction in service,” Moore says. “Unfortunately, one day the charade will end.”

Even as they have created serious problems with cuts to local government funding, some states are trying to provide relief in other ways. In Michigan, Gov. Rick Snyder came into office in 2011 seeking to consolidate the functions of local government. Since 2012, the Snyder administration has awarded about $44 million in grants “to stimulate smaller, more efficient government.” In practice, that has meant more than 86 communities combining services, from trash collection to building inspection. Other states, such as New Jersey and Ohio, have also encouraged local governments to enter into shared services agreements.

Massachusetts has been something of an innovator in dealing with local revenue losses. Unlike most states, it has given municipalities new taxing authority. Though the state has restored some of its recession-era cuts, last year’s revenue sharing program disbursements were still about $200 million below what they were a decade ago, not accounting for inflation. So the state passed a law allowing cities and towns to tax meals and increase their local hotel taxes. Last year, municipalities generated an additional $184 million through the taxes.

Localities in Massachusetts have portrayed the funding of municipal services as an investment strategy for the entire state. “If communities aren’t succeeding, there’s no way the state’s going to compete economically,” says Geoffrey Beckwith, the executive director of the Massachusetts Municipal Association. “What business is going to locate into an area if the class sizes are out of control, if the test scores are going down, if the roads are not in good shape and there is one police cruiser on duty at night? You’re not going to attract business investment.”

But even in Massachusetts, state relief has been uneven. Not every town has enough restaurants and hotels to make the new taxes worth implementing. In some places that could generate revenue that way, local leaders have decided to forgo the tax hikes because they believe residents couldn’t bear the higher food bills.

Although revenue sharing to localities has rebounded lately
To pedestrian deaths? By Daniel C. Vock.
Shirley Gonzales made no secret of her views on transportation when she ran for the San Antonio City Council in 2013. She laid them out in her answer to a questionnaire: “pedestrians first, followed by cycling, public transportation and private automobiles, in that order.” Gonzales promoted this agenda even though she was running in a city where fewer than 2 percent of commuters walk to work.

A few months later, after she’d won the election, the tales of some of her constituents drove the issue home. Most prominent was the story of Sharon Ledesma, a 26-year-old single mother who was crossing a four-lane street one night when a car switched lanes and veered toward her and her two children. Ledesma managed to push the children out of the way. Dominic, who was 11 at the time, and Mallory, who was 8, survived but had serious injuries. Both had broken bones and were on crutches for weeks. Ledesma, however, did not make it. She was declared brain dead at the hospital. The next day, after her kids had a chance to say goodbye, her family took her off life support.

Gonzales began to hear from other San Antonio families. The city had one of the highest pedestrian death rates in the country. In fact, 373 pedestrians had died in the metropolitan area over the previous decade. And Gonzales’ own district, largely poor and Hispanic, had some of the most dangerous streets, especially Calle de la Raza, the arterial where Ledesma died. That four-lane road shares many of the characteristics of other deadly stretches for pedestrians: Cars traveling near the speed limit of 40 mph pass between modest homes and retail outlets, while pedestrians walk along sidewalks separated by traffic; only a low curb for as much as half a mile between crosswalks.

Gonzales’ constituents kept asking, “Isn’t there something you can do to slow down this street?” The new city councilwoman wanted to know too.

That’s how Gonzales came across the New York City program called Vision Zero. The premise is that no one needs to be killed while traveling, whether by car, bicycle, bus or foot. Saving lives, in other words, is more important than getting home faster. She pushed San Antonio to join the movement, and it did. Instead of the 84 pedestrians who died in the city in 2014, San Antonio would shoot for zero. The goal was the same for cyclists, drivers and automobile passengers.

Vision Zero has a long way to go before reaching its goal, and indeed an absolute elimination of traffic deaths is difficult even to imagine, but the movement has already had a positive impact in the three years since it came to the United States. Most important, in some cities, including New York, the number of traffic fatalities has dropped significantly under Vision Zero, even as national numbers are climbing. Vision Zero is now official policy in nearly two dozen U.S. cities, from Portland, Ore., to Fort Lauderdale, Fla. It is forcing transportation planners all over the country to rethink their priorities. Both the U.S. Department of Transportation and a national organization of state transportation officials have adopted similar concepts, one of which is called “Toward Zero Deaths.” But whether Vision Zero will be effective in the long run is still an open question. It will require cities to commit wholeheartedly to its audacious goal and to stick with it for years on end. That’s the key to Vision Zero—and also the hardest part to achieve.

Vision Zero began as an initiative of the Swedish government in 1997. The first big push under the program was to address vehicle deaths on rural roads. The government started building three-lane, rather than two-lane, roads for those areas, with the center lane used for passing. Later, Sweden began focusing on urban areas, building separated bike lanes, lowering speed limits and creating pedestrian-only zones. The years of effort paid off. Sweden now has one of the lowest traffic fatality rates in the world.

The concept made its debut in the United States in the weeks following the inauguration of New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio in 2014. Vision Zero was just one of several items on the mayor’s transportation agenda, but a spate of traffic deaths in the weeks before his swearing-in convinced him to make it a top priority. De Blasio announced the program the week he took office, and

gave his administration 30 days to come up with a plan for achieving it. Within a month, New York City had a list of 63 action items to improve traffic safety. “It was an extraordinary moment,” says Transportation Commissioner Polly Trottenberg. “It was the kind of bold, ambitious goal that understandably elected officials often don’t want to make, because it’s a goal that you know is going to be tough to reach.”

Developing New York’s plan wasn’t simply a matter of taking the Swedish model and importing it to the United States. The Swedish national government, after all, has far more sweeping powers than an American city does. It can regulate vehicle design, increase criminal penalties and change licensing requirements. New York City, on the other hand, had to ask permission from the state legislature just to lower its citywide speed limit from 30 mph to 25 and to install more speed cameras. The legislature agreed to both changes.

Given the complications, city officials had to look closer to home to find other ways to reduce traffic deaths. They started
with the traditional cornerstones of traffic safety campaigns: education, enforcement and engineering. When New York won the right to lower its speed limit, it mounted a “25 to 25” public education campaign 25 days before the change went into effect, explaining to the public that a pedestrian hit by a car going 30 mph has a 20 percent chance of dying, while one hit by a car going 25 mph has only a 12 percent fatality rate. Once the message got out, the city stepped up its enforcement of speeding laws, using both police officers and speed cameras in school zones. Meanwhile, engineers made a commitment to reconfigure 50 dangerous streets and intersections a year, using narrower lanes and other improvements that encourage drivers to move more slowly.

That emphasis on street design is one of the hallmarks of Vision Zero. “We spend a lot of time, a lot of energy and money educating individuals about safe behaviors,” says Leah Shahum, the founder and director of the Vision Zero Network. “There is still a place for that.” But, she adds, “how we design or redesign our streets has a huge impact on behavior.”

It’s no coincidence, in other words, that the most dangerous streets for pedestrians in cities are the arterials like Culebra Road in San Antonio. Fast-moving traffic, poor lighting, limited pedestrian crossings and unprotected sidewalks on roads that cut through neighborhoods are a fatal formula for those on foot. And while a more traditional safety campaign might try to stop those deaths by educating people about the dangers of jaywalking, Vision Zero seeks to address the reasons why pedestrians feel compelled to dart across dangerous roads to begin with.

For Vision Zero, crashes are not “accidents;” they are often the result of deliberate decisions to prioritize smooth traffic flow over safety. Proponents of the campaign anticipate that all users of the transportation network—drivers, cyclists and pedestrians—will make mistakes. But simple mistakes shouldn’t cost people their lives. “Vision Zero is not about eliminating all crashes. That’s not possible,” Shahum says. “The issue is: How can we lessen the severity of those crashes?”

Although pedestrian deaths often draw the most attention, Vision Zero employs the same strategies for other road users too. Corinne Kuster, policy director at the National Association of City Transportation Officials, has seen the benefits of improved street design. “When you redesign a street to improve safety for people walking and biking, it makes it safer for everybody,” she says. “A lot of the strategies that are part of the Vision Zero redesign, for example reducing turning conflicts [at intersections], actually reduce crashes for people driving as well.”

To draw up their Vision Zero plans, cities have relied on two major sources of information: data analysis and discussions among city agencies and outside community groups. Both have produced unexpected insights that have forced local officials to recalibrate their approaches.

New York City, for instance, studied fatal crashes that involve left-turning vehicles, because approximately one out of every eight pedestrian and cyclist deaths in the city between 2010 and 2014 involved such vehicles. “We’ve known for a while that left turns are dangerous,” Shahum says. “But it’s not intuitive that you would be more likely to hit a pedestrian on a left turn than a right turn.”

Big-City Fatality Rates

The number of pedestrian deaths varies widely among the 50 largest U.S. cities. The cities with Vision Zero programs are in bold.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Total Deaths Per 100K Population, 2013–2015</th>
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<td>Detroit</td>
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SOURCE: GOVERNING ANALYSIS OF 2013-2015 NHTSA FATALITY ANALYSIS REPORTING SYSTEM, CENSUS POPULATION DATA
From Dusk till Dawn
New York City found that pedestrian injuries and fatalities were highest immediately following sunset in the fall and winter.

Overnight AM Peak Midday PM Peak Evening
Jan. Low KSI High KSI Low KSI High KSI
Feb. Low KSI High KSI Low KSI High KSI
Mar. Low KSI High KSI Low KSI High KSI
Apr. Low KSI High KSI Low KSI High KSI
May Low KSI High KSI Low KSI High KSI
Jun. Low KSI High KSI Low KSI High KSI
Jul. Low KSI High KSI Low KSI High KSI
Aug. Low KSI High KSI Low KSI High KSI
Sep. Low KSI High KSI Low KSI High KSI
Oct. Low KSI High KSI Low KSI High KSI
Nov. Low KSI High KSI Low KSI High KSI
Dec. Low KSI High KSI Low KSI High KSI

Average number of people killed or seriously injured (KSI) per hour per week in NYC, 2010-2014

SOURCE: NYC/DOT/NYPD TRAFFIC FATALITY DATABASE

Turns are three times as deadly as right turns, but we didn’t know why exactly until we did this deep study,” says Juan Martinez, the director of strategic initiatives for the city’s transportation department. “What we found is that it’s mostly highly correlated with the speed of the turn.”

To be sure, there are several factors that make left turns more dangerous. Drivers are under more stress, the frame of the car blocks their view and the “conflict zones” between cars and pedestrians are bigger, because many drivers cut the corners. But the biggest difference seems to be speed. Vehicles in fatal left-turn crashes are typically traveling about 9.3 mph, compared with 5.6 mph for right-turn crashes.

With a better understanding of the problem, New York is testing different ways to slow left-turn traffic at 100 intersections throughout the city. One approach has been to use paint and flexible posts to force drivers to travel farther into intersections before they start their turns. The city has also been restricting left turns in more places and using extra-long walk signals to give pedestrians a head start before vehicles enter an intersection.

Another breakthrough for New York City came last fall, when city officials analyzed the time of day and season of the year when pedestrians were killed. They noticed that pedestrian deaths shot up each year between September and January, and spiked right after sunset during the winter. The earlier the sunset, the more rush-hour deaths occurred.

The city took out ads on drive-time radio to get the message to rush-hour commuters to be extra careful in the evening in darker months. The transportation department installed new lighting at 1,000 intersections to better illuminate crosswalks. The police department moved officers from daytime to evening shifts, and mounted a campaign to crack down on drivers who failed to yield to pedestrians. In the first two months of the initiative, pedestrian deaths dropped to half of what they had been during that stretch the year before.

The numbers are looking better for overall traffic fatalities as well. There were 297 traffic deaths in New York City in 2013, before Vision Zero went into effect. That dropped to 257 in 2014 and a record low of 231 in 2015. The 2016 tally was lower still, at 225. “At the time we announced our dusk and darkness initiatives,” Trottenberg says, “we were on track to have a significantly worse year [in 2016] compared to [2015] in terms of fatalities. We’ve really helped slow that trend. We’re naturally an agency that focuses on engineering because that’s our expertise, but it makes us realize we also need to focus more on the messaging side of things.”

Another lesson that data reinforced for New York is that the most dangerous roads were not necessarily the ones that drew the most complaints. Residents in poorer areas or immigrant communities often face the greatest hazards, but tend not to contact the city as much. So it’s necessary to look more closely at actual neighborhood statistics than at citizen feedback.

In Portland, Ore., the issue of neighborhood equity is even more front and center. Mayor Charlie Hales kicked off the city’s Vision Zero efforts at the headquarters of the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon in the Jade District of East Portland, one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the city for traffic deaths. Hales’ administration created a large task force that included black, Hispanic and Asian-American advocacy groups. As a result of those collaborations, city officials agreed to make sure that the Vision Zero program would not be used as justification for racial profiling by police. The cops would target behaviors, not communities. It’s one of the reasons why Portland plans to rely heavily on speed cameras for enforcement: Cameras don’t discriminate.

The community groups also pushed to make sure that crackdowns on dangerous driving came with chances for drivers to avoid fines or points on their licenses through diversion programs. They wanted the city to help immigrants with limited English understand the rules of the road. The transportation department also promised to prioritize road improvements that serve minority communities, elderly residents, children, people with disabilities and others who rely most heavily on walking, biking and transit to get around.

Leah Tavit, director of the Portland Transportation Bureau, says those conversations are necessary for Vision Zero’s success, even though that means changes can take longer to roll out. Portland worked on its Vision Zero action plan for more than a year before it finally got city council approval. “You need to have a very
Statistically, vehicles turning left are known to be more dangerous to pedestrians than those making right turns.

broad group of people who will likely disagree with you and push you,” Treat says. “You have to reach compromise and reach consensus decisions, which is not easy. It takes a lot of time and a lot of communication.”

When it comes to the bottom line for Vision Zero—the number of traffic fatalities—the movement has had mixed results. While New York City’s improvements inspired many cities to join up, a lot of those cities are just now starting their programs. Meanwhile, traffic deaths nationally increased by 7.2 percent in 2015 and by 10.4 percent in the first half of 2016, a worrisome signal coming after a decades-long trend of overall decreases. Still, Vision Zero cities appeared to fare better than the country as a whole. “It’s exciting to hear cities talk about this, but we really need to learn about the implementation and the impact,” says Keshia Pollack, a professor at Johns Hopkins University and associate director of its Center for Injury Research and Policy. “It’s too soon to see a lot of impact, so people aren’t really evaluating it yet. But we know that implementation has varied tremendously. If a city says it’s going to adopt Vision Zero, what does that really mean? Those questions are not very clear.”

What is clear to Pollack, based on her research and safety campaigns she’s helped design in Baltimore and New York City, is that education campaigns won’t be enough on their own. Long-lasting changes depend on changes to the physical roads. “Engineering strategies are really important, because those are sustainable,” she says. “If you educate somebody today, they might move away and then you have to worry about the new people coming in tomorrow. With engineering strategies, such as putting in traffic calming or putting in lights with delays so that pedestrians can cross, those are really sustainable and important.”

In San Antonio, Councilwoman Gonzales is excited about several physical improvements that have been made to the city’s roadways. The city, for example, has installed a Z-shaped mid-block crosswalk on Culebra Road. When pedestrians get to the road’s edge, they press a button to activate warning lights and then cross to a median. Once on the pedestrian island, they turn 90 degrees and walk to another button. The directional change forces them to look at oncoming traffic before making the second half of their crossing.

That said, Gonzales admits she is disappointed that the city’s Vision Zero plan focuses more on education than on engineering changes. She thinks the plan gives the city too much latitude to decide whether to make improvements. To kick off the city’s Vision Zero efforts in 2015, Gonzales joined Mayor Ivy Taylor at an event where 54 people stood on the steps of City Hall to represent each of the pedestrians killed in the city during 2014. That number dipped to 46 in 2015, but climbed back up to 65 in 2016.

Still, Gonzales is sticking by the program. “For so many years, mobility was the No. 1 concern for our roadways,” she says, “and safety was not even really even considered. So having that shift in culture, where we prioritize safety over mobility, is something that I’ve learned is going to take a long time to change.”
A Little Learning
Universal pre-kindergarten is widely admired. But it’s hard to find—and even harder to fund.

By Mattie Quinn

You would be forgiven for thinking the building on the north side of San Antonio is a liberal arts college, or maybe a live/work space for artists. The walls are hung with paintings, there are spaces for dancing and there’s a community garden where farm-to-table foods are grown. But in fact it’s the North Education Center, one of San Antonio’s four new full-day pre-kindergarten facilities. The four centers represent a roughly $31 million annual investment by city residents who, in 2012, voted to apportion one-eighth of a cent of the sales tax toward expanding the reach and scope of the state’s existing half-day pre-kindergarten program.

City residents and then-Mayor Julian Castro saw creating full-day pre-K programs, especially in underserved neighborhoods, as a major step toward becoming a world-class city, one that could provide an educated workforce for major companies attracted by the city’s mild climate and low cost of living. The pre-K decision was based on a city task force’s report that looked at all aspects of education and found that a strong early education investment could yield excellent results—not just for the 3- and 4-year-old children who attended, but for schools in general and the city at large.

San Antonio isn’t alone in its focus on pre-K. A handful of states are pumping funds into expanded pre-kindergarten programs, with varying degrees of success and commitment. Several cities have opted to fund a more rigorous pre-K program than state funding provides. But while universal pre-K is widely admired, the prevalence of well-funded and enriching programs is highly uneven across the U.S. In 2014, of the 40 states plus the District of Columbia with state-funded pre-K programs, only nine served more than half of all 4-year-olds in the state, and 11 served less than 10 percent, according to a report in U.S. News. Overall, only “a smattering of states have dedicated time and resources to expanding pre-K programs,” says Steve Barnett, director of the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). “Even fewer have made it a priority through the years.”

Over the past half century, states’ interest in early education has waxed and waned. Although funding faltered during the Great Recession, states overall have been increasing their investments in pre-K programs during the past 20 years. The investments are generally popular with the public: Several studies have shown that pre-kindergarten can help kids from different cultural backgrounds and lower socioeconomic neighborhoods enter kindergarten on a level playing field with their more affluent, mainstream peers. At the same time, there has been flagging interest in some states as questions have been raised about how effective the programs are in the long run.
As more states and cities implement universal pre-K programs, they’re confronting basic questions of funding. Who will pay for it and how? But there are broader, thornier questions as well. Is high-quality universal pre-kindergarten an affordable and achievable goal? Do these programs actually accomplish what their advocates hope? So far, in the states and cities that have moved forward with pre-K programs, the answers seem to range from “absolutely” to “not so sure.”

Only three states—Florida, Georgia and Oklahoma—have what could be called truly universal programs in that they’re available to all 4-year-olds, regardless of parental income. The three states offer examples of the different ways in which the program’s funding source can affect its future.

The soundest and most successful of the programs is Oklahoma’s, which has been in place since 1998. Today, 75 percent of the state’s 4-year-olds are in a pre-K classroom. The program didn’t necessarily start as a crusade by local politicians and activists to expand early education efforts, it began in perhaps the only way it could have in a conservative stronghold like Oklahoma with an anomaly in the state budget.

While combing over the way the state spent its money, lawmakers noticed that many school districts had half-day kindergarten, but were receiving money to cover a full day of school. Where was the overage going? “That extra money was basically subsidizing football teams in the state,” says Steven Dow, executive director of Community Action Project (CAP)/Tulsa, an anti-poverty agency in Oklahoma that partners with local school districts to help with their pre-K programs.

Something had to be done about the misuse of funds, and some lawmakers saw an opportunity to use the money creatively. After some wrangling and political maneuvering, legislators quietly expanded the state aid formula for education to include preschool children. They also wanted to ensure that the money was spent on a quality program, so they mandated that all pre-K teachers have a bachelor’s degree and that class sizes be capped at 20, with a student-teacher ratio of 10-to-1.

In the 18 years since Oklahoma embraced pre-K as part of its education system, the program has been considered a national model. Studies from Georgetown University and Science magazine, for example, found that children in the state’s program went on to outperform those who weren’t enrolled, no matter their background. Research has also indicated that the program has helped boost both pre-math and pre-reading skills among the children enrolled. The program’s success has helped spur some additional investment. CAP Tulsa, for example, is piloting a program to expand offerings for children from birth to age 3.

Of course there’s room for improvement. Dow acknowledges that the 25 percent of kids who aren’t attending a pre-K program are likely the most vulnerable. “It’s a quandary on how we’re going to get them there,” he says. “There’s no reason that a 4-year-old in Oklahoma should not be in a classroom.”

If Oklahoma is leading the way, the other two states with universal pre-K are somewhat further behind. The issue in both places is funding.

Florida’s program had its genesis at the ballot box. In 2005 voters approved a universal pre-K program for 4-year-olds. Lawmakers at the outset allocated roughly $2,400 a year for each child enrolled in school. But that funding has remained stagnant over the years and is far below the national average for state spending on early education. According to the 2018 State of Preschool Yearbook, an annual report from NIEER, average state spending per child is nearly double that amount.

Barnett points out that many Florida residents may think the state has followed through on its mandate to provide a quality universal pre-K program. “If you don’t have a 4-year-old, you’d think they did it,” Barnett says, suggesting that parents of preschoolers have a different perspective. “Pre-K programs are often at a high risk of bait and switch.”

Georgia is also a story of funding gone awry, despite good intentions. In 1992, Georgia lawmakers wanted to create a universal preschool program that wouldn’t fall prey to any future state budget cuts. So legislators designated a portion of the state lottery, making it the first universal pre-K program to be funded entirely by state lottery money. Today, more than half of the state’s 4-year-olds attend one of the public preschools.
If that sounds like a success story, Barnett cautions against jumping to conclusions. While the funding is not subject to legis- lative budget pressures, a state lottery’s revenue stream is notori- ously prone to boom-and-bust cycles. That means the revenue available for pre-K has had its ups and downs, and that can translate into the amount of money available to the program in any year. In 2011, the state was forced to implement changes to the program to keep it from going bankrupt, cutting the pre-K school year by 20 days and raising the cap on class size from 20 students to 22. A full 180-day calendar has since been restored, but the bigger classes remain in place, and low salaries have made it hard to retain teachers.

In addition to the states that have moved toward universal pre-K, a handful of cities have implemented their own programs as well. One of the most notable is New York, where Mayor Bill de Blasio campaigned on a promise of universal pre-kindergarten when he ran in 2013. Initially, de Blasio wanted to fund the program through a tax on the city’s highest earners, providing a guaranteed income stream as in San Antonio. But Gov. Andrew Cuomo insisted that the funding come from the state’s general budget. He came up with $340 million per year to fund the program for five years.

Despite its short track record—citywide pre-K was launched in fall 2014—New York City’s program is largely regarded as a success. The standards are high. Teachers must have a bachelor’s degree as well as state certification in early education. And the city is spending just over $10,000 per child, putting it among the nation’s top programs in terms of investment. By just its second school year, the program had achieved its initial enrollment goal. State legislators from the city’s suburbs have asked Albany to expand the program to include their jurisdictions.

B ut not everyone thinks New York’s program represents the best approach. The disagreement touches on a national question regarding the way cities and states design their pre-kindergarten programs: Just what exactly does “universal” mean?

While most state programs call themselves universal, it’s really a catch-all term with a range of meanings—from truly universal pre-K for all children regardless of parental income, to pre-K for all low-income families, to pre-K programs contingent on how much the state budget can afford that year. From the beginning, de Blasio decided to make pre-K universal in the true meaning of the word, open to all 4-year-olds, even the children of the city’s wealthiest families. (In contrast, Okla- homa uses programs like CAP Tulsa to target those families who need early education the most, and San Antonio gives preferential enrollment to families experiencing hardship.) De Blasio’s deci- sion was based on a study of Boston’s preschools, which are also open to all children regardless of family income. The study found that it wasn’t just poor children in the program who performed better on literacy and math tests. Middle-class kids did too.

That stands in contrast to other studies, however, which have found little evidence that universal pre-K actually has any benefit for middle- or upper-class children. “If it’s not broke, you can’t fix it,” says Barnett of NIEER. “If the kid has every advantage and is developing optimally, a great preschool program won’t hurt—but it doesn’t fix anything.”

That’s why truly universal programs like New York City’s may not be the best use of taxpayer dollars, says Bruce Fuller, a professor of education and public policy at the University of California, Berkeley, and the author of a book on pre-kindergarten called Standardized Childhood. He has spent most of his career focused on how “collective actions,” like the government, impact the livelihood of children and families. Fuller cautions against a vision, like de Blasio’s, to create early education programs that are designed to help every single family. “Entitlements make good press releases,” he says, “but I don’t think we should promise things to middle-class kids unless they have proven benefits.”

As Fuller sees it, New York’s program has had to spread itself too thin to meet its universal goal and has not been able to put in enough efforts to target the families that need the program the most. His research team at UC Berkeley noted that in the fall of 2014, two-fifths of the slots in New York’s program went to families who earned above the median income. “They say a rising tide lifts all boats, but does it narrow gaps in achievement?” Fuller says: “And if you are making the argument [that it’s good for every child], you’re banking on a proposition that doesn’t really impact middle-class kids in the first place.”

While Fuller advocates for a less-universal, more targeted pre-K approach, others question the efficacy of preschool at all. Researchers at the conservative Heritage Foundation have concluded that all benefits of pre-K programs disappear by third grade and that the programs may “cause more harm than good.”

That’s a common criticism also leveled at Head Start, the federal program that offers education and other services for low-income families of small children. Established in 1965, it now serves nearly three-quarters of a million 3- and 4-year-olds. There have been a multitude of studies of the program over the decades. Much of the research indicates that while Head Start does help with educational attainment in the short term, those advantages eventually fade out. (One definite benefit of Head Start seems to be increased parental involvement. More parents of Head Start children report that they read to their kids, expose them to edu- cational outings and use fewer physical punishments.) Nonetheless, advocates of universal pre-K programs insist they can have a lasting positive impact on kids, if they’re implemented the right way: “If you look at some of the data and research following our kids through eighth grade, we’re seeing significant staying power in a number of areas,” says Oklahoma’s Dow. “The truth is, until you have universal penetration, you’re going to have classrooms where kids don’t have that pre-K background.”

San Antonio, meanwhile, says it’s already seeing benefits from its program, which currently serves around 2,000 4-year-olds in the city, exceeding expectations. “An external committee watch- ing our program told us not to expect outcomes this early,” says Sarah Baray, CEO of the city’s pre-K program. “But they’ve been surprised by what they’ve seen already. Kids aren’t just playing catch-up. They’re leaving with a head start.”
Now in its third year, the program highlights the outstanding contributions of women in public office.

The Governing Institute is thrilled to introduce the Women in Government Leadership Program Class of 2017. The profiles on the following pages highlight the remarkable public service, diverse experiences and goals for the future of the 25 women. Congratulations to these ladies for their selection from among the 100,000 women in office across the United States.

The Class of 2017 is the third cohort of extraordinary women invited to participate in the leadership program. Individually, they are smart, accomplished, determined women at various stages in their political careers. Collectively, these women represent what one of my colleagues has referred to as “a network of communities and a community of networks.” Since the program was founded in 2014, they have recruited dozens of women to run for office. They have passed legislation and local ordinances to protect, empower and impact future generations of women, children and men. They have raised their voices in person, online and in the media. And they have been role models for women and young girls who see them at the table, at the dais, debating on the floor and traveling the globe on behalf of their communities.

These women are making a difference. We are honored to express our gratitude to the Class of 2017 for their service. We are also honored to provide the leadership development and resources necessary to help them meet their commitment to pay it forward.

Julia Burrows
Director, Governing Institute
Diane Allen started her career covering the New Jersey Legislature as a journalist. Those days as a radio reporter launched a career in TV and public relations, which took her to Philadelphia and Chicago before she ran for a seat in the same legislature she had once covered. “When I left anchoring in Philadelphia, I had both political parties come and ask me to run in New Jersey,” Allen says. As a journalist, “I thought that was a feather in my cap that they didn’t know what party I belonged to.”

Allen opted to run as a Republican in a Democratic district. She won a spot in the Assembly, then quickly moved to the Senate, where, two decades later, she is the deputy minority leader.

Despite her leadership spot, Allen is not afraid to vote against her party or her Republican governor, whom she recently opposed on a deal to hike the state’s gasoline tax. Allen is especially focused on veterans’ issues because her district houses a joint Army, Navy and Air Force base. She has also traveled the country as a journalist, “I thought that was a Louisiana native, she had moved around thanks to her Navy and Air Force base. She has also traveled the country as a journalist, ‘I thought that was a hard-fought battle,’ she says. Barry is Nashville’s first woman mayor. “My favorite times are when young women or girls stop me and say, ‘You mean a woman can be a mayor?’” she says. “If you can see it, you can be it.”

San Juan County is an expansive tract in southwest Utah where Native Americans make up a majority of the population. But when Rebecca Benally, a member of the Diné (Navajo) people, won a seat on the county commission in 2015, she was the first Native American woman to hold the post. A big part of her job so far, Benally says, has been to reduce tensions between whites and Native Americans, and improve communications between the two groups.

Benally has taken on a number of other thorny issues as well. She was a vocal opponent of designating 1.9 million acres in the area as the Bears Ears National Monument, a position that put her at odds with other Native American groups. She’s concerned Native Americans will lose control of the lands with the federal reservation are still made of dirt, which makes it hard for vehicles like school buses to pass during inclement weather. “Our students miss an average of 10 days of school a year because of roads,” she says. “So [improving them] is my biggest mission and goal.”

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S P E C I A L   S E C T I O N :   W O M E N   I N   G O V E R N M E N T

Cynthia Cloud hadn’t planned to run for state auditor. As the owner of a successful construction and design firm in Cody, Wyo., she had more than enough to fill her plate. But when the incumbent auditor stepped aside to run for governor in 2010, Cloud decided to seek the office. She narrowly beat an opponent in the Republican primary and was unopposed in the general. The first certified public accountant to serve as Wyoming’s state auditor, Cloud has leveraged her professional background to increase government efficiency. “I constantly tell my staff, we are not getting any more money and we are not getting any more people,” she says. “So we need to work smarter.”

She has trained workers in data entry, switched some services to paperless transactions and streamlined the auditing process.

Cloud has also served on the State Loan and Investment Board, which provides grants for local projects. A longtime advocate for expanding medical infrastructure, she recalls a poignant moment when, after weeks of hard work, she was able to announce funding for the expansion of a failing hospital. “There were tears of joy and happiness because it meant so much to the community,” she says. For Crouch, helping women has always been important. Last year, she successfully pushed through a gender-neutral change to the state code, which still referred to all office holders as “he”—despite the fact that five of the seven top state officials at the time were women. “That small change sends an empowering message to women that in Indiana,” she says, “you can be part of the success story because you can help write it.”

Debra Davis
Commissioner, Anne Arundel County, Maryland

Being in the public eye makes Debra Davis uneasy. A civil litigator for more than 20 years, she usually prefers working behind the scenes. So when she thought about running for county commissioner in 2010, she did it almost as an impulse, filing her candidacy the next day before she had a chance to change her mind. “The more you think about it, the more fear has time to sit in,” she says. Davis was well aware that there had only been one previous black candidate in the county’s history. “It was scary. It was new territory.”

In office, Davis created a program aimed at eradicating poverty in her county by 2020. Every year, the program takes 10 families and assigns one social worker to walk them through the system of all existing resources, spanning health, housing, education, employment and transportation. By personalizing the program and setting tailored goals, Davis says, “we are making a dent into the cycle of poverty.”

She has also worked to establish mentoring programs within the county government to help train a new generation of administrators. She says she’s convinced that all of her county’s persistent issues can be addressed. “I’m an eternal optimist.”

Suzanne Crouch
Lieutenant Governor, Indiana

Suzanne Crouch has won a slew of elections since she began her political career as a county auditor in 1994. She went on to serve as a county commissioner, a two-term state representative and state auditor. Now she’s bringing that wealth of experience to her post as Indiana’s newest lieutenant governor. The governor she’s serving under, Eric Holcomb, has had an unexpected rise to power:

Last March, the former state GOP chair was named by Gov. Mike Pence to be his new lieutenant governor; in July, when Pence was tapped as Donald Trump’s vice presidential nominee, Holcomb was picked as the Republican nominee for the gubernatorial race. When voters picked Holcomb in November, it was the first time he’d ever won elected office.

For Crouch, helping women has always been important. Last year, she successfully pushed through a gender-neutral change to the state code, which still referred to all office holders as “he”—despite the fact that five of the seven top state officials at the time were women. “That small change sends an empowering message to women that in Indiana,” she says, “you can be part of the success story because you can help write it.”

When Eileen Filler-Corn won a special election to the Virginia House of Delegates in 2010 (by a razor-thin 37 votes), she didn’t waste a minute. The morning after her win, she drove to Richmond and got to work. “I was sworn in by noon and I was voting by 12:01,” she says. Since then, Filler-Corn, who has lived for nearly 30 years in Northern Virginia’s Fairfax County, outside Washington, D.C., has helped pass bills focused on people with disabilities, children recuperating from cancer and parents concerned with child care safety. She’s been an ardent advocate for gun control and campus sexual assault prevention. She’s served as the House Democratic Whip, and in November 2015 was elected vice chair for outreach of the House Democratic Caucus.

Filler-Corn had previously served in the administrations of governors Mark Warner and Tim Kaine as an adviser on state-federal relations. She says the biggest lesson from her time in office is that, while government progress can be slow, it’s still worth fighting for: “If you’ve learned nothing else during my time in the legislature,” she says, “I’ve learned that things move slowly. It’s all about taking baby steps and moving things forward however best we can.”

Cynthia Cloud
State Auditor, Wyoming

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Tameika Isaac Devine doesn’t take no for an answer. As an attorney prosecuting sexual assault cases across her state, she saw a need for her hometown of Columbia to establish criminal domestic violence courts. But the city rejected her proposal. Devine was outraged. So she ran for council, won and pushed through the new courts herself. “Now being on the inside, I kind of understand all the demands that they have in balancing the needs of the budget,” Devine says. “But at that time, I just thought, ‘How could they not feel like this is important?’”

Just after her election, a 12-year-old child was shot on Devine’s porch by an alleged gang member. That devastating incident inspired her to start violence prevention programs that target at-risk youth. “It was a situation where you felt helpless and that the government can’t do everything,” she says. “But we can do for this challenge.”

Since being elected mayor of Gary in 2013—the city’s first female leader—Freeman-Wilson has focused on reviving her struggling Rust Belt city, which has less than half the population it had in 1960. She started by cataloging Gary’s empty buildings. “The consensus was that in most neighborhoods, vacant and abandoned structures were a real problem,” she says. “But coming in, no one really knew how many.”

The city systematically documented each structure and began demolishing the ones that were dangerous or in poor condition. Freeman-Wilson’s also pushing economic development. The city of 80,000 has fewer than 20 restaurants, one hotel and no movie theaters. “We have to increase the number of amenities—that’s the only way people might move in,” she says. “The good thing is, we have laid out plans that will allow us to do just that.”

Karen Freeman-Wilson followed an unconventional path to the mayor’s office. She’s been a city judge, the Indiana attorney general and the CEO of a national nonprofit representing drug courts. “In hindsight,” she says, “I can say I took that circuitous route so that I would be as prepared as I could be for this challenge.”

Jackson, Miss., and Shang- hai, China, have one thing in common: They’re both places where Cindy Hyde-Smith negotiates agricultural regulations. As Mississippi’s Commis- sioner of Agriculture and Commerce, she scrutinizes regulations—from catfish inspection to poultry export bans—to advocate for farmers and ensure the quality of the food they produce.

A beef cattle producer, Hyde-Smith counts herself among the 2 percent of Americans who grow food for everyone else. While she may be focused on helping farmers, she likes to point out that those regulations impact every- one. “Most people eat every day,” she says. “When they say, ‘Agriculture is just not part of my life,’ I say, ‘You’re the only person I know that doesn’t eat.’”

Hyde-Smith’s most memorable moment in public service came as a state senator. She championed a bill authorizing schools of the blind to purchase large print and braille textbooks earlier so that the students would get them as school starts rather than two months in. “I got all these cards and letters from parents all over the state saying, ‘Thank you for helping my child who cannot see,’” she says. “That’s one that will get stuck in my heart forever.”
SPECIAL SECTION: WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT

When she started college at the University of Findlay, Lydia Mihalik had a clear path laid out for herself: under grad, law school and then hopefully a job as a lobbyist. But after working for the city while in college, her plans changed. She was offered a full-time job with the city after graduation, and she hasn’t left Findlay since.

She first gained the trust of Findlay residents while working as a grant administrator; she was able to secure $18 million for the area, which saved 13 police officer positions that had been slated for elimination. During the economic downturn of the Great Recession, she began eying the mayor’s seat. “The standard mayor was an older white man in his 60s or 70s,” she says. “I just knew it was ripe for someone with a lot of energy.”

Mihalik won in 2011 and was re-elected in 2015. Findlay is a conservative city, she says, but it has embraced her as its first female mayor (and as a city leader who’s in her 30s). “My husband is the first dude, and I’ve been pregnant in office,” Mihalik says. “I want young professionals to see it’s possible to have a family and a rewarding career.”

Lydia Mihalik
Mayor, Findlay, Ohio

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Holly Mitchell has a long history of activism. Having worked for California’s first African-American state senator and then gone on to run the state’s largest family development nonprofit, she says she considered herself a “great No. 2” who can dive deep into policy. “The extra step of actually holding office yourself seemed really unnecessary to actually effecting policy change,” she says.

That changed when she was lobbying against deep cuts to subsidized child care in California. As a single mom who had a policy and child development background, it dawned on her that Sacramento might need someone with her unique set of experiences and skills. “I felt like I really didn’t have a choice. I got mad enough to run.”

Since being elected in 2008, Mitchell has focused on issues like child trafficking and child poverty. One of her bills gained national attention in 2015 when California became the first state to ban the use of secret grand juries when deciding whether to indict police officers in cases of deadly force. Last year she pushed through a repeal of California’s maximum family grant policy, which had prohibited people from receiving increased welfare income if they have more children while receiving public assistance.

Holly Mitchell
State Senator, California

After five-and-a-half years of active duty in the Navy, including stints in Bahrain and at the Pentagon, Blair Milo was set on her plan to become a private defense consultant in Washington, D.C. But on an Easter visit to her hometown of LaPorte in 2010, she saw several articles in the local paper about how the city budget might run out within six months. “Nobody even seemed to have a plan,” she says. “I thought, ‘This is crazy!’”

Back in D.C., Milo spent time digging into LaPorte’s financial situation, which led to a series of letters she published in the paper about how the city could get back on sound fiscal footing. Inevitably, that led to calls for Milo to run for office. She laughed them off. “I kept thinking, ‘Boy, somebody really needs to do something here,’” she says. “Then I realized it was me.”

Milo ran for mayor in 2011 and won. In office, she resolved the town’s budget problem by hammering out a deal with the county, which hadn’t properly been collecting property taxes. She’s been focused on fostering economic growth in LaPorte, and on better infrastructure maintenance, including landing new money from the state legislature for roads.

Blair Milo
Mayor, LaPorte, Indiana

As a teenager in northwest Philadelphia, Cherelle Parker walked every day past the blighted Ogontz Avenue commercial corridor. Officials had talked forever about cleaning it up, but nothing changed. Then, “there came this tall, skinny guy,” she says, “and I watched him change our community literally one building at a time.” That man was state Rep. Dwight Evans; Parker volunteered for his community efforts and eventually his re-election campaign. The experience roped her in.

Parker went on to become the youngest African-American woman ever elected to the Pennsylvania House, in 2005, where she served for a decade with Evans. In the House, she fought for years for a bill to allow experts to testify in sexual assault cases; it finally passed in 2012 after Penn State assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky’s child sexual abuse scandal. Parker also pushed through a $2-per-pack cigarette tax for Philadelphia to generate more money for schools and a historic $2.3 billion transportation bill for the state. Now she’s in her first term as city councilmember and is talking on issues including retirement security and protecting seniors from potentially harmful financial products like reverse mortgages.

“arve fixing things for individuals, for the community,” she says.

Cherelle Parker
Councilwoman, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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Deb Peters is a go-getter. From traveling abroad in her role as the National Conference of State Legislatures’ president-elect, to running her successful consulting business, Peters is used to deftly managing and multitasking. "If things aren’t going my way I tend to get very frustrated," she says. One long-time object of her frustration has been the inability of South Dakota (and every other state) to tax online sales. Tired of waiting for Congress to deal with the issue, Peters last year authored and shepherded through legislation that allows her state to collect such taxes. The effort resulted in an immediate—and expected—lawsuit in a case that’s designed to trigger a U.S. Supreme Court decision.

The high-profile role is a departure for Peters, who tends to work busily in the background. As one of the state’s longest-serving legislators and the chair of the appropriations committee, she is often sought out as an adviser and is known for her ability to help make things happen. “If someone comes to me with an idea and I think it’s a good thing for our state, then I will work with all the parties to make sure it happens,” she says. “My philosophy has always been that I don’t need the credit.”

Before Crystal Rhoades became the second woman ever to sit on the Nebraska Public Service Commission, she defied another historical precedent by becoming the first person in her family to graduate from college. Rhoades earned her degree while raising a child as a single mom. She had her parents’ support and even some scholarships, but “it was hard for me,” she says. “When I graduated from college, what I really wanted to do was make it easier for the people who followed me, the people who found themselves in very similar circumstances, but with even fewer resources than what I had.”

That underlying philosophy led Rhoades to run a neighborhood nonprofit, join the board of a local community college and run for a spot on the Nebraska Public Service Commission. Since becoming a commissioner in 2015, she has helped oversee state regulation of all sorts of activities, from making sure grain elevators are safe, to ensuring access to telemedicine services, to regulating ride-hailing companies so that everyone can get an affordable ride from a taxi or one of its competitors. “We do a lot of consumer protection,” she says. “It is incredibly important policy work and it does impact people’s lives.”

Before Toni Preckwinkle became board president in 2010, and before she sat on the Chicago City Council for 19 years, she was a high school history teacher. Lately, she’s spent a lot of time trying to change the criminal justice system to be less punitive for teenagers like the ones she taught three decades ago. “In this country, we criminalize what I call ‘petty antisocial behavior’ particularly of black and brown kids,” she says. “I’ve seen what happens to people who get ensnared in the criminal justice system. It messes up people’s lives.”

In 2015, Preckwinkle lobbied state lawmakers to raise the age at which a teenager is tried as an adult, resulting in a 73 percent reduction in automatic transfers to adult correctional facilities. She was also a vocal advocate for another recent statewide policy change: eliminating the mandatory five-year probation period for juvenile offenders, which means fewer young people will be sent back to prison for small relapses. She has had to focus much of her attention on closing $1.2 billion in budget deficits. “We’re trying to make county government more effective and responsive,” she says, “and we’re trying to do that while we’re reducing staff.”

Nily Rozic is of Argentine descent but was born in Israel. That makes her a good match for her New York state Assembly district, which is heavily populated by immigrants. Her name on Twitter is spelled in Chinese characters. Serving a diverse urban district means Rozic pays attention to a range of issues. She’s known as a champion of bus service, since her Queens district doesn’t have a subway stop. Rozic has also focused on issues of direct concern to women, from expanding rights for women suffering from domestic violence to banning solitary confinement for pregnant women prisoners.

She’s drawn the most attention with a bill that requires that sports teams treat their cheerleaders as employees, rather than denying them rights as independent contractors. “The Buffalo Jills are New Yorkers, just as much as the person living down the street from me,” she says. “We found extreme inequity between the genders when it came to their role in sports.” Rozic was steeped in social justice at home and at school. She worked on campaigns and in government before winning office on her own. At 26, she was the youngest woman ever elected to the Assembly.
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Evelyn Sanguinetti didn’t get mad, she got even. After a fall on city property a decade ago caused a severe injury, she decided to do something about it. Sanguinetti ran for city council, pledging to maintain sidewalks and provide public safety. “When you’re personally affected,” she says, “that’s when you get into office.”

Now in her third term in the Illinois General Assembly, Sanguinetti has a much broader portfolio. She’s traveled to every county in Illinois to work on rural issues and has been Gov. Bruce Rauner’s point person on revamping school funding formulas. She’s all about making sure government works, because “I want every kid to have the same opportunity I was able to have.”

Sanguinetti was born to teenage immigrant parents who instilled in her the value of education, which for her included training as a classical pianist. Around the time of her accident, Sanguinetti was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Rather than let that stop her, she decided her best course was to continue pushing forward. She almost can’t believe where she’s ended up. “If you had told me where I’d be 10 years ago, I would have really cracked up,” she says. “I never wanted a career in politics.”

With few women in office and many deeply rooted jurisdictional boundaries dividing governments, the Pittsburgh region’s political establishment is fairly entrenched. One official who has championed reforms is Chelsa Wagner. While serving her third term as a state representative, Wagner opted in 2011 to run for Allegheny County comptroller, a position that in her view played a greater role in shaping local and regional policy. She has since worked to bolster accountability and transparency, particularly for the county’s public authorities. Earlier this year, her office launched a new open government website and posted county government contracts online. “You see all these different things that ‘wow’ people where Pittsburgh has been able to put itself on the map,” she says. “But the government is still in many respects in the Dark Ages.”

Wagner equates the region’s political class to an “old boys’ club.” Other than judges, she’s the only woman in a countywide elected office. Her aggressive approach hasn’t enamored all local officials. But voters in 2015 elected her to a second term despite not receiving her party’s endorsement and being significantly outspent by an establishment-backed candidate in a primary.

Last year, Louisiana state Rep. Julie Stokes became an Internet sensation when she repudiated her male colleagues for sexist rhetoric. During discussion about a bill on the minimum age of strippers, a fellow lawmaker proposed an amendment to also limit a stripper’s maximum age to 28 and her weight to 160 pounds. He drew a sharp rebuke from Stokes, who walked to the podium to address the chamber. “I hear derogatory comments about women in this place regularly. I hear and I see women get treated differently than men,” she said. “It has got to stop.”

Around Baton Rouge, Stokes is better known for her budget acumen than antisexist rhetoric. She is the only certified public accountant in the legislature and sits on the House Ways and Means Committee. Her expertise is badly needed in a state with year-after-year budget shortfalls and a tax code that ranks among the worst in the country for its complexity. Stokes, a Republican, wants the tax system to be simpler and more transparent, and even though her plans haven’t gone through yet, they have earned some rare bipartisan support. “The right answer is going to be something that works for the broadest spectrum of people.”

Betty Yee has helped shape public policy in California for more than three decades. Her introduction to public finance came while she was serving as a county public health commissioner during the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s. Local governments lacked resources to fight the disease, so she led efforts to secure additional funding. “Finance may have to do with money and dollars, but there’s a human face behind every decision and people’s lives are affected,” she says.

Yee went on to serve in multiple positions in both houses of the California Legislature. When she first arrived in Sacramento, she saw a stark disparity in how few women worked on fiscal policy issues. She has since mentored other women and has held leadership roles with California Women Lead, a group that works to boost representation of women in government. “The conversations really are different when women are at the table,” she says. Now in her third year as the state’s chief fiscal officer, she’s embarked on her biggest challenge yet: comprehensive tax reform. The state’s tax structure, she says, is unsustainable. It’s a topic that elected officials have been reluctant to take on and will likely take years to resolve. But Yee doesn’t plan on backing down.
Serving in the Placer County District Attorney’s Office is a homecoming for Niki Cid: she grew up in the county, which borders Lake Tahoe, where her father was in law enforcement and her mother was a social worker. “I wanted to have the kind of job that my parents had,” she says, “where I knew at the end of the day, they felt like they have done something for someone.”

Her background extends beyond Northern California: Her parents were Cuban émigrés who fled Fidel Castro’s regime. Cid says her family and faith are her two most important pillars.

In college, she considered a career in business but ultimately settled on law; she did stints in the DA offices in Los Angeles County, Sacramento County and the state of California. After graduating from law school in 2015, Cid knew she wanted to return home. “This is where I had a really safe and great childhood,” she says. “It’s nice to be a part of creating that for other people.”

As an energetic recent grad, Cid says she has to fight the temptation to take every case to trial. But she says she’s already learned to take a step back and treat each case holistically, considering what’s in the best interest for her overall community.

About the program: The Women in Government Leadership Program from the Governing Institute is a professional network of accomplished women who serve in state and local government. The program provides a community in which members share their experiences, mentor colleagues and encourage future generations of women in public service. The women are elected and appointed officials from state and local governments across the country. The group includes Democrats and Republicans. For more information or to nominate an individual for the Class of 2018, please visit governing.com/womeningov.
Problem Solver

CLOCKING THE COMMUTE

Transit systems need to find ways to speed up the journey to work.

For New York metro residents who take public transportation, a door-to-door commute averages about 30 minutes. That's much longer than the 29 minutes typically spent by those who drive alone. Similar discrepancies exist around Los Angeles, where drivers report an average commute of 22 minutes faster than public transportation riders. In nearly every metro area, driving to work remains far quicker than using a bus or train, taking less than half as long in some places.

Across the country, transit systems are seeking to attract new customers as the latest national statistics show stagnant ridership. For New York metro residents who take the subway to work, more than twice as much time is spent commuting to and from jobs, to get them to schools, health-care facilities … seven days a week.”

A survey found riders didn’t have a long wish list of capital improvements. Rather, improving and increasing the frequency of bus service was the top concern. So the agency roughly doubled the number of routes running every 15 minutes or less and upgraded service on weekends. Faced with declining ridership, the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, Texas, which includes Houston, recently took the radical step of redesigning its entire bus network. The agency restructured it into a new grid system with straighter routes. “To take an average speed of a route from 12 to 14 mph is actually a big deal,” says Kurt Luhrsen, the transit agency’s vice president of service planning. A survey found riders didn’t have a long wish list of capital improvements. Rather, improving and increasing the frequency of bus service was the top concern. So the agency roughly doubled the number of routes running every 15 minutes or less and upgraded service on weekends.

The revamped bus network, which required just a 4 percent budget increase, launched in August 2015. The results so far are encouraging. Weekday ridership has stabilized after declining for years, and is up about 10 percent on Saturdays and more than 30 percent on Sundays.

Riders traveling during off peak times are more sensitive to changes in frequency of trains or buses than those who commute during rush hour.

Over the years, bus systems sometimes increase the number of zigzag routes through neighborhoods, accommodating more stops but slowing down commutes. Transit agencies are now simplifying and straightening their routes to speed them up, Polain says. Investments in faster light rail and bus rapid transit systems should further cut travel times. And for many, service reliability is just as important. To this end, real-time information systems, such as those supporting smartphone apps, help reduce uncertainty.

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Driving vs. Riding

By Mike Maciag

Across all metro areas, public transportation riders spend significantly longer traveling to work than those who drive. This chart shows average total commute times (including walking and waiting) for the 25 metro areas where public transportation accounts for the largest share of commuting.
Flipping the Safety Switch
States are finding serious lapses in inspections.

A few months ago, the auditor’s office in Louisiana issued a report about inspections of dental offices. The state requires inspectors to check out dental facilities once every three years. This is important stuff. If dental instruments aren’t properly cleaned, for example, the first patient of the day can easily spread a flu bug to the second patient and then on to the third, fourth and so on. “These inspections are an important way to protect the public’s safety,” says Chris Magee, a senior performance auditor for Louisiana.

Between 2012 and 2014, violations were found in some 40 percent of inspections, the most common of which was “undocumented or lack of sterilization and disinfection techniques.” Another important finding was that more than a third of all dental offices weren’t inspected at all. What’s more, about a quarter of the time the state didn’t even let dentists know about violations uncovered.

Welcome to the generally unnoticed world of safety inspections in the states. Though there has been very little coverage of the topic in studies or articles, performance auditors in state after state regularly discover significant backlogs of inspections. This shortcoming can be found in inspections of restaurants for food safety, elevators, buildings for fire codes and assisted living facilities.

While most of the time inspections may only pick up minor infractions such as the lack of properly posted licenses, the dangers of insufficient coverage are very real. An outbreak of hepatitis in Oklahoma, for instance, emanated from an uninspect ed dental office. In December, some 16 lives were lost in the deadliest fire in the history of Oakland, Calif. Though cause and effect isn’t entirely clear, the California Grand Jurors’ Association reported that “two years before the … fire, the Alameda County civil grand jury sounded the alarm about deficiencies in the Oakland Fire Department’s inspection bureau—saying the city wasn’t even trying to check a third of the 12,000 commercial properties that were supposed to be examined every year.”

Most of the time, inspections are conducted too infrequently because of budgetary shortages that lead to insufficient staff. A November report from the audit division of the Oregon Secretary of State’s office found that “the Oregon Department of Agriculture’s Food Safety Program is struggling with a backlog of establishments needing inspection.” Nearly a quarter of food businesses in the state, ranging from groceries to dairies, were overdue for their inspections, the auditor found.

Why has this sad state of affairs come to pass? According to the report, the backlog was caused by “an increase in the number of licensed businesses and complexity of business practices and an inspection staff busy with other duties.”

One interesting wrinkle: According to Kyle Rosse, lead on the Oregon audit, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires a great abundance of training for food inspectors, including schooling in tasks in which specialized inspectors are rarely trained. An outbreak of hepatitis in Oklahoma, for instance, emanated from an uninspect ed dental office. In December, some 16 lives were lost in the deadliest fire in the history of Oakland, Calif. Though cause and effect isn’t entirely clear, the California Grand Jurors’ Association reported that “two years before the … fire, the Alameda County civil grand jury sounded the alarm about deficiencies in the Oakland Fire Department’s inspection bureau—saying the city wasn’t even trying to check a third of the 12,000 commercial properties that were supposed to be examined every year.”

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By Katherine Barrett and Richard Greene

States regularly discover significant backlogs in safety inspections.
The Problem with ‘Political Will’
Should it mean being ready to lose an election? Sometimes it does.

I served as mayor of Kansas City from 2007 to 2011, and was its first mayor in more than a hundred years to not win re-election. I left office with my reputation more or less in tatters, and the pundits and political players in Kansas City politics regard me as a failure.

I think of this discouraging and disappointing experience whenever I hear someone—invitably a person who has never held elective office—declare that what is needed to solve this or that problem is “political will.” What those people are really saying is that all that is required to solve a knotty, complex public policy issue is for a politician to be willing to lose the next election.

That seems to me to be asking too much of people who, after all, ran for office in the first place to be able to make a positive difference. But for some, that’s what it ultimately has come down to. A couple of years ago, I finally read Profiles in Courage, John F. Kennedy’s Pulitzer Prize-winning 1957 book, and was surprised to find that it was essentially about political losers, at least as we generally define them. The book chronicles pivotal moments in the lives of eight U.S. senators whose courageous acts ended with positive policy outcomes achieved at the cost of their political reputations and in some cases the offices they held.

In 1989, the Kennedy family created the John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award to honor public officials who “risked their careers by embracing unpopular positions for the greater good.” A look at those who’ve received the award in recent years shows the pattern. The 2012 awardees, for example, were David Baker, Michael Street and Marsha Termus, justices of the Iowa Supreme Court who were part of the unanimous decision striking down a statute barring same-sex marriage. The three subsequently faced a retention election and were all defeated.

In 2014, former President George H.W. Bush received the award for his role in the historic budget compromise of 1990, which is widely credited with helping to lay the foundation for the economic growth of the 1990s—and with contributing to Bush’s defeat for re-election. The 2015 awardee was Bob Inglis, a congressman from South Carolina who after opposing efforts to combat climate change changed his mind and advocated for a carbon tax. You’ve probably already guessed what happened to Inglis: he lost the next election.

For every public official receiving this award, there are hundreds whose acts of political courage go unrecognized. This year marks the centennial of John F. Kennedy’s birth. I’d suggest celebrating it by going to the JFK Library website and nominating a courageous public official. Recognizing more of them could go a long way toward redefining the meaning of success in public life.

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Nudged Out

New Mexico combined analytics and behavioral theory to reduce errors.

During the height of the Great Recession, when 10 percent of workers were out of a job, unemployment insurance pumped $155 billion into the pockets of laid-off workers. Today, with unemployment at less than 5 percent, the state-administered systems that distribute such benefits receive less attention. Even so, they still pay out hefty sums in benefits—$22.9 billion in 2016. They also pay out hefty sums improperly.

Unemployment insurance has one of the highest error rates among state benefits programs, worse than Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or Rental Housing Assistance. In fiscal 2015, the program made $3.5 billion in improper payments, an error rate of 10.7 percent, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

A big reason why unemployment insurance performs so poorly is outdated technology. Thanks to a lack of funding at the state and federal level, fewer than half of the states have modernized their computer systems. They struggle to reduce errors because they can’t perform tasks such as cross-matching the names of claimants with birth and death records to make sure the person is alive and lives in the state where he or she is claiming benefits.

One state that has modernized its unemployment insurance technology is New Mexico, which overhauled computer systems in 2011 and now cross-matches benefit claimants. As a result, New Mexico reduced unemployment insurance fraud, often in the form of identity theft or fictitious employers, by 60 percent, saving $10 million between 2012 and 2013.

But when the savings started to level off, the state realized it had to do something different if it wanted to get at the biggest source of improper payments. “The reality is that 95 percent of improper payments have to do with reporting errors,” says Joy Forehand, deputy cabinet secretary in the state Department of Workforce Solutions. “It’s not just fraud; it’s incorrect information from employers and individuals.”

To reduce improper payments, the agency assembled a team of lawyers, communications specialists, economists and technology experts to create a unique program that uncovers trends and patterns in applicant behavior to predict when an error might occur. The program then “nudges” the person at the right point in the process to help solicit an accurate response and avoid making a reporting error. Forehand describes the technique as a combination of predictive analytics and behavioral economics. The secret sauce includes carefully written and well-tested pop-up messages that appear during the online application process and encourage people to answer in a way that doesn’t lead to incorrect responses.

One problem the state kept encountering, for example, was people misreporting their earnings. So when applicants got to the question about income, a pop-up appeared and stated “9 out of 10 people in your county report their earnings accurately.” Results show that because of the pop-up a quarter of claimants were more likely to report their actual income, compared to little change in behavior when the pop-up simply displayed the law and penalties for breaking it.

“Nudges” can be used to encourage people to accurately report their earnings.

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Sharing Is (Kind of) Saving

The benefits to sharing services may not show up in the bottom line.

By Justin Marlowe

Umatilla County’s public health professionals have the unenviable task of containing these outbreaks. Fortunately, they don’t go it alone. The county has several cross-jurisdictional sharing arrangements with other counties throughout the region. An especially important one is with neighboring Morrow County. That agreement allows public health officials in one county fast access to patient case files from the other. When infections can spread quickly, time is of the essence, so the arrangement is a real asset.

This style of interlocal sharing is all the rage. By some estimates, including some of my own research, there are more than a quarter-million local service sharing arrangements across the country. Some are based on formal memoranda of understanding, while others are informal “handshake” agreements between local officials. You’ll find sharing across every local government service imaginable.

Interestingly, the majority of these arrangements have been formed since the Great Recession. That suggests local officials have come to lean on sharing to save money when budgets are tight. States have also gotten in on the action. New York offers financial incentives to local governments that can generate cost savings through interlocal cooperation. Other states have adopted a more aggressive approach: In Oregon, state funding for local public health agencies is mostly contingent on interlocal sharing.

Politically speaking, sharing makes a lot of sense. It’s a wonderful counterpoint to consolidating local governments. Consolidation is politically perilous, and as I’ve written before, it rarely saves money. By sharing you get better services for less money and you get to feel good about co-operating with your neighbors. Who’s against that?

Unfortunately, the link between sharing and cost saving is unclear. So far researchers have completed about a dozen scientific studies on how sharing affects the costs of service delivery. Across the board, their findings show that expenditures in jurisdictions that share services are really no different from those in jurisdictions that don’t. Those findings complement dozens of case studies and anecdotes to the same effect. Several surveys of local officials also show that saving money is rarely their main motivation for sharing.

If sharing is not about driving down costs, then why has it become a go-to strategy since the Great Recession? It turns out sharing has a lot to do indirectly with saving money. According to those same studies, jurisdictions that share have greater capacity to deliver new services. That’s why it’s no surprise that sharing is most common in areas like disaster preparedness, local anti-terrorism efforts, cybercrime and programs to fight the opioid epidemic. These problems have all become headline issues since the Great Recession. Rather than create new, jurisdiction-specific programs, many localities have built these efforts as shared services. Without that sharing, these new essential services might not exist.

The same is true for preserving the scope and quality of existing services. There are dozens of examples across the country of one local government filling in a service delivery gap that emerged when a neighboring jurisdiction eliminated or scaled back that same program during the recession. Under these circumstances, sharing won’t necessarily save money, especially if expanding a service requires spending money on new staff, facilities or equipment. But the cost savings might happen later, when a different jurisdiction agrees to step up and help its neighbors during the next recession.

Interlocal service sharing is complex, difficult work, and the return on investment is not always clear. It doesn’t save money in the traditional sense. But it does create flexibility and a bit more certainty in the increasingly uncertain world of local government finance.

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An unlikely public building sits at the northern edge of Tribeca, by far Manhattan’s priciest neighborhood. The building is the Spring Street Salt Shed, and it holds 5,000 tons of salt to help deal with winter’s snow and ice. The 67-foot-tall angular structure is modeled on the shape of a salt crystal, and its bluish concrete walls are meant to age to a salty gray. Wealthy Tribeca residents had fought it for years. But since the $18 million shed opened last winter, it’s been lauded as an achievement in urban art. The *New York Times* architecture critic opined, “I can’t think of a better public sculpture to land in New York than the shed.”

—David Kidd
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