## Six Months In: Cities under Trump

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Why does Donald Trump demonize cities?
Because they show that the liberal experiment works.

By Will Wilkinson
March 17
Will Wilkinson is the vice president for policy at the Niskanen Center and a former U.S. politics correspondent for the Economist.

President Trump is a big-city guy. He made his fortune in cities and keeps his family in a Manhattan tower. But when Trump talks about cities, he presents a fearsome caricature that bears little resemblance to the real urban landscape.

“Our inner cities are a disaster,” he declared in a campaign debate. “You get shot walking to the store. They have no education. They have no jobs.” Before his inauguration, in a spat with Atlanta’s representative in Congress, he tweeted: “Congressman John Lewis should spend more time on fixing and helping his district, which is in horrible shape and falling apart (not to mention crime infested).” He makes Chicago sound like an anarchic failed state. “If Chicago doesn’t fix the horrible ‘carnage’ going on, 228 shootings in 2017 with 42 killings (up 24% from 2016), I will send in the Feds!” he warned. His executive order on public safety claimed that sanctuary cities, which harbor undocumented immigrants, “have caused immeasurable harm to the American people and to the very fabric of our Republic.”

With this talk, Trump is playing to his base, which overwhelmingly is not in cities. Party affiliation increasingly reflects the gulf between big, diverse metros and whiter, less densely populated locales. For decades, like-minded people have been clustering geographically — a phenomenon author Bill Bishop dubbed “the Big Sort” — pushing cities to the left and the rest of the country to the right. Indeed, the bigger, denser and more diverse the city, the better Hillary Clinton did in November. But Trump prevailed everywhere else — in small cities, suburbs, exurbs and beyond. The whiter and more spread out the population, the better he did.

He connected with these voters by tracing their economic decline and their fading cultural cachet to the same cause: traitorous “coastal elites” who sold their jobs to the Chinese while allowing America’s cities to become dystopian Babels, rife with dark-skinned danger — Mexican rapists, Muslim terrorists, “inner cities” plagued by black violence. He intimated that the chaos would spread to their exurbs and hamlets if he wasn’t elected to stop it.

Trump’s fearmongering turned out to be savvy electoral college politics (even if it left him down nearly 3 million in the popular vote). But it wasn’t just a sinister trick to get him over 270. He persists in his efforts to slur cities as radioactive war zones because the fact that America’s diverse big cities are thriving relative to the whiter, less populous parts of the country suggests that the liberal experiment works — that people of diverse origins and faiths prosper together in free and open societies. To advance his administration’s agenda, with its protectionism and cultural nationalism, Trump needs to spread the notion that the polyglot metropolis is a dangerous failure.

The president has filled his administration with advisers who oppose the liberal pluralism practiced profitably each day in America’s cities. “The center core of what we believe,” Steve Bannon, the president’s trusted chief strategist, has said, “is that we’re a nation with an economy, not an economy just in some global marketplace with open borders, but we are a nation with a culture and
a reason for being.” This is not just an argument for nationalism over globalism. Bannon has staked out a position in a more fundamental debate over the merits of multicultural identity. Whose interests are included when we put “America first”?

When Trump connects immigration to Mexican cartel crime, he’s putting a menacing foreign face on white anxiety about the country’s shifting demographic profile, which is pushing traditional white, Judeo-Christian culture out of the center of American national identity. “The ceaseless importation of Third World foreigners with no tradition of, taste for, or experience in liberty,” wrote Michael Anton, now a White House national security adviser, is “the mark of a party, a society, a country, a people, a civilization that wants to die.” Bannon has complained that too many U.S. tech company chief executives are from Asia.

The Census Bureau projects that whites will cease to be a majority in 30 years. Suppose you think the United States — maybe even all Western civilization — will fall if the U.S. population ever becomes as diverse as Denver’s. You are going to want to reduce the foreign-born population as quickly as possible, and by any means necessary. You’ll deport the deportable with brutal alacrity, squeeze legal immigration to a trickle, bar those with “incompatible” religions.

But to prop up political demand for this sort of ethnic-cleansing program — what else can you call it? — it’s crucial to get enough of the public to believe that America’s diversity is a dangerous mistake. If most white people come to think that America’s massive, multicultural cities are decent places to live, what hope is there for the republic? For Christendom?

The big cities of the United States are, in fact, very decent places to live. To be sure, many metros have serious problems. Housing is increasingly unaffordable, and the gap between the rich and poor is on the rise. Nevertheless, the American metropolis is more peaceful and prosperous than it’s been in decades.

Contrary to the narrative that Trump and his advisers promote, our cities show that diversity can improve public safety. A new study of urban crime rates by a team of criminologists found that “immigration is consistently linked to decreases in violent (e.g., murder) and property (e.g., burglary) crime” in the period from 1970 to 2010. What’s more, according to an analysis of FBI crime data, counties labeled as “sanctuary” jurisdictions by federal immigration authorities have lower crime rates than comparable non-sanctuary counties. The Trump administration’s claim that sanctuary cities “have caused immeasurable harm” is simply baseless. Even cities that have seen a recent rise in violent crime are much safer today than they were in the early 1990s, when the foreign-born population was much smaller.

Yes, cities have their share of failing schools. But they also have some of the best schools in the country and are hotbeds of reform and innovation. According to recent rankings by SchoolGrades.org, the top 28 elementary and middle schools in New York state are in New York City; Ohio’s top four schools are in Cincinnati, Cleveland, Youngstown and Columbus; and the best school in Pennsylvania is in Philadelphia. “The culture of competition and innovation, long in short
supply in public education, is taking root most firmly in the cities,” according to the Manhattan Institute researchers who run the site.

And it gets things exactly backward to think of unemployment as a problem centered in cities. Packing people close together creates efficiencies of proximity and clusters of expertise that spur the innovation that drives growth. Automation has killed off many low- and medium-skill manufacturing jobs, but technology has increased the productivity, and thus the pay, of highly educated workers, and the education premium is highest in dense, populous cities. The best-educated Americans, therefore, gravitate toward the most productive big cities — which then become even bigger, better educated and richer.

Meanwhile, smaller cities and outlying regions with an outdated mix of industry and a less-educated populace fall further behind, displaced rather than boosted by technology, stuck with fewer good jobs and lower average wages. The economist Enrico Moretti calls this regional separation in education and productivity “the Great Divergence.”

Thanks to the Great Divergence, America’s most diverse, densely populated and well-educated cities are generating an increasing share of the country’s economic output. In 2001, the 50 wealthiest U.S. metro regions produced about 27 percent more per person than the country as a whole. Today, they produce 34 percent more, and there’s no end to the divergence in sight.

Taken together, the Great Divergence and the Big Sort imply that Republican regions are producing less and less of our nation’s wealth. According to Mark Muro and Sifan Liu of the Brookings Institution, Clinton beat Trump in almost every county responsible for more than a paper-thin slice of America’s economic pie. Trump took 2,584 counties that together account for 36 percent of the nation’s gross domestic product. Clinton won just 472 counties — less than 20 percent of Trump’s take — but those counties account for 64 percent of GDP.

The relative economic decline of Republican territory was crucial to Trump’s populist appeal. Trump gained most on Romney’s 2012 vote share in places where fewer whites had college degrees, where more people were underwater on their mortgages, where the population was in poorer physical health, and where mortality rates from alcohol, drugs and suicide were higher.

But Trump’s narrative about the causes of this distress are false, and his “economic nationalist” agenda is a classic populist bait-and-switch. Trump won a bigger vote share in places with smaller foreign-born populations. The residents of those places are, therefore, least likely to encounter a Muslim refugee, experience immigrant crime or compete with foreign-born workers. Similarly, as UCLA political scientist Raul Hinojosa Ojeda has shown, places where Trump was especially popular in the primaries are places that face little import competition from China or Mexico. Trump’s protectionist trade and immigration policies will do the least in the places that like them the most.

Yet the Great Divergence suggests a different sense in which the multicultural city did bring about the malaise of the countryside. The loss of manufacturing jobs, and the increasing concentration of
the best-paying jobs in big cities, has been largely due to the innovation big cities disproportionately produce. Immigrants are a central part of that story. But this is just to repeat that more and more of America’s dynamism and growth flow from the open city. It’s difficult to predict who will bear the downside burden of disruptive innovation — it could be Rust Belt autoworkers one day and educated, urban members of the elite mainstream media the next — which is why dynamic economies need robust safety nets to protect citizens from the risks of economic dislocation. The denizens of Trump country have borne too much of the disruption and too little of the benefit from innovation. But the redistribution-loving multicultural urban majority can’t be blamed for the inadequacy of the safety net when the party of rural whites has fought for decades to roll it back. Low-density America didn’t vote to be knocked on its heels by capitalist creative destruction, but it has voted time and again against softening the blow. Political scientists say that countries where the middle class does not culturally identify with the working and lower classes tend to spend less on redistributive social programs. We’re more generous, as a rule, when we recognize ourselves in those who need help. You might argue that this just goes to show that diversity strains solidarity. Or you might argue that, because we need solidarity, we must learn to recognize America in other accents, other complexions, other kitchen aromas.

Honduran cooks in Chicago, Iranian engineers in Seattle, Chinese cardiologists in Atlanta, their children and grandchildren, all of them, are bedrock members of the American community. There is no “us” that excludes them. There is no American national identity apart from the dynamic hybrid culture we have always been creating together. America’s big cities accept this and grow healthier and more productive by the day, while the rest of the country does not accept this, and struggles.

In a multicultural country like ours, an inclusive national identity makes solidarity possible. An exclusive, nostalgic national identity acts like a cancer in the body politic, eating away at the bonds of affinity and cooperation that hold our interests together.

Bannon is right. A country is more than an economy. The United States is a nation with a culture and a purpose. That’s why Americans of every heritage and hue will fight to keep our cities sanctuaries of the American idea — of openness, tolerance and trade — until our country has been made safe for freedom again.
Why Trump’s Budget Terrifies America’s Mayors

New survey reveals anxiety over potential loss of housing and transportation dollars.

By AIDAN QUIGLEY

April 24, 2017

The nation’s mayors never bought Donald Trump’s “American carnage” description of their cities. But they say his proposed budget, which would cut a $54-billion hole right in the heart of the programs that their cities live and die by, could bring his rhetoric closer to reality.

A large majority of America’s mayors—88 percent—say that Trump’s proposed budget, issued March 16, would be “devastating” or “extremely painful” to their city, according to POLITICO Magazine’s new quarterly mayors survey. The poll confirms the deep concerns mayors expressed in the previous survey released immediately after the Inauguration in January. But the largely theoretical anxiety that urban chief executives articulated earlier this year now has specific dollar amounts attached and the programs slated for cuts—some of them eliminated entirely—are ones that benefit their poorer, most vulnerable citizens.

The mayors expressed the most concern about cuts to federal housing and urban development programs, including Community Development Block Grants, a workhorse of the Housing and Urban Development budget. Seventy-seven percent of mayors surveyed said the $6 billion in proposed cuts to housing, including for low-income energy assistance and vouchers, would be “devastating” or “very harmful.”

Cuts to transportation programs rank alongside housing on the mayors list of top concerns, followed closely by education (after-school programs and teacher training, for example). Public safety and legal aid for low-income citizens were tied, with just under 60 percent of mayors saying that cuts in those areas would be “devastating” or “very harmful.”

The massive cuts led 63 of the mayors surveyed (93 percent) to say they don’t believe Trump’s statements that he wants to improve the inner cities. Only five mayors said they still believed him.

“America is only great when American cities are great,” Democratic Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti said. “Cuts make our national economy weak, leave Americans less protected and widen the gap between successful and struggling residents.”

Sixty-eight mayors responded to the ninth installment of Politico Magazine’s mayors survey, part of the award-winning What Works series. Mayors from across the country responded to the unscientific and anonymous survey during the first half of April. More than 80 percent of survey respondents, 57, were Democrats, mirroring the leftward tilt of America’s city halls. Five Republicans and six independent or non-partisan mayors responded.

Mayors are most concerned about the elimination of the $3 billion Community Development Block Grant program administered by HUD, now run by neurosurgeon turned failed presidential candidate Ben Carson. While the Trump budget says the CDBG “is not well-targeted
to the poorest populations and has not demonstrated results,” those seeing the effects of the program, mayors, are defending it vigorously.

The CDBG funds are used to provide affordable housing, provide services to the poor and create jobs through business expansion and retention in around 1,200 state and municipal government units nationwide.

In fiscal year 2016, 73,757 households were aided through CDBG housing programs and 17,545 jobs were created or retained through economic programs. Nationwide, 9.2 million Americans benefitted from public services funding from CDBG that went to programs ranging from substance abuse programs to employment training.

Denver mayor Michael Hancock, a Democrat said CDBG funding helps cities like his “revitalize struggling neighborhoods and create jobs.”

“Cities helped power the country out of the recession with the support of these programs,” he said. “They are vital and help us ensure that all our residents have the opportunity to live a good life. We risk going backwards if budget cuts affect most those who have the least.”

### What Mayors Fear Losing the Most

Of the proposed budget cuts, what would the impact of each of the following be on your city?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Devastating</th>
<th>Very Harmful</th>
<th>Moderately Harmful</th>
<th>Slightly Harmful</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
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<tr>
<td>Community Development Block Grants</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and Infrastructure</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Safety</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Aid for Low Income Residents</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
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Percentages are rounded and do not equal 100% due to those who selected “No Answer.”
These concerns were shared by at least one of Hancock’s Republican colleagues, Steve Hogan of Aurora, Colorado. He said CDBG was “hardly a wasteful program,” as the locality spends most of its around $3 million in CDBG funding on police, fire, water, sewers, streets and parks. “Which of those are we supposed to cut in order to make up for the loss of CDBG dollars to address the needs of our citizens?” Hogan asked.

But the fight over CDBG funding isn’t new to America’s city halls. Mick Cornett, the Republican mayor of Oklahoma City and the president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, said the mayors went through this under the Obama administration. Despite campaign promises to maintain CDBG funding, President Obama recommended cuts throughout his presidency, including a $200 million cut in his budget for fiscal year 2016. Cornett said this led mayors to mobilize and lessen cuts to the program.

“I don’t know of a mayor who’s not very protective of CDBG funding,” Cornett said. “I think time and time again you’ll see in city after city, that these dollars are spent well.”

Trump’s budget represents a different kind of threat for the program signed into law by Republican President Gerald Ford. From a peak of around $15 billion a year during the Carter administration, funding for the program has fallen under presidents from both parties. This includes about a 50 percent decrease since 2000. But mayors say a complete elimination of the program would have an unfathomable impact on their communities.

With Republicans holding the presidency and majorities in both houses of congress, budget cuts are likely in whatever budget finds its way to Trump’s desk, but some mayors are finding solace in the budget’s long path to passage. Only 35 percent said they were extremely worried Trump’s budget would pass, while half were somewhat worried and 13 percent not worried at all.

Although the U.S. Conference of Mayors has reached out to the White House and individual cabinet members, its main efforts are focused on Congress, which holds the purse strings, Cornett said. “I tend to think that Congress had made up its mind years and years ago that these are worthwhile programs, and they’ll want to put them back in the budget,” he said. “If this is a new day and a new era where these kinds of programs are eliminated, I guess I’d be surprised.”

To rally against these cuts, the mayors say they have turned to each other for support. Eighty percent of the mayors said they are conferencing with mayors across the country to fight the proposed cuts. Seventy-two percent said they are appealing to their congressional representatives, while 58 percent are speaking out in the media to address the cuts.

With cuts to transportation and education spending also on the table, more than two-thirds of mayors said those proposed cuts would be “devastating” or “very harmful” to their cities. The budget proposes a 13 percent, $2.4 billion cut to the Department of Transportation. Trump’s
budget eliminates funding for the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) program, part of the 2009 economic stimulus which funds local transportation projects. The cuts also include funding for long-distance Amtrak trains and the Federal Transit Administration’s Capital Investment program which pays for rail, streetcar and bus projects.

Trump has also proposed a $9.2 billion, or 13.5 percent, cut to the Department of Education. These cuts include $2.4 billion in teacher training grants, $1.2 billion in summer school and after school programs. Federal work study programs are facing cuts, and the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOG) program which offers aid to 1.6 million low-income undergraduates every year is on the chopping block.

Even some more conservative mayors, who say they understand the need for cuts, are struggling to reconcile these cuts with Trump’s signature campaign promise to build the border wall with Mexico.

“I don’t mind necessary cuts, but I struggle at the highest level when you take the dollars saved and then put them towards things like a border wall at $8 million per mile that won’t provide taxpayer value at all,” Mike T. Huether, the independent mayor of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, said.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security estimates building the border wall would cost $21.6 billion, enough to fund around seven years of the CDBG at current levels. Constituents in these cities are taking notice of the proposed budget, with 49 percent of mayors saying their inboxes were “overflowing” with constituents feelings on the proposed cuts. Thirty-two percent of mayors say they haven’t heard a peep, while 10 percent said their constituents are happier with the rollback of regulations than they are concerned with the budget.

“I think a lot of our constituents are worried about the issues and not the mechanics of how that plays out,” Democratic mayor Suzanne Jones of Boulder, Colorado, said. “It’s not that they email us about budgets, but they do email us about concerns.”

Along with the housing, transportation and education cuts concerns, more than half of the mayors said cuts to public safety and legal aid for low-income residents would be “devastating” or “very harmful.” Trump’s budget would eliminate the $375 million-a-year Legal Services Corporation, which provides legal aid to low-income residents. The budget also cuts anti-terrorism funding for cities, including $200 million from the New York Police Department. Mayor Helene Schneider of Santa Barbara, California, a Democrat, fears Trump’s budget cuts would have “devastating” effects on her constituents, primarily cuts to affordable housing and the SNAP program which provides low-income students breakfasts and lunches at school.

Additionally, she fears the Trump administration’s cuts to the National Endowment for the Arts will affect the city’s libraries and art scene. The city’s culture plays a role in driving tourism, which bolsters the local economy, she said. Schneider wasn’t alone in pointing to the economic impact they foresee if the budget is enacted.

“President Trump — you’ve said your main focus is economic growth, but by punishing America’s cities, you will slow the economic engines that move our country forward,” San Francisco Democratic mayor Ed Lee said.
Although almost 70 percent of mayors remain as or more optimistic about the economy in their city as they were six months ago, this reflects a drop from January, when that number was closer to three-quarters. It’s the second quarter in a row that mayors have tempered their optimism.

While there is broad consensus on big ticket items such the block grants program, many mayors also have concerns particular to their city. In Boulder, Jones is deeply concerned about the economic impact of cuts to federally funded labs, research at the University of Colorado Boulder and transit cuts.

The labs in the Boulder area and Northern Colorado study issues ranging from extreme weather and climate change to energy efficiency of household appliances. Cuts would also lead to layoffs, which would also hurt the economy, Jones said.

“It would have a huge impact economically as well as substantively with the good work being done,” Jones said. The dramatic, theatrical political fights in Washington don’t trickle down to the localities, as Jones said city halls across the country realize these issues affect all mayors, regardless of party.

“I think mayors in the cities in general understand that these issues aren’t partisan, this is about delivering services to our communities,” Jones said.

Participating Mayors: Noam Bramson, New Rochelle, NY; Joseph M. Petty, Worcester, MA; Claudia Bill-de la Pena, Thousand Oaks, CA; George Van Dusen, Skokie, IL; Paul Dyster, Niagara Falls, NY; Jonathan Rothschild, Tucson, AZ; Helene Schneider, Santa Barbara, CA; Nan Whaley, Dayton, OH; Javier M. Gonzales, Santa Fe, NM; Jon Mitchell, New Bedford, MA; Steve Adler, Austin, TX; Frank C. Ortis, Pembroke Pines, FL; Kate Thomas, Reno, NV; Paul Soglin, Madison WI; Timothy McDonough, Hope, NJ; Ed Lee, San Francisco, CA; Mike T. Huether, Sioux Falls, SD; Mark Stodola, Little Rock, AR; Jeri Muoio, West Palm Beach, FL; Patrick J. Furey, Torrance, CA; Steve Chirico, Naperville, CA; Norm Archibald, Abilene, Texas; Steve Hogan, Aurora, CO; Frank Cownie, Des Moines, IA; Terry Tornek, Pasadena, CA; Michael Taylor, Sterling Heights, MI; J. Christian Bollwage, Elizabeth, NJ; Bob O’Dekirk, Joliet, IL; Joseph Ganim, Bridgeport, CT; Walter Campbell, Coral Springs, FL; Denny Doyle, Beaverton, OR; Cynthia Chase, Santa Cruz, CA; Bob Buckhorn, Tampa, FL; Esther Manheimer, Asheville, NC; Dan Pope, Lubbock, TX; Levar M. Stoney, Richmond, VA; Andy Berke, Chattanooga, TN; Allison Silberberg, Alexandria, VA; Larry Wolgast, Topeka, KS; Jackie Biskupski, Salt Lake City, UT; Jennifer Roberts, Charlotte, NC; Rick Kriseman, St. Petersburg, FL; Lovely A. Warren, Rochester, NY; Madeline Rogero, Knoxville, TN; Andrew Gillum, Tallahassee, FL; Adrian O. Mapp, Plainfield, NJ; Jim Darling, McAllen, TX; Toni N. Harp, New Haven, CT; Bob Sampayan, Vallejo, CA; Buddy Dyer, Orlando, FL; Darrell Steinberg, Sacramento, CA; Robert Garcia, Long Beach, CA; William Capote, Palm Bay, FL; Mitch Landrieu, New Orleans, LA; Elizabeth Tisdahl, Evanston, IL; Suzanne Jones, Boulder, CO; Marilyn Strickland, Tacoma, WA; Jim Kenney, Philadelphia, PA; Stephanie Miner, Syracuse, NY; Bruce Whitaker, Fullerton, CA; Karen Freeman-Wilson, Gary, IN; Marni Sawicki, Cape Coral, FL; Michael Hancock, Denver, CO; Pauline Cutter, San Leandro, CA; Edward B. Murray, Seattle, WA; Lucy Vinis, Eugene, OR; Mark Mitchell, Tempe, AZ; Eric Garcetti, Los Angeles, CA.
President Donald Trump's administration has ended Affordable Care Act contracts that brought assistance into libraries, businesses and urban neighborhoods in 18 cities, meaning shoppers on the insurance exchanges will have fewer places to turn for help signing up for coverage.

Community groups say the move, announced to them by contractors last week, will make it even more difficult to enroll the uninsured and help people already covered re-enroll or shop for a new policy. That's already a concern because of consumer confusion stemming from the political wrangling in Washington and a shorter enrollment period. People will have 45 days to shop for 2018 coverage, starting Nov. 1 and ending Dec. 15. In previous years, they had twice that much time.

Some see it as another attempt to undermine the health law's marketplaces by a president who has suggested he should let "Obamacare" fail. The administration, earlier this year, pulled paid advertising for the sign-up website HealthCare.gov, prompting an inquiry by a federal inspector general into that decision and whether it hurt sign-ups.

Now insurers and advocates are concerned that the administration could further destabilize the marketplaces where people shop for coverage by not promoting them or not enforcing the mandate compelling people to get coverage. The administration has already threatened to withhold payments to insurers to help people afford care, which would prompt insurers to sharply increase prices.

"There's a clear pattern of the administration trying to undermine and sabotage the Affordable Care Act," said Elizabeth Hagan, associate director of coverage initiatives for the liberal advocacy group Families USA. "It's not letting the law fail, it's making the law fail."

Two companies — McLean, Virginia-based Cognosante LLC and Falls Church, Virginia-based CSRA Inc. — will no longer help with the sign-ups following a decision by Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services officials not to renew a final option year of the vendors' contracts. The contracts, awarded in 2013, were never meant to be long term, said CMS spokeswoman Jane Norris in an email.

"These contracts were intended to help CMS provide temporary, in-person enrollment support during the early years" of the exchanges, Norris said. Other federally funded help with enrollment will continue, she said, including a year-round call center and grant-funded navigator programs. The existing program is "robust" and "we have the on-the-ground resources necessary" in key cities, Norris said.
But community advocates expected the vendors' help for at least another year. "It has our heads spinning about how to meet the needs in communities," said Inna Rubin of United Way of Metro Chicago, who helps run an Illinois health access coalition.

CSRA's current $12.8 million contract expires Aug. 29. Cognosante's $9.6 million contract expires the same date.

Together, they assisted 14,500 enrollments, far less than 1 percent of the 9.2 million people who signed up through HealthCare.gov, the insurance marketplace serving most states. But some advocates said the groups focused on the healthy, young adults needed to keep the insurance markets stable and prices down.

During the most recent open enrollment period, they operated in the Texas cities of Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, Austin, McAllen and El Paso; the Florida cities of Miami, Tampa and Orlando; Atlanta; northern New Jersey; Phoenix; Philadelphia; Indianapolis; New Orleans; Charlotte, North Carolina; Cleveland and Chicago.

The insurance exchanges, accessed by customers through the federal HealthCare.gov or state-run sites, are a way for people to compare and shop for insurance coverage. The health law included grant money for community organizations to train people to help consumers apply for coverage, answer questions and explain differences between the insurance policies offered.

In Illinois, CSRA hired about a dozen enrollment workers to supplement a small enrollment workforce already in the state, Rubin said. The company operated a storefront enrollment center in a Chicago neighborhood from November through April.

"It was a large room in a retail strip mall near public transit with stations set up where people could come in and sit down" with an enrollment worker, Rubin said.

CSRA spokesman Tom Doheny in an email said the company "is proud of the work we have accomplished under this contract." He referred other questions to federal officials.

Cognosante worked on enrollment in nine cities in seven states, according to a June 6 post on the company's website. The work included helping "more than 15,000 Texas consumers" and staffing locations "such as public libraries and local business offices." A Cognosante spokeswoman referred questions to federal officials.

The health care debate in Congress has many consumers questioning whether "Obamacare" still exists, community advocates said.

"What is the goal of the Trump administration here? Is it to help people? Or to undermine the Affordable Care Act?" said Rob Restuccia, executive director of Boston-based Community Catalyst, a group trying to preserve the health care law.
Trump’s war on sanctuary cities has begun

After months of empty threats, the administration is moving aggressively to defund cities that don’t let ICE agents into local jails.

Updated by Dara Lind on July 26, 2017 11:00 am

It’s official: After months of empty threats, the Trump administration is moving to lay siege to progressive cities, with federal grants as its weapon, in the name of immigration enforcement.

On Tuesday night, the Department of Justice announced its first real attempt to prohibit “sanctuary cities” — cities that, in the federal government’s view, don’t do enough to help federal agents enforce immigration law — from getting federal funds.

Under the DOJ’s new criteria for the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant program, the biggest federal grant for local law enforcement, states and cities will only be able to apply if they agree to allow Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers into local jails — and if they notify ICE agents at least 48 hours before anyone ICE has expressed interest in gets released.

The Trump administration’s been saber-rattling against “sanctuary cities” during its whole six months in office (not to mention on the campaign trail). But until now, the actual steps it’s taken to change federal policy to crack down on “sanctuaries” have been relatively toothless. Tuesday’s announcement puts an end to all that. It signals that the fight to defund sanctuary cities has begun in earnest.

The new grant conditions take the sanctuary city fight out of rhetoric and into policy

The Byrne Justice Assistance Grant program hands out funds to states and cities that get used for everything from training to military-style equipment. It’s the biggest grant the Department of Justice administers to local law enforcement; in fiscal year 2016, it handed out more than $263 million in funds.

The Trump administration isn’t trying to strip funding that’s already been promised. But starting in the fall, according to the DOJ’s Tuesday announcement, applicants for new Byrne grants are going to have to certify three things:

- that they comply with a federal law banning any state or local policy that prohibits municipal employees from sharing information with the feds about someone’s immigration status;
- that they allow ICE agents into local jails; and
- that, whenever ICE sends local jail officials a “detainer request” — a request to hold someone after they’d otherwise be released so ICE can pick them up (sent when ICE agents have reason to believe someone in a local jail is deportable) — jail officials give ICE at least 48 hours’ advance notice before letting that person go.

The first criterion is in line with the steps the Trump administration has already taken against “sanctuary cities,” which have focused on the idea that cities are violating the federal law against local bans on information-sharing.

But it’s a pretty toothless critique. Even the most outspoken sanctuary cities in America claim that they don’t prohibit anyone from sharing immigration information with the federal government.

But the second two criteria added to the Byrne JAG program, though, take turn the rhetoric against sanctuary cities into actual policy.

Many cities and states limit the circumstances under which jails can hold people just because ICE asks them to. And while the DOJ isn’t officially requiring grantees to agree to all ICE requests, it’s requiring them to do things that would lead to pretty much the same outcome.

It’s going to be extremely hard — or even impossible — for many local governments to agree to these terms.
Under the new conditions, local jail officials would have two options whenever they got a detainer request on someone ICE wanted to take into custody. They could honor the detainer request, and hold the person for an extra 48 hours after they’d otherwise release him to give ICE a chance to pick them up. Or they could decline the detainer request — but to remain compliant with the new terms of the federal grant, they’d still have to tell ICE 48 hours in advance that they were going to release the person, and allow ICE agents to come into the jail to collect him immediately upon his release.

Often, jail officials don’t even know 48 hours in advance when they’re going to release someone. “Local jails generally would only know 48 hours in advance of someone’s release if the person is serving out a sentence,” says Christopher Lasch, a Denver University law professor who’s assisted cities in court battles over federal cooperation. The rest of the time — “if they post bond, or if their criminal case gets dismissed,” for example — the jail officials will typically just get an order to release the person as soon as possible.

So to comply with the new DOJ grant requirements, local jail officials could end up holding an immigrant longer than they otherwise would anyway, because they’d have to wait 48 hours after notifying ICE that a release was in the works.

The Trump administration has argued extensively that picking immigrants up in jails is safer for both ICE agents and immigrants, and warned that when they can’t get easy access to immigrants in jails they resort to picking them up at home (often causing panic about raids) or in safe places like courthouses.

But for cities and states around the country that have made a concerted effort to limit their cooperation with immigration agents, making it harder for ICE to pick people up is kind of the point — they aren’t trying to create a pipeline by which someone hauled in on a traffic violation (or who’s been booked into jail during a domestic dispute in which she was actually the victim of abuse) can get sent into deportation proceedings.

The new DOJ criteria might be a very tough pill to swallow.

There’s another reason that many cities have limited their cooperation with ICE: Many state and federal courts (most recently, the Massachusetts Supreme Court) have ruled that it’s downright unconstitutional for a jail to hold someone based solely on the ICE request.

While, again, there’s nothing in the new DOJ grant criteria explicitly requiring local law enforcement to agree to ICE requests, it’s possible that the 48 hours’ advance notification requirement would end up forcing local officials to hold people longer than they would — which could run afoul of those court rulings.

**The question isn’t whether cities will sue — it’s whether the Trump administration has already violated a ruling in the lawsuit that already happened**

City governments have no intention of changing their immigration policies to comply with the Trump administration’s standards. But for the most part, local police departments aren’t willing to simply give up their biggest stream of federal funding to avoid an immigration policy fight.

The question is whether they can stop the new criteria from going into effect by persuading the federal courts that they’re unconstitutional.

In general, the federal government isn’t supposed to use grants to coerce cities and states into adopting its preferred policies. And the executive branch can only do so much to change grant conditions without Congress’s involvement.

But the Trump administration has a more urgent legal question on its hands: whether Tuesday’s announcement violated an existing court order.

In February, soon after the Trump administration issued an executive order that let the DOJ deny grants to cities that it deemed “sanctuaries,” a couple of them went ahead and sued over the threat of defunding. And in April, a judge sided with the cities and told the administration it wasn’t allowed to enforce that section of the executive order — except “to enforce existing conditions of federal grants” or the existing federal information-sharing law.

At first, it looked like that court ruling had forced the administration to back down, and define “sanctuary cities” as cities that violated the information-sharing law (which didn’t appear to threaten the actual funding of any actual cities, since, again, cities claim they comply with that law). But adding new criteria to the Byrne JAG funds certainly might be seen as a violation of the judge’s restriction.

It appears that that’s the point of the new announcement, though. Sessions and the DOJ aren’t waiting for the courts to decide what they can and can’t do to defund sanctuary cities. They’ve just drawn a line in the sand — one that would force many of the nation’s biggest, bluest cities to choose between losing millions of dollars for police and letting ICE agents scoop up the very immigrants cities have promised to protect.
Trump promised to end the opioid epidemic. He could be making it worse.

What Trump has done so far will not end the crisis — and could in fact make it worse.

*Updated by* [German Lopez](#)  *May 17, 2017, 8:00am EDT*

Donald Trump didn’t mince words about it on the campaign trail: He said he would, as president, “end the opioid epidemic in America,” arguing he would “spend the money” needed for drug treatment.

Fast-forward to nearly four months into the Trump administration, and nothing of the sort is happening. In fact, some of the administration’s actions on opioids are downright counterproductive. Last week, Attorney General Jeff Sessions sent out a memo to federal prosecutors asking them to “charge and pursue the most serious, readily provable offense” even against low-level drug offenders. That followed Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price denigrating medication-assisted treatment, the gold standard in opioid addiction care. Trump’s White House is also considering slashing the budget for the office that’s in charge of coordinating the federal government’s anti-drug response by nearly 95 percent.

Together, these discrete policy decisions paint a picture of a president who has been all talk, no action — and what little action there is counts as counterproductive — on opioids. As [Andrew Kolodny](#), an addiction physician and co-director of opioid policy research at Brandeis University, told USA Today, “There’s some positive signs in terms of all the talk, but we haven’t really seen any action.”

Meanwhile, the opioid epidemic continues to ravage much of the country. In 2015, drug overdoses were linked to more than 52,000 deaths in the US, nearly two-thirds of which were linked to opioids. The total drug overdose deaths add up to more than the 38,000 deaths from car crashes, the 36,000 deaths due to gun violence, and the 43,000 deaths due to HIV/AIDS during that epidemic’s peak in 1995. Since then, the crisis has shown no signs of abetting — and the nation is waiting on Trump’s White House to finally act.

**What the Trump administration has done ranges from ineffective to counterproductive**

Trump’s opioid policy can generally be described as the opposite of what Trump said on the campaign trail — instead of allocating more funding to deal with the epidemic as a public health issue, he’s often undercutting such efforts.
Here’s a broad rundown of what the Trump administration has said and done on opioids since Trump took office:

- Trump wants to build a wall at the US-Mexico border, in part to stop the flow of heroin into America. There’s wide consensus among border security experts, however, that a wall and even tougher border security would have little to no effect on drug trafficking. The simple reason: Most drugs come through the legal ports of entry, meaning a wall and similar efforts will do nothing to hinder drugs where they’re actually coming through.

- Trump supports the American Health Care Act, which would cost millions of people their health insurance and severely weaken protections for drug treatment coverage. According to a previous analysis, this could leave as many as 2.8 million Americans with drug use disorders — including 222,000 with opioid use disorders — without adequate access to care.

- Trump has proposed other cuts to the budget that will hurt access to drug treatment: He called for $100 million in cuts to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s mental health block grants, which could ultimately impact some addiction services.

- Trump set up a commission to study the opioid crisis and recommend a coordinated response. This is a positive step. But the commission will take months to produce its recommendations, and the administration isn’t required to follow through on any of them.

- The White House is considering slashing the budget of the Office of National Drug Control Policy by nearly 95 percent. This is the office in charge of coordinating all the federal agencies’ anti-drug policies. While it has a history of “tough on drug” policies that can be counterproductive, advocates agree that it could lead the way in mounting a serious, evidence-based response to the current drug crisis — if it has the funding to do so.

- HHS Secretary Tom Price recently acknowledged that opioids are an issue of public health, not criminal justice, but he also argued that medication-assisted treatment — which essentially uses drugs to medicate opioid addiction — is “just substituting one opioid for another.” This is a common myth that has been used to denigrate and restrict medication-assisted treatment, even though it’s considered the gold standard for opioid addiction treatment and has decades of research behind it. (A spokesperson later said, though, that Price supports all kinds of drug treatment.)

- Attorney General Sessions on Friday rescinded an Obama-era memo that told federal prosecutors to avoid some of the harshest charges on low-level drug offenders. He instead told prosecutors to “charge and pursue the most serious, readily provable offense,” calling this concept “a core principle” of the Justice Department.

The only concrete action on this list is Sessions’s latest action, which doubled down on the old war on drugs. But the research suggests that this “tough on crime” approach — focused on increasing the criminal penalties for drugs — just won’t work.

For example, a 2014 study from Peter Reuter at the University of Maryland and Harold Pollack at the University of Chicago found there’s no good evidence that tougher punishments or harsher supply-elimination efforts do a better job of driving down access to drugs and substance misuse than lighter penalties. So increasing the severity of the punishment doesn’t seem to do much, if anything, to slow the flow of drugs.
Similarly, a 2015 review of the research by the Brennan Center for Justice estimated that more incarceration explained only about 0 to 7 percent of the crime drop since the 1990s, while other researchers estimate it drove 10 to 25 percent of the crime drop since the ’90s. That’s why criminal justice experts now emphasize that there are better ways, from new policing tactics to more stringent alcohol policies, to bring down crime without resorting to longer prison sentences. The punitive criminalization of drugs is also sometimes a reason that drug users don’t seek care. Reporter Maia Szalavitz, who’s covered addiction for decades, has long argued that criminalization just leads to stigma, which pushes drug users underground. And a 2009 report by the libertarian Cato Institute found that after Portugal decriminalized all drugs, more drug users sought treatment because the policy change removed the fear of arrest and the stigma attached to it.

At the same time, Trump has, if anything, vowed to reduce funding on opioid addiction care — contradicting his campaign promise to “spend the money” on treatment.

**Trump has yet to do anything that would tackle the heart of the epidemic**

The fundamental problem in the opioid crisis is that America needs to put a lot more resources toward drug addiction prevention and treatment. In 2016, the surgeon general released the most comprehensive analysis of the state of addiction in America. Its core finding was that the US massively underfunds addiction care. It found, for example, that just 10 percent of Americans with a drug use disorder get specialty treatment, in large part due to a shortage in treatment options.

President Barack Obama’s administration took some steps to alleviate this. It dedicated $2.5 million in 2015 to fight heroin use. Its Department of Health and Human Services also unlocked more than $100 million for drug treatment in 2016. And Congress in 2016, with Obama’s approval, allocated $1 billion over two years to combat the opioid epidemic.

But experts widely agree that this all was far, far from enough. They have hoped that Trump would do more, given that some of his biggest areas of support are places that have been hit hardest by the opioid epidemic.

Instead, the Trump administration has proposed cutting mental health spending in a way that could lower access to addiction treatment, has pushed to repeal Obamacare without a replacement that would cover Americans’ health insurance needs, and might propose gutting the one office in charge of coordinating anti-drug policies.

It’s not unusual for Trump to make a promise and do the opposite. But in this case, people’s lives are quite literally at stake — and his administration is at best dawdling and at worst taking steps that will make a very deadly crisis even deadlier.
The head of the Census Bureau just quit, and the consequences are huge

Updated by Alexia Fernández Campbell@AlexiaCampbellalexia@vox.com  May 11, 2017, 8:50am EDT

Ralph Orlowski/Getty Images
As news broke Tuesday evening that President Donald Trump had fired the head of the FBI, the fallout that resulted overshadowed the announced departure of another top government official: the head of the US Census Bureau.

John Thompson, who has led the bureau since 2013, announced Tuesday that he would retire in June to pursue “opportunities in the private sector,” according to the Commerce Department. He is leaving at a critical time for the bureau as it prepares for the arduous, constitutionally mandated task of counting every single person living in the United States, which it does every 10 years.

His departure puts into question the future of the 2020 Census, which has enormous consequences for military veterans and Americans who are elderly, poor, or disabled. Information gathered by the census questionnaire and in-person interviews is used for a wide variety of issues, from drawing congressional districts and voting precincts to distributing hundreds of millions of federal dollars for roads, schools, fire departments, and infrastructure investments.

Thompson has been at the center of a funding battle with Congress, which drastically limited the amount of money it’s providing to carry out the 2020 census. The bureau estimated it would need $17.8 billion to pull it off, but Congress had instructed Thompson to keep the cost the same as last time — $12.5 billion — even though there are another 15 million-plus people to count.

This has led the Census Bureau to find creative ways to cut costs, like relying more on internet surveys, opening fewer field offices, paying canvassers less and requiring fewer hours of training. For the 2020 census, census staff are working out of six regional offices instead of 12, and with 250 local offices instead of 500. The bureau will also try to pull off the 2020 count with 300,00 canvassers, instead of the 516,000 hired for the 2010 count.

When Congress passed its budget in late April, the $1.47 billion allocated for the Census Bureau was even less than the $1.5 billion requested.

At a House Appropriations subcommittee hearing on May 3, Thompson basically begged members of Congress for more money. He mentioned that the cost of the electronic system, which was supposed to save money, was more expensive than the amount of money he had originally budgeted: $309 million more.

“Although we’ve experienced a cost overrun, the technical implementation of [electronic system] is progressing well,” Thompson said during the hearing. “There are many challenges ahead, but we’re confident that with the appropriate funding levels we can successfully execute a high-quality 2020 census.”
He added that the funding for 2017 and 2018 are critical to “the outcome of the 2020 Census.”
The added expense likely didn’t sit well with members of Congress, though it’s unclear whether
Thompson quit on his own, or if he was pushed out.
If funding problems lead to lower standards for collecting 2020 census data, it damages the credibility of
the most reliable data on American society.
Here are seven key data points collected from the Census that have major implications:

1) Age
Finding out how many senior citizens live in a given community helps cities provide programs and
services to help them remain living independently in their homes, as required under the Older
Americans Act. This data is also used to identify seniors who are eligible for financial assistance to pay
their utility bills.

2) Children and adults
The number of children and adults in each household is crucial information for communities to enroll
families in welfare programs. It tells governments whether or not someone in the house qualifies for
Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program. Counting the number of children who live in a
neighborhood also guides local school districts in making long-term decisions about where to build
schools and how many teachers to hire.

3) Gender
Data about a person’s gender helps researchers identify barriers women face in the workplace, in their
education, and homeownership rates. According to the Census Bureau, the National Science Foundation
uses gender data to track the percentage of women working in science and engineering. Several
government agencies use the data to investigate whether women have similar job opportunities as men,
including those in military service.

4) Income and employment
Details about a family’s income give a snapshot of the American economy, and how many people live in
poverty. It determines how to distribute aid to help families pay for food, health care, job training, and
rent. Statistics about a person’s employment status and occupation are used to identify neighborhoods
where people are having trouble finding work, and helps in planning workforce development, training,
and business opportunities.

5) Race, ethnicity, and languages
This data is essential in identifying potential racial discrimination in housing and education. Civil rights
advocates use it to ensure the government is complying with the Voting Rights Act and offering bilingual
assistance to voters who need it. The information helps agencies identify people who may not be getting
needed medical services under the Public Health Service Act. It’s also used to determine which schools
get money for bilingual services and education.

6) Rent and property values
Government programs analyze this data to find out if there is enough affordable housing in a
neighborhood and whether residents qualify for subsidized housing. These statistics are also used to
enforce laws and policies aimed at eliminating housing discrimination.

7) Commuting
Details about how people get to work or school is key in planning and funding improvements to road
and highway infrastructure and in developing public transportation. The data is also used to ensure that
a city or county’s public transit system serves the needs of all groups.
Midsize and Small Cities Have Important Role in Saving Federal Transit Funding

BY JOSH COHEN | APRIL 17, 2017

The threat of losing U.S. federal transit funding and the TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) grant program has loomed large since the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) released President Donald Trump’s budget blueprint, with its $54 billion in cuts ($2.4 billion to U.S. DOT), mid-March. But transit agencies and advocates were holding out hope they’d at least get another year of business-as-usual during which some transit projects already in the pipeline would reach the full funding grant agreement (FFGA) stage and another round of TIGER grants would be awarded. Now it appears the Trump administration wants to make cuts before the year is out.

“People should be legitimately alarmed,” says Stephen Davis, communications director with Transportation for America, a transit advocacy group, of the OMB’s request to Congress to “suspend additional projects from entering the [transit capital grants] program.”

In practice, this means only those projects with a FFGA right now would move forward. Davis says the administration is also pushing to end TIGER immediately, meaning the 2016 awardees would be the final round of projects to receive funding (totaling $500 million) for complete streets, bike and pedestrian infrastructure, and other local street safety efforts.

“TIGER is one of the only ways local communities can get federal funding directly,” Davis says, explaining what’s at stake. “A lot of communities that get TIGER grants are in places that are at the mercy of their state DOT and what the state wants to build.”

The Trump administration’s push for immediate transit and TIGER funding cuts is possible because of congressional gridlock and the complexities of federal budgeting. Congress didn’t pass a 2017 spending bill last fall, so the government is operating under a temporary budget resolution passed under President Barack Obama. That resolution expires on April 28 so Congress must pass a spending bill before then to prevent a government shutdown. It is in that process that Congress could make the requested cuts.

In Trump’s budget blueprint, the administration makes clear it shares the common conservative view that transit should be a local concern. In its explanation of the New Starts cuts, for example, the blueprint says, “future investments in new transit projects would be funded by the localities that use and benefit from these localized projects.” A huge portion of the $2.4 billion cut to U.S. DOT comes from eliminating
funding for the Federal Transit Administration’s Capital Investment Program (which includes the New Starts, Small Starts and Core Capacity programs), a critical source of funding for local and regional transit funding.

There are currently 14 New Starts projects with FFGAs that would get their expected funding. They include light-rail expansion in Los Angeles, a new commuter rail in Fort Worth, a rapid transit system in Honolulu, new commuter rail in Denver, upgrades to two L lines in Chicago, an extension of Boston’s Green Line, and more.

There are another 55 projects in the capital investment grants pipeline in the project development or engineering stages that would be stuck in limbo, searching to make up the hundreds of millions if not billions of dollars in funding they expected from the federal government.

In the Seattle area, the LINK light-rail extension to Lynnwood is in the New Starts Engineering stage. The $2.3 billion project was slated to receive about half of its funding from FTA. Two light-rail extension projects in Minneapolis in the pipeline would now have to find $1.6 billion in local or state funds to make up the FTA gap. Cities such as Atlanta, which passed major transit funding ballot measures last November, won’t have the federal funds they planned for.

Davis says Indianapolis’ $96 million plan to electrify its bus rapid transit system had reached the final stage project development before receiving its Small Starts Grant Agreement. Now the city might not get the $75 million Small Starts funding it needs.

“This is not a big city thing,” says Davis. “These grants fund projects in small- to medium-size cities all across the country.”

Because of that, he’s hoping that a broad and vocal constituency might provide the kind of outcry necessary to keep the capital grants program and TIGER in place. He points to the swift outrage that followed news that the Trump administration had plans to cut Meals on Wheels, the federally funded program that delivers food to those in need.

Transit certainly doesn’t have the emotional appeal of feeding people who have trouble leaving their homes, but Davis says it would make a difference if Congress heard from constituents who say, “not only do we value these programs, they help us with our economic development goals. This is a vital program, especially for local communities who want to see project advance.”
Cuts in the administration’s budget proposal threaten funds that cities rely on to invest in water management, clean energy and revitalization efforts across the country.

Here’s how these cuts could impact your city.

Proposed cuts to regional water restoration programs would cost local governments $427 million in funds to help clean up waterways and natural environments like the Chesapeake Bay. (Getty Images)

This April recess, NLC is encouraging city leaders to engage with their members of Congress while they are at home in their districts for two weeks. Don’t let Congress leave America’s cities behind — join us this week and next as we #FightTheCuts proposed in the administration’s budget.

This post was co-authored by Mayor James Diossa and Will Downie. It is part of a series on the 2018 federal budget.

Proposed cuts to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), and the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) threaten the funds that cities of all sizes rely on to invest in water management, clean energy and revitalization efforts across the country, with many of the programs directly benefiting the most vulnerable members of society. Here’s how these cuts could impact your city.

**Water**

While President Donald Trump’s proposal increases funding for the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund programs and calls for level funding for WIFIA — a loan and loan guarantee program for large water infrastructure projects — it eliminates the Rural Utilities Services’ Water and Waste Water Loan and Grant Program under the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This program provides critical funds for rural communities across the country to maintain water infrastructure and address their unique water needs. Together, these water infrastructure programs helped small cities like Garber, Oklahoma, (population 842) protect their community’s drinking water by replacing aged water pipes and large cities like Boston (population 645,966) complete landfill closure and reduce rainwater infiltration.

Regional water restoration programs like the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and the Chesapeake Bay Initiative are also slated for elimination — a move that would cost local
governments $427 million in funds to help clean up waterways and natural environments that provide national benefit. These funds allowed the village of Shorewood, Wisconsin, to reduce contamination at Atwater Beach by investing in improved sewer systems and the city of Port Huron, Michigan, to restore 5,000 square feet of fish habitat and provide recreation areas for residents and tourists. If the proposed cuts go through, cities will be stuck with another unfunded mandate to meet the federal requirements, in this case for pollution reduction.

Land

Although not specifically mentioned in the proposal, two key programs that help local governments establish local parks and greenways and revitalize abandoned properties may face cuts: the Land Conservation Fund and the Brownfields Redevelopment Program. The DOI Land and Water Conservation Fund helped the city of Seattle develop its now famous Gasworks Park. Without the assistance, the city would not have been able to transform an old gasification plant and its surrounding area into one of Seattle’s landmark public spaces. Meanwhile, under Mayor Diossa, the city of Central Falls, Rhode Island, leveraged a $200,000 EPA Brownfields grant with other public funds and private investment to restore an abandoned mill building into job-producing mixed-use retail and business space. Together, these programs are key funding opportunities to invest in local economies to create jobs, and increase property values, by bridging the financing gap for businesses and private capital.

Energy

The DOE Weatherization Assistance Program and the State Energy Program — which together provide over $300 million in assistance to local governments to promote energy efficiency and renewable energy projects, including assistance to low-income residents to help lower their energy bills — are proposed to be eliminated. These programs allowed the city of Philadelphia to invest in innovative weatherization ideas that led to an increase in the total number of weatherized homes in the city, a reduction to the weatherization cost per home, increased energy savings, and new weatherization jobs in Philadelphia.

Air and Climate

The president’s proposed budget also targets programs that help cities reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and meet their climate action goals. The EPA Diesel Emission Reduction Program encourages cities to switch to cleaner-burning diesel vehicles. Last year, the program provided $7.7 million to 90 different cities to provide safer and cleaner school buses through replacement and retrofitting rebates. In addition, the proposed budget would eliminate climate change research and partnership programs totaling $100 million that cities rely on for data and information on climate change impacts on their communities.

Personnel

Out of all the federal agencies, EPA faces the biggest hit overall with a proposal to cut funding by 31 percent and eliminate 3,200 jobs, or 20 percent of its employees. These staff cuts will have a negative effect on EPA’s role as a regulator and will impede the ability of local government to function. EPA approves a variety of permits and facilities that local governments rely on, like wastewater treatment plants. A “slimmed down” EPA will still have to process permits and projects, but a smaller staff will lead to delays and reduced technical assistance and will hurt local governments’ ability to provide the safe and clean environment they are entrusted to maintain.

Cities across the country be negatively impacted by the White House’s budget plan. The president’s proposal will see cities large and small working with fewer funds and a less responsive regulatory regime, crippling their ability to provide vital services and infrastructure to their citizens. These cuts are bad for every city in the country, and pose a threat to the environment, our economy and our future.
When Cities Fought the Feds Over Apartheid

BRENTIN MOCK
MAY 24, 2017

In 1986, the city of Baltimore battled the Reagan administration over its local anti-apartheid ordinances—and won. How they prevailed may have important lessons for cities trying to resist Trump today.

Earlier this week, Attorney General Jeff Sessions reiterated his threat to withhold federal funding from cities deemed as providing sanctuary for immigrants, this time bending language in the law to make it easier for him to penalize recalcitrant jurisdictions. In his May 22 memo to “All Department Grant-Making Components,” Sessions wrote:

Consistent with the Executive Order [13768], statutory authority, and past practice, the Department of Justice will require jurisdictions applying for certain Department grants to certify their compliance with federal law, … as a condition for receiving an award. Any jurisdiction that fails to certify compliance with section 1373 will be ineligible to receive such awards.

And just to show that he’s not playing around, Sessions emphasized in the memo that this threat applies to “any existing grant administered by the Office of Justice Programs and the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services…”—a possible ploy to wedge police departments against their own city governments by conditioning law enforcement grants on city compliance with Trump’s immigration demands.

Such warning shots sound alarming, but it’s important to note that we’ve been here before. It’s not the first time that the federal government has threatened to smack cities with both carrot and stick for not complying with its orders.

In the 1980s, as international pressure against South Africa ramped up, several U.S. cities passed sanctions on companies that did business with that country’s apartheid regime. And, just as Donald Trump and Sessions are doing today to “sanctuary cities,” the Reagan administration attempted to punish them.

“There’s a lot for cities to learn about what happened in the 1980s and how it relates to now,” says Madeline Janis, executive director of Jobs to Move America. The Los Angeles-based nonprofit has been researching the topic for a report on how Reagan tried to clamp down on cities that chose not to support South Africa’s apartheid government. “Pretty much every aspect of the Reagan administration came down as hard as possible on cities, but the cities stood up, and really contributed, as Nelson Mandela once said, to the demise of apartheid. That’s a really big lesson for today.”
Jobs to Move America researchers combed through thousands of pages of documents—legal memos, policy guidances, court briefings, and correspondence between companies and the Reagan administration—to piece together the story of how cities rose up against the federal government in joining the worldwide fight against apartheid in South Africa. According to their research, which they shared exclusively with CityLab, nearly 100 cities and states passed ordinances or laws limiting contact with companies that did business with South Africa. They pulled government accounts from banks that operated in the country, or divested from portfolios that included companies doing business there. More than half of U.S. states participated in this movement, but cities made up the largest cluster of jurisdictions involved. Their sanctions punctuated a groundswell of college students and grassroots activists across the country who turned the divestment movement into a worldwide campaign.

To protest Penn State’s refusal to drop $5.8 million in stocks in companies operating in South Africa, a group of students left from the steps of the university's administration building on a six-day march to Harrisburg on Feb. 28, 1987 in State College, Pennsylvania. (Craig Houtz/AP)

The Reagan administration was livid about this, given its cozy financial and political relationship with South Africa. (In certain ways, Reagan’s policy of “constructive engagement” with that country’s apartheid government isn’t so dissimilar to Trump’s controversial relationship with Russia.) Teaming with Justice Department leaders, the Reagan administration sought out ways to thwart city action in the divestment movement. They claimed that the local anti-apartheid ordinances violated federal laws, and hence began threatening to yank these cities’ federal funding. When the threats didn’t work, the feds took the cities to court.

What followed was a saga with echoes of the conflicts that cities are currently having with the Trump administration on issues like immigration and climate change. The common themes: local self-determination vs. federal preemption, fairness vs. privilege, inclusivity vs. xenophobia, justice vs. inequity. But the results of this Reagan-era clash between city and federal powers were mixed.

The battle escalated in 1986, when the Reagan administration got involved with a lawsuit against Baltimore filed by city trustees over the anti-apartheid ordinance. The trustees, along with DOJ lawyers, argued that the ordinance violated commerce clause laws.

“The lesson here is: Get in the weeds. Don’t assume that just because there is a threat there is an actual strong law backing them up.”

Indeed, this ordinance was no trivial pursuit. It dealt specifically with the city’s pension funds, which were to be divested from any portfolio that included companies with South African business ties. Anyone who understands the role of pensions in city financing knows that these are expenditures that can effectively break budgets and bankrupt cities. This is the money cities use to pay for the retirements of police, firefighters, teachers, and government administration officials—nothing to play with. But Baltimore’s leaders—specifically, then-City Councilman Kweisi Mfume, who pushed the city’s divestment effort—were courageous enough to place the pension funds squarely in a political battle with the White House over ending apartheid.

“If you read through all the briefs, it is clear at all levels of this case that the mayor and the city council of Baltimore articulated their moral outrage at South Africa as an extension of their ongoing feelings about the history of racism in the South and in the U.S. in general,” says Janis.
Baltimore ultimately won its case to preserve its South Africa divestment ordinance when the U.S. Supreme Court deferred to the Maryland Court of Appeals ruling, which read:

The Trustees and Intervenors argue that by requiring the sale of hundreds of millions of dollars of investment portfolios, with the intended effect of forcing corporations to withdraw from business operations in and with South Africa, the Ordinances substantially burden interstate commerce. While we do not dispute that the Ordinances impose some burden on interstate commerce, in our opinion that burden is not excessive in relation to the benefits. The Ordinances embody the City's moral condemnation of racial discrimination. The use of pension funds arguably to support racial discrimination in South Africa is an issue of deep concern, not only to the pension systems' members and beneficiaries but also to all citizens of Baltimore who are sensitive to slavery's persistent legacy. In our judgment, the Ordinances' burden on the interstate sale of securities does not outweigh these unique and profound local concerns.

This was a landmark victory that sent the message to cities across the U.S. that the federal government couldn’t just bully them into complying with policies that clash with their values.

This win was not a sweep, though. The Reagan administration also waged war against New York City for a 1984 ordinance that allowed the city to withhold contracts from companies that did business with South Africa. The Justice Department demanded that New York City change or withdraw this ordinance or else forfeit its Department of Transportation funding. Unlike Baltimore, New York City, then under Mayor Ed Koch, wasn’t willing to go to court to preserve its anti-apartheid sanctions. The city caved and changed its law.

To block New York’s ordinance, the Justice Department leaned on a bidding competition rule under the Federal Aid Highways Act that says all government contracts must abide by “full and open competition” and must not create an “undue burden” on the companies bidding for them. The Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) interpreted that statute as saying that cities can’t limit the number of companies bidding for a piece of a federally funded project. Further, if the Department of Transportation gives a city a grant—to fix roads, for example—the city would have to farm out work under that grant to the lowest bidder, regardless of a bidding company’s stances on apartheid or any other human rights or labor issues. If that rule is violated, the DOT can pull the grant.

It’s disputable whether OLC’s interpretation of this statute is what Congress intended, though, when it passed the federal highways legislation in 1956. Language in that act also made clear that jurisdictions should avoid corruption in administering federal funds, according to Jobs to Move America’s researchers. Also, there were amendments added in 1968—a year when Congress was aggressively working to strengthen civil rights protections—stating:

Contracts for the construction of each project shall be awarded only on the basis of the lowest responsive bid submitted by a bidder meeting established criteria of responsibility. No requirement or obligation shall be imposed as a condition precedent to the award of a contract to such bidder for a project, or to the Secretary’s concurrence in the award of a contract to such bidder, unless such requirement or obligation is otherwise lawful and is specifically set forth in the advertised specifications.
The Jobs to Move America researchers interpreted that as meaning that cities can include other criteria, so long as they are transparently advertised.

Still, Reagan’s more free-market-friendly interpretation of the competition rule has prevailed ever since, effectively preventing cities from adding innovative criteria to procurement policies to fight injustice. That’s why it’s so difficult for cities to add local-hire provisions, consider certain climate change ramifications, or ensure LGBTQ protections when contracting out federally funded projects.

Baltimore’s fight serves as a reminder that cities can find legal pathways to push back—and win—when federal policy conflicts with community values.

For example, when Cleveland tried to enforce an ordinance prioritizing jobs to local residents for a U.S. DOT-funded project in 2003, the Federal Highway Administration pulled the funds, saying this hindered competition. A federal court upheld the agency’s discretion to do so when the city sued to get the funds back. Cleveland is still fighting in court today to have that local-hire ordinance enforced.

In 2005, when New Jersey added language to bidding criteria that would stamp out corrupt pay-to-play practices, the FHWA again pulled the “hindering competition” card and blocked funding. That same year, when Los Angeles simply wanted bidding companies to disclose any information that it had historical ties to slavery, the federal government, again, thwarted enforcement by threatening to withhold funding.

Such past federal actions could complicate matters for cities today that want to open their municipal borders to immigrants regardless of orders from the Trump/Sessions regime. It’s not an entirely apples-to-apples comparison to the anti-apartheid ordinance conflict of the 1980s—the sanctuary city issue is not about procurement or divestment. But the way the Reagan administration was willing to bend interpretations of law to force cities to do its bidding serves as a nasty precedent for what Sessions is trying to get away with today.

“While city actions and grassroots activism were powerful in obtaining short-term victories, the Reagan administration was able to impact how federal funding worked over the long term,” says Abhilasha Bhola, lead researcher for Jobs to Move America. “We can’t forget that even if we’re fighting back, they are still laying the groundwork for longer-term impacts.”

However, Baltimore’s successful fight against the Reagan administration serves as a reminder that cities can find legal pathways to push back—and win—when federal policy conflicts with community values. Sanctuary cities that are weighing their legal options now might be able to learn from that experience. So might cities that are poised to clash with the Trump administration over other issues.

“It’s about more than sanctuary cities,” says Janis. “It’s also cities considering laws to potentially require disclosure from companies that are bidding on [Trump’s proposed] border wall, and other problems that are likely to come up. Regardless of what the technical legal issues are, the lesson learned here is to get in the weeds and don’t assume that just because there is a threat that there is an actual strong law backing them up.”
These Cities Aren’t Waiting for Trump to Self-Destruct. They’re Fighting Back Now.

Dispatches from the Urban Resistance, from Los Angeles to El Paso.

By Jimmy Tobias

MAY 31, 2017

Hundreds protest against Senate Bill 4 in Austin, May 29, 2017. (Austin American-Statesman via AP / Ricardo Brazziell)

This article was produced in partnership with Local Progress, a network of progressive local elected officials, to highlight some of the bold efforts unfolding in cities across the country.

RUSSIA. COMEY. LEAKS. LIES.

COLLUSION. Reading the obsessive reports constantly spewing forth from the nation’s capital, you might be tempted to think that the Trump administration’s blundering and babbling are all that matters—that the tales of palace intrigue and possible criminality are all the news that’s fit to print. And, to be fair, the tales are engrossing, like a sweet and steady delicious morphine drip that brings relief to an excruciating situation. As the leaks pile up, the pain dissipates in a haze of schadenfreude. Perhaps we don’t have to fight this regime so relentlessly after all. Perhaps it will simply self-destruct.

Thankfully, millions of Americans aren’t giving in to Russiagate-induced complacency—and they aren’t leaving anything to chance. As Trump tweets and rages, as his administration teeters but doesn’t fall, they are building movements and getting creative, finding new ways to challenge injustice and inequality. They are winning elections, fighting plutocracy, and pushing back against the dictates of right-wing governors. They are, in short, working hard to make this country a kinder, better place—Donald Trump be damned.

CITIES PUSH FOR IMPEACHMENT

Donald Trump be damned, indeed! That’s the message the Los Angeles City Council sent in early May when it passed a resolution calling on Congress to investigate whether the president has committed crimes or misdemeanors that could lead to impeachment.
The resolution, which passed on a 10-0 vote, makes Los Angeles one of the latest cities to urge an investigation into Trump’s docket of potentially impeachable offenses. Other municipalities, including Richmond, Berkeley, and Alameda, California as well as Cambridge, Amherst, and Brookline, Massachusetts, have passed similar resolutions in recent months.

It’s no accident that cities are making pro-impeachment pronouncements. For months, activists aligned with a group called Impeach Trump Now have been quietly pushing their local elected officials to pass such resolutions. In the case of Los Angeles, an Impeach Trump Now affiliate called West Valley Resistance brought the idea to City Council member Bob Blumenfield, who co-authored Los Angeles’s resolution. Similar organizing is happening all over the country, says John Bonifaz, a Massachusetts-based attorney and one of the leaders of Impeach Trump Now.

The dream goes something like this: If enough cities call for Trump’s head, driving up pressure on elected officials, then perhaps Congress will be forced to take action.

“It will only grow over time,” Bonifaz forecasts. “We will see many communities taking this up in the weeks and months ahead.”

FIGHTING PLUTOCRACY, CITY-STYLE

Even before Trump and his coterie of kleptocrats arrived in DC, much of the work of fighting inequality fell to cities. Now, as Team Trump crafts a budget for the 1 percent, gutting social programs while slashing taxes for the rich, the fight for financial fairness falls even more heavily on local governments. Thankfully, they are rising to the occasion.

On May 1, in Seattle, the City Council passed a resolution declaring its intent to pass a progressive income tax on high-earning residents by July of this year. An alliance of labor unions and grassroots groups called the Trump-Proof Seattle Coalition is spearheading the effort. Fearing that the Trump administration’s war on sanctuary cities will result in the loss of federal funding for Seattle, the group has called for a 1.5 percent tax on households with gross incomes greater than $250,000 a year. Such a tax would generate roughly $125 million a year for city coffers. Any such tax proposal, however, will likely face a serious court challenge, since state law prohibits counties and cities in Washington from taxing net income. In a blog post, Councilmember Lisa Herbold, who sponsored the resolution, wrote that the city would move forward with its plans despite the possible legal hurdles.

“Washington State’s [tax structure] is the most regressive in the nation, with people earning $20,000 a year devoting two entire months of pay to their yearly tax bill, while the 1 percent pay their annual tax bill in only 6 days,” she wrote. “We need a fairer tax system.”

On May 17, meanwhile, a San Francisco Board of Supervisors task force put forward a series of groundbreaking recommendations that would completely change the way the city collects fines and fees from its residents. In an attempt to combat rising inequality and indebtedness in the city, the task force called for a progressive fine and fee structure that charges people according to their ability to pay. Instead of charging a flat fine for,
say, traffic violations, the city would instead implement a sliding scale system in which those with higher-incomes pay more and those with lower incomes pay less or perform community service. It’s the first proposal of its kind in the United States.

“A flat fine system disproportionately impacts poor and working class people,” says Jane Kim, one of the city Supervisors who created the task force. “A city as wealthy as San Francisco should not be in the business of impoverishing our poor and working class families.”

To round out the economic news, New York this month became the latest—and largest—city to pass fair workweek legislation for fast food and retail workers laboring within its borders. Under a bill passed by the City Council on May 24—and signed by Mayor Bill de Blasio on May 30—brand-name fast food restaurants like McDonald’s will no longer be able to subject their workers to unpredictable and constantly-shifting schedules. Instead, they will be required to give employees their work schedules two weeks in advance, with financial penalties for any last-minute changes. The bill also requires employers to offer additional hours to part-time employees before hiring new staff.

The bill is the latest victory for the Fair Workweek Initiative, a nationwide effort to end manipulative scheduling practices at corporate chains. San Francisco, Seattle and Emeryville, California have passed similar measures in recent years.

TEXAS SANCTUARY CITIES STAND UP

When Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed a nasty bill in early May that effectively bans sanctuary cities in the state and establishes civil and criminal penalties for local officials who do not cooperate with federal immigration agents, he probably didn’t expect push back from the tiny border city of El Cenizo. But he got it anyway. On May 8, the city government in that town of 3,300 filed a lawsuit in a San Antonio federal court arguing that Texas’s Senate Bill 4 (SB 4) violates both the state and the nation’s constitutions. The city, which has a large undocumented population, was joined in its lawsuit by nearby Maverick County as well as the League of United Latin American Citizens and the ACLU.

“This bill is reckless, it is dangerous, it is discriminatory and it opens up the door to racial profiling,” says Raul Reyes, the 32-year-old mayor of El Cenizo and a lead plaintiff in the lawsuit. “In the most powerful country in the world, no person should have to live in fear. As a leader of a diverse community here on the Texas border I want to ensure that this bill gets adequately challenged.”

On May 22, the county of El Paso filed its own lawsuit in federal court challenging the constitutionality of Abbott’s sanctuary-city prohibition. The city of Austin has also announced its intention to challenge the state’s brutal anti-immigrant policies in court. Bottom line: Cities are taking Governor Greg Abbott, pandering ideologue and gleeful bully, to court.

TEARING DOWN THE PAST, BUILDING UP THE FUTURE

For at least two years, a group called Take Em Down Nola has pushed for the removal of Confederate monuments and other symbols of white supremacy and racial oppression in the city of New Orleans. The group has staged protests, attended city hearings, organized
marches, and burned Confederate flags in public venues. It has been dogged in its drive to shatter the images and erase the names of those who fought to preserve slavery and erect the system of racial apartheid that still lingers in this country today.

This month, the group garnered a massive victory when New Orleans tore down four of its most infamous Confederate monuments. On May 20, after a 60-foot statue of Robert E. Lee had finally been removed from the city’s Lee Circle, Mayor Mitch Landrieu gave a speech in which he recognized the statue’s demise as a powerful blow against the memory and present reality of racist terror.

“These statues are not just stone and metal. They’re not just innocent remembrances of a benign history,” Landrieu said. “These monuments celebrate a fictional, sanitized Confederacy, ignoring the death, ignoring the enslavement, ignoring the terror that it actually stood for. And after the Civil War, these monuments were part of that terrorism, as much as burning a cross on someone’s lawn.”

They are also just the first step, activists insist. Take Em Down Nola wants to see all emblems of white supremacy removed, including street signs, school names, and a host of remaining monuments to slaveholders, Confederates, and brutalizers.

And their struggle is spreading. In Baltimore, Mayor Catherine Pugh has announced that she would like to explore the possibility of “following in the footsteps of New Orleans” by removing some of the city’s most flagrant Confederate monuments.

PROGRESSIVE ELECTION-DAY PICKUPS

May saw two proud progressives take big strides toward power in very different cities. Chokwe Antar Lumumba, a radical 34-year-old attorney and black-liberation activist aligned with the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, won 55 percent of the vote in Jackson, Mississippi’s May 2 Democratic mayoral primary. Lumumba, whose platform includes proposals to create a citizens’ police-oversight board as well as funnel more city contracts to local minority-owned businesses, is expected to win the general election on June 6 and become Jackson’s next mayor. He is the son of Chokwe Lumumba, the legendary radical activist, who was himself mayor of Jackson until his sudden death in 2014.

Far to the north in Philadelphia, another progressive attorney, the civil-rights and criminal-defense lawyer Larry Krasner, won a hotly contested May 16 primary to be the city’s district attorney. If he wins the general election next November, Krasner has vowed to use the normally punitive office to protect Philadelphia’s sanctuary city status, effectively abolish the death penalty, and end the broken cash-bail system for nonviolent offenders, among other reforms.

Oh, and happy belated May Day to all the marchers out there! For those of you who couldn’t make it, just know this: In cities across the country, from sea to shining sea, people hit the streets for roaring rallies that, once again, made Trump’s inauguration look like a feebly attended funeral.
Seattle City Council approves income tax on the rich, but quick legal challenge likely

By Daniel Beekman, Seattle Times staff reporter

The Seattle City Council unanimously approved an income tax on wealthy residents Monday, a move widely expected to draw a quick legal challenge. The measure applies a 2.25 percent tax on total income above $250,000 for individuals and above $500,000 for married couples filing their taxes together.

“Seattle should serve everyone, not just rich folks,” software developer Carissa Knipe told the council before the 9-0 vote, saying she makes more than $170,000 per year.

“I would love to be taxed,” the 24-year-old from Ballard testified, drawing applause from a room packed with supporters of the tax.

The city estimates the tax would raise about $140 million a year and cost $10 million to $13 million to set up, plus $5 million to $6 million per year to manage and enforce. The council’s finance committee cleared the tax last week and increased the rate from 2 percent to 2.25 percent.

Opponents have argued the tax would violate state law and the state constitution, while proponents have said it would make Seattle’s tax structure more fair and that they want to test the legality of taxing income. Neither Washington nor any city in the state now collects an income tax. That’s partly why the state’s tax system has been called the most regressive in the country, meaning people with less money pay a much greater percentage of what they have.

In a statement, Mayor Ed Murray said Seattle is “challenging this state’s antiquated and unsustainable tax structure by passing a progressive income tax,” calling it a “new formula for fairness.”

Washington State Republican Party chair Susan Hutchison urged Seattle residents to “forcefully resist the tax” by refusing to pay it. Under the legislation sponsored by Councilmembers Lisa Herbold and Kshama Sawant, money from the tax could be used by the city to lower property taxes and other regressive taxes; address homelessness; provide affordable housing, education and transit; replace federal funding lost through budget cuts; create green jobs and meet carbon-reduction goals; and administer the tax.

Voting 5-3, the council approved an amendment by Councilmember M. Lorena González to possibly reduce Seattle’s business-license tax in some way. The recent push for an income tax began in February, when nonprofits and labor unions calling themselves the Trump Proof Seattle coalition launched a campaign. The coalition said the revenue could offset threatened cuts by President Donald Trump’s administration and held town-hall events in every council district to drum up support. A boost came in April, when Murray, during a mayoral candidate forum, said he would send income-tax legislation to the council. Earlier that week, former Mayor Mike McGinn had backed an income tax. Murray later dropped out of the race.
Legal arguments

A lawsuit will likely emerge in the next week or so, after the mayor signs the tax into law, said Jason Mercier, director of the Center for Government Reform at the business-backed Washington Policy Center, which opposes the tax. There are three key legal barriers, according to Mercier: The state constitution says taxes must be uniform within a class of property; a 1984 state law bars cities from taxing net income; and cities must have state authority to enact taxes. Seattle may assert that taxing total income is different from taxing net income, while also seeking a ruling that income isn’t property.

“We are greatly disappointed,” Washington Policy Center’s president, Dann Mead Smith, said in a statement after the vote.

“As a lifelong Seattle resident, it is frustrating to see the Seattle City Council choose to waste taxpayer dollars on lawsuits for an income tax that is not needed.”

The Freedom Foundation, a conservative think tank based in Olympia, announced in a statement that the organization was prepared to challenge the tax in court — “hopefully with a coalition of other freedom-minded organizations.”

“No matter who starts out paying it, everyone will eventually suffer,” foundation CEO Tom McCabe said in the statement, warning that the tax would creep down the income ladder. But Sawant insisted her only desire is to “tax the rich,” and Herbold said the legislation has been designed to give the city its best chance in court.

“Time for rich to pay their fair share”

Supporters of the tax rallied before Monday’s vote, waving signs and cheering. “When we fight, we win!” they chanted with Sawant, who said more public pressure may be needed. “If we need to pack the courts, will you be there with me?” she asked.

Karen Taylor, 34, was in the crowd holding a sign with a Seattle Times headline dating to the early 1900s: “Why don’t you come through with a little bit of the wealth Seattle has given you, rich man?”

The Judkins Park resident said she’s struggling to stay housed. “Whoever goes against this is openly causing suffering,” she said. Inside City Hall, Taylor wound up sitting next to income-tax opponent John Peeples, who was vastly outnumbered. There were grumbles in the chambers when Peeples reminded the council that Washington voters have rejected income-tax measures on multiple occasions.

“Yes means yes and no means no,” said the 45-year-old Green Lake resident. The crowd was more appreciative of homeowner Bobby Righi, 79, who said she’s campaigned and voted for one property-tax levy after another despite modest means.

“It’s time for the rich to pay their fair share,” said Righi, of Phinney Ridge.

Outside City Hall after the vote, calls of “tax the rich” by proponents of the legislation drowned out Hutchison as she spoke against the council’s action. In a KING 5/KUOW poll last month, 66 percent of 900 Seattle adults who took part expressed support for an income tax on the wealthy, while 23 percent were against it and 12 percent weren’t sure.

There were about 11,000 individuals in Seattle with earned annual incomes of at least $250,000 in 2015, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. The Seattle tax would cover both earned and unearned income.

“Washington has among the most regressive tax systems in the United States,” the legislation states, citing research by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. In 2015, Washington households with incomes below $21,000 paid 16.8 percent of their income in state and local taxes, on average, while households with income above $500,000 paid only 2.4 percent, according to the organization.
Attorney General’s Civil Asset Forfeiture Orders Are ‘Irrelevant’ in Philadelphia

BRENTIN MOCK, JUL 25, 2017

Jeff Sessions has ordered prosecutors to continue seizing property from suspects, even if they haven’t been charged with a crime, to help finance law enforcement practices. Philadelphia is moving in the opposite direction.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions made a stink last week when he announced he was revamping policies that allow federal law enforcement officials to seize property from suspects—even if those suspects haven’t been charged or convicted of a crime. These policies have been heavily scrutinized by liberals and conservatives in recent years given that the funds from these seizures have been used and abused to pad the coffers of law enforcement agencies for decades. No less a pro-policing outlet than the National Review even called asset forfeiture a “constitutionally questionable practice,” that Sessions should reconsider.

Which helps explain why on the same week of Sessions’s announcement, the city of Philadelphia announced it was moving in the opposite direction of the Attorney General on this matter. The state of Pennsylvania is not far behind it. Not only that but nearly half of the states in the U.S. have also been passing laws to curb asset forfeiture policies. For Philadelphia, its new direction on this is mostly the result of a multi-tiered lawsuit the Institute of Justice filed over the city’s civil forfeiture program— one of the worst such programs in the country until new reforms started rolling in a few years ago. Pennsylvania is one of the dozens of states that allows local law enforcement agencies to keep 100 percent of the proceeds from assets seized from criminal suspects, even if they haven’t been found guilty of a crime. Philadelphia police and district attorneys have collected tens of millions of dollars from these seizures to pay for their own salaries, overtime pay, weapons, and other equipment.

“By giving police and prosecutors a direct financial stake in the outcome of forfeiture proceedings, this practice creates an impermissible conflict of interest that denies property owners a fair and impartial administration of justice as required by due process,” says Darpana M. Sheth, a senior attorney for the Institute for Justice.

Meanwhile, much of the property seized—houses, cars, bank funds, and cash—comes from people of low income. People have been evicted from their homes simply because a police officer or prosecutor had a hunch that the house was used for illegal activity, and there was little recourse available once the house was seized. (Read reporter Isaiah Thompson’s excellent reporting on this for more background.) The Institute for Justice filed a complaint against the city in August of 2014 to stop law enforcement officials from taking people’s homes without giving them notice or a chance to appeal to a judge. Since that complaint was filed, the city and the state have scaled back civil forfeiture actions considerably.

For one, the city agreed in 2015 that it would no longer take people’s homes without notice or giving them due process. Two years later, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled that district attorneys would need to satisfy a larger burden of proof that a car or house was being used for criminal activity before attempting to seize those properties. This past June, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf signed a law that provides even more protections for people subjected to civil asset forfeiture. The new law not only codifies the aforementioned new reforms, it also gives people the right to claim their seized property back if they can demonstrate to a judge that living without it would be too much of a hardship.

Civil asset forfeiture remains a problem, however. For one, it’s still legit for cops to take your property if they suspect it’s tied to a crime, and the victims of those takings still have no right to a lawyer to get it back. Moreover, the profit incentive for law enforcement officials to pursue seizing people’s assets remains. As Institute for Justice attorney Milad Emam wrote in an op-ed last week:

Property owners can still lose their property without being convicted of — or even charged with — a crime. Worse still, Pennsylvania law enforcement, including in Philadelphia, can use 100 percent of forfeiture proceeds...
to pad their budgets and salaries. This direct and powerful financial incentive has lured law enforcement away from the impartial pursuit of justice.

That loophole looks like it’s coming to a close, though, at least in Philadelphia, given that the city has filed a permanent injunction against itself to prohibit police and prosecutors from using seized assets funds for law enforcement-related expenses—a “highly unusual” step, says the Institute for Justice’s senior attorney Sheth.

Instead, the city is proposing that funds from seized assets be used for drug rehabilitation programs or to fight blight. Sheth says that would be acceptable, but that the city still needs to declare that the very act of using seized assets to cover law enforcement expenses is unconstitutional, which the city is so far unwilling to do. Admitting as much would subject it to numerous additional lawsuits from people who’ve been harmed in the past seeking damages. Either way, there’s little chance that the city will continue to seize property for its own law enforcement activity’s sake. Larry Krasner, the civil rights attorney who recently won the Democratic primary to become Philadelphia’s next District Attorney, is dead against it. He opposes it even though those kinds of funds accounted for as much as a fifth of the district attorney’s office budget between 2002 and 2013. In fact, he says that he will not seize people’s properties at all unless they’ve actually been convicted of a crime.

“[Civil asset forfeiture] is just one more way the criminal justice system steps on the necks of the poor and criminalizes poverty,” says Krasner. “They have a right to counsel when charged with a crime, but they don’t have any rights to protect what might be the only asset they have, like a home or a car. So, what has happened is local prosecution has been able to take property from poor people simply because poor people don’t have the ability to get lawyers.”

It’s a brave stance for a city like Philadelphia where draconian law enforcement stances have led to some of the highest incarceration rates of any city in the U.S. And it stands in stark contrast to the position of the Attorney General. In issuing new guidelines for federal asset forfeiture policies, Sessions said that they were a “key tool” for law enforcement because they take “the material support of the criminals and instead makes it the material support of law enforcement, funding priorities like new vehicles, bulletproof vests, opioid overdose reversal kits, and better training.” In those guidelines, Sessions added extra steps for federal prosecutors to take before attempting to seize properties suspected to be associated with a crime. The new order won’t have a tremendous impact on local and state asset forfeiture policies—which is where the bulk of property seizures happen anyway. However, the new guidelines do make “another tool available” for local authorities attempting to seize someone’s assets.

For the federal equitable sharing program—a program that former Attorney General Eric Holder once tried to discontinue—local police can choose to forfeit seized assets to the U.S. Justice Department, rather than report them to the state. The Justice Department can then redistributes as much as 80 percent of the proceeds from those seized properties back to local law enforcement agencies, almost like a laundering scheme. (If ever there was a case for defunding the police, this would be the pot to pick.) Pennsylvania law enforcement agencies received nearly $105 million in equitable sharing funds between 2002 and 2013. Philadelphia took in almost $1.4 million from this program in 2014 alone. But the rules are a bit tight in terms of how city law enforcement agencies can subscribe to these proceeds. The federal government can simply “adopt,” or seize a local agency’s seized properties if connected to a federal crime, but for the most part, local law enforcement agencies must access federal equitable sharing funds by partnering with the Justice Department via a joint task force or investigation.

Philadelphia officials could technically try to take advantage of such partnerships through the new federal tools Sessions has made available, but the likelihood seems low. The city is still embroiled in pending lawsuits to halt these practices altogether—not to mention, the city is filing injunctions against itself to curb these practices. Also, Krasner says the Justice Department “doesn’t have enough boots on the ground” to encourage continuing asset forfeiture in Philadelphia.

“Frankly, I think most of the nonsense that comes out of Jeff Sessions’ mouth is really irrelevant,” says Krasner. “The biggest problem we have [to solve] is that the system should not be incentivized by having money go to law enforcement because that eliminates any objectivity or fairness when they know they can take money for themselves.”
Map Shows Growing U.S. 'Climate Rebellion' Against Trump

The U.S. government may want to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, but these states and cities are still committed to climate progress.

12 states and Puerto Rico have become members of the U.S. Climate Alliance and remain committed to achieving existing CO2-emission reduction goals. Officials from 10 states and the District of Columbia pledged to follow the Paris Agreement but have not formally joined the alliance. Across the country, 274 cities and counting have signed on to the Mayors National Climate Action Agenda, which asserts their commitment to lowering emissions at the local level.

By Michael Greshko PUBLISHED JUNE 8, 2017

As the aftershocks of the Trump administration’s June 1 rejection of the Paris Agreement continue to rumble, groups across the United States have rebelled against the decision to withdraw from the international climate pact. States, cities, businesses, philanthropies, and universities have vowed to fill the void that the U.S. federal government makes if it departs from the accord or ignores its voluntary targets: a 26 to 28-percent reduction in the country’s carbon emissions by 2025, relative to 2005 levels, and further cuts thereafter.

Already, billionaire philanthropist and former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg has pledged to donate $15 million to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, in order to help fill any funding gaps created by the Trump administration’s departure. The same day as Trump’s announcement, the states of New York, California, and Washington announced the formation of the United States Climate Alliance. The coalition
aims to uphold U.S. commitments under the Paris Agreement, and it also says it wants to meet or exceed the Clean Power Plan, an Obama-era EPA rule on power plant emissions.

As of June 7, the U.S. Climate Alliance has amassed 12 states and Puerto Rico, collectively representing more than a hundred million Americans and a third of the U.S. GDP. One member state, Hawaii, passed a law on June 6 formally committing the state to the Paris Agreement. Jerry Brown, the governor of member state California, has positioned himself as the U.S.’s de facto climate leader, attending meetings on climate change with leading Chinese officials at a recent clean-energy conference.

Separately, U.S. states, state attorneys general, cities, businesses, and universities have banded together into a coalition called We Are Still In. The group, spearheaded by Bloomberg, has signatories from 125 cities, nine states, 183 colleges and universities, and 902 businesses. The group says that it represents 120 million Americans and $6.2 trillion in contributions to the U.S. economy.

In addition, 274 U.S. mayors representing 58 million Americans have signed onto a statement prepared by the Mayors National Climate Action Agenda (MNCAA) network to uphold the Paris Agreement, as of the evening of June 7, 2017.

If the U.S. follows through with its pledge to formally withdraw from the pact, which cannot happen formally until November 4, 2020, the country would join just two others—Syria and Nicaragua—as non-parties to the agreement. (Find out how withdrawing from Paris could isolate the U.S. from the world.)

Among the three countries, the U.S. would stand alone in withdrawing from the accord. The other two countries never joined: Nicaragua didn’t feel as though the Paris Agreement was ambitious enough, and a vicious civil war and international sanctions left Syria unable to attend the negotiations.
Americans on the right have long argued for the “devolution” of power from the federal government to the states. With President Trump in office, Americans on the left should consider taking that idea further: devolving power to cities.

“The Saturday Night Live” captured it best in its skit, “The Bubble.” The satirical planned city-state promises progressive Americans a place (other than Canada) to get away from the unthinkable election of Trump. Billed as a “like-minded community for free thinkers—and no one else,” the sketch skewers the idea of urban space as an echo chamber full of affluent young creatives.

Harsh as this portrait may be in its critique of the naiveté of the post-Trump cocoon, for many urbanists, cities really are the bubble—the last refuge for opposition and resistance to Trumpism. (Lucky me, I get to live in Toronto, an urban bubble nested inside the bigger bubble of Canada.)

True, cities may be the best safeguard against Trump and Trumpism, but there are more numerous and better reasons to press for the devolution of power away from the nation-state and the shifting of greater authority to cities, metro areas, and other forms of local control.

Localism = innovation

Urbanists have long argued that the local level is more innovative. Years ago, when many American analysts were extolling the virtues of Japanese and Korean economic and industrial policy, one of my students from South Korea remarked at the time: “That sort of industrial policy works great when you make the right call, but when you don’t, it fails. In the U.S., you have the ability to have hundreds if not thousands of local economic policies.” Our states and cities have long been the so-called laboratories of democracy, where new initiatives and approaches are tried out and honed.

The local level is not only more innovative, it is a more effective form of governance. Economist Alice Rivlin long ago said that economic policy aimed at innovation and productivity works best at the local level and should be decentralized to local leaders and organizations who have the best handle on their economies. Corporations long ago realized that huge productivity gains can come from decentralizing decision-making to work groups on the factory floor. A massive amount of research from the OECD shows that decentralized local government is more effective and efficient than centralized control.
Local governance is also more democratic and gives citizens more choice. Decades ago, the economist Charles Tiebout argued that we vote with our feet, essentially selecting the community which best serves our wants and needs. Single people may prefer lower taxes. Families want better schools. But the diversity at the local level recognizes our differences and allows us to choose the kind of community that best fits us.

**The nation-state has become dysfunctional**

One reason we are so scared of Trump is that he has taken control of the most powerful office on earth; the fear he instills is a product of the vast over-concentration of power in the nation-state and the imperial presidency. It’s high time we take steps to limit and counter-balance that power by shifting more of it to states and localities. In Canada, for example, the federal government has far less power and the provinces have far more.

Not only do the American presidency and nation-state have too much power, it is increasingly an economic anachronism—out of sync with an economy powered by cities and metro areas. The uber-powerful nation-state may have made sense in the era of economically concentrated industrial capitalism, but it’s extremely ill-suited to the demands of geographically concentrated, clustered and spiky knowledge capitalism.

The biggest challenge facing America right now is not Trump. It is the underlying divides that produced him. It’s time to recognize that those divides are unbridgeable.

Our economy is in the midst of two powerful nested transformations. The first is the shift from natural resources and physical power/labor to knowledge—where the mind has become the means of production. The second shift is toward clustering as the source of innovation and economic advantage, massively concentrating talent and economic assets in a handful of superstar cities and tech hubs.

Trumpism represents a backlash not just against women, immigrants and minorities, but against this very basic and fundamental and disruptive economic force. As the world becomes spikier and spikier—across nations, across regions, and within cities—the clustering of talent and economic assets makes the city and metro the new economic and social organizing unit.

**Mutual coexistence in a divided nation**

Right after the election, a smart reporter asked me a good question: What do we do to overcome America’s stark red-blue divide? Without even thinking, I shot back immediately: It’s not possible.

Our divides are not just about politics and political difference; they reflect a fundamental economic and geographic fissure that is baked in the deep structures of the knowledge economy. The biggest challenge facing America right now is not Trump; it’s the underlying divides that produced him. It’s time to recognize that those divides are unbridgeable, that we are in effect a divided nation.
And we’re going to have to learn to live with our differences. We need a mutual coexistence strategy that acknowledges the gap between our two distinct and separate nations. As my NYU and MPI colleague Jonathan Haidt told Vox:

We have to recognize that we’re in a crisis, and that the left-right divide is probably unbridgeable. And if it is, we’ll have to give up on doing big things in Washington, and do as little as we possibly can at the national level. We’re going to have to return as much as we can to states and localities, and hope that innovative solutions spring from technology or private industry.

He’s absolutely right. The geographic divides that separate cities, suburbs, and rural places may well be too deep for us to form a national consensus around urban issues.

No top-down, one-size-fits-all strategy can address the very different needs and desires of those who live in the dense, expensive blue-state cities and urban areas and those who live in more sprawling, car-oriented red-state suburbs and exurbs. Every place has its own set of unique needs, and these are very different kinds of places. Dense regions need transit, spread-out ones need better roads and bridges. Just as the minimum wage should be geographically indexed to local costs and conditions, urban policies are best tailored to local conditions and local needs. Empowering cities, suburbs, and communities respects both our differences in values and our very different needs.

A big tent

A few years ago, devolution and local empowerment may have seemed like a pipe-dream, but several forces (not the least of which is Trump) have conspired to bring a wide range of strange bedfellows from the left and right together on this issue. Localism is a big tent—one that actually looks politically feasible.

From the left, it is pushed for and supported by Bruce Katz of Brookings and Benjamin Barber, author of If Mayors Ruled the World. “The road to prosperity, no less than the road to global democracy, runs not through states but through cities,” Barber wrote. “Cities are now the guardians of the future, the bastions of diversity.” In an interview with New York Magazine, Barber proposed that the tax dollars generated in cities should serve the municipality rather than being sent to Washington, given that cities create 80 percent of American GDP and tax revenue. That article succinctly described Barber’s view: Cities are labor, government is capital. [Editor’s note: As we were preparing this piece, CityLab learned that Benjamin Barber had passed away on Monday after a long illness; we’ll have more on his life and work soon.]

That sounds similar to what Yuval Levin of the National Review has been arguing. In his book, The Fractured Republic, Levin outlines the need for “subsidiarity,” or the devolution of power to its lowest level (something Jane Jacobs also long argued for). He sees local empowerment as enabling a synthesis between two seemingly opposed but actually mutually reinforcing elements of American economic and political life.
The country would benefit from the familial, social, cultural, and economic stability made possible by that unity and order, while also benefiting from the dynamism made possible by greater individualism, diversity, and competition. It was an unstable mix, but it allowed the nation, for a time, to enjoy the best of both worlds.

Devolution and local empowerment is the issue that also brought Joel Kotkin and I together. Kotkin sees localism as a way to end America’s “new feudalism,” where the federal government lost the people’s trust. Most Americans however, still trust their local government. As my colleague James Fallows has pointed out, cities work even when Washington doesn’t.

**The way forward**

The GOP has long argued for smaller government, for shrinking federal control and shifting power to the states and local governments. It is time to hold them to their word. Devolution not only fits the fear of Trump on the left, it fits the GOP’s professed desire to shrink the national government.

This is an area where mayors and local officials can lead. A broad bipartisan movement of mayors calling for devolving and shifting power toward greater local control might well find many allies in Washington, on both sides of the aisle. America has a huge institutional advantage in its historically flexible system of federalism, which can balance and rebalance power among the federal government, states, and cities. During the New Deal, Franklin D. Roosevelt forged a new kind of partnership between the federal government and the cities. It’s time to do so again, this time putting more resources, power, and control in the hands of local government.

We need a mutual coexistence strategy that acknowledges the gap between our two distinct and separate nations.

Instead of using the arbitrary political boundaries, the nature of federalism has to change to a more dynamic federalism, as Jenna Bednar described, where political power mirrors the economic power that cities provide.

The present moment affords a real opportunity to recast urban governance in a way that aligns the underlying nature of economic activity and the challenges it brings with the level of governing authority. Transit and transportation investments, for example, could be overseen by the networks of cities and suburbs that make up metropolitan areas, or even the groups of metropolitan areas that make up megaregions.

If mayors and local leaders seize the initiative and push hard for greater autonomy, they will be in an even stronger position when the pendulum swings back in the other direction and our nation is once again ready to re-invest to rebuild our cities and suburbs. Maybe a 21st century economic strategy cannot be central or national, but it can be local.
Want empowered cities? Start by understanding city power

Alaina J. Harkness
Wednesday, April 19, 2017

In this brave new world, expectations for city leadership are rising by the day. Home to the majority of U.S. residents who did not vote for Donald Trump, cities are a natural center of resistance to the new administration’s agenda. Already leading on policies to raise the minimum wage and combat climate change, cities are now on the front lines in battles over refugees, immigration, and other federal actions that threaten to stifle the diversity and entrepreneurial activity that powers the American economy. But as the ongoing conflict over sanctuary cities shows, the sources, uses, and limits of city power with respect to other levels of government are complex and not widely understood. Which tools should city leaders be sharpening, and which of the many anticipated battles are the most strategic to fight?

In City Power: Urban Governance in a Global Age (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), University of Virginia law professor Richard Schragger offers some answers. Though it is nominally about the more expansive concept of city power, Schragger’s real concern is the messy business of institutions, systems, laws, processes, and norms that define how decisions are made and where authority sits. By focusing on the structural and institutional forms that shape cities, Schragger puts a fine point on the vertical and horizontal limits to formal city policymaking and makes a compelling case for what can and should be done in spite of them. Schragger’s first claim is that cities should not only fully exercise the powers they already have to the greatest extent possible, they should advocate for more powers. As “a process of economic development, as a generator of the middle class and as the primary location for the exercise of robust self-government,” cities have critical roles to play in building a thriving society.

He offers a clear prescription for what cities should use their powers to do: implement policies to enhance and expand the delivery of basic services and to ameliorate the burdens of income inequality. In Schragger’s words, inequality is “a function of the city itself, both something the city creates and something the city can solve.” City power should therefore be used to “enable cities to help their citizens manage the inevitable cycle of economic growth and decline.” With concerns for equity rising, and new research showing the costs of segregation and inequality to cities in the long run, Schragger’s advice to cities is clear: identify every available power and tool to address distributional issues, and activate them.

The flip side of the argument—what cities should not do—is likely to be his most contested claim. Schragger is deeply skeptical of the ability of city powers and policies to be decisive in altering a city’s economic development trajectory. He finds efforts to use city policies to grow local economies through business attraction and corporate subsidies an ultimately fruitless pursuit that diverts resources and attention from the more pressing goal of meeting the basic
needs of residents. “Tying growth or decline to any particular policy is a hazardous business,” Schragger writes. “Unsurprisingly, city leaders tend to take credit when cities are booming and deflect blame when they bust.”

Yet there are numerous examples of cities using economic development policies to stimulate productive industrial clusters and innovation districts. Though these projects often rely on state and federal policy (and funding), they don’t happen without supportive city leadership. A plea for greater balance between policies that aim to drive growth and those that seek to improve equity seems more pragmatic than a wholesale abandonment of city leadership on development projects. Yet the commonsense call for cities to do more of what they can do well and less of what they cannot, should resonate in a time of such scarce public resources. Schragger’s book should remind city leaders that the goals of growth and equity need not be mutually exclusive, and that they have not only the imperative, but the tools to address equity concerns at a time when they are paramount.

Federal and state investments in cities have been generally declining, particularly for critical infrastructure and for services that support the most vulnerable residents. With the exception of a federal infrastructure bill, this trend is likely to continue under the Trump administration. At the same time, state governors and legislators hostile to urban agendas are preempting progressive municipal policies on everything from paid sick leave to taxing authority, aided by ALEC-authored bills designed to enforce the strictest limits on city power. Cities must be vigilant, resourceful, and aligned in their pushback to this pressure—and creative in their exploration of new paths to empowerment.

This will require a sharper understanding of the current extent and limits of city powers. Schragger’s book is an important contribution, a call for cities to exercise powers they already have to address the pressing concerns of our present moment. But this will not be enough: cities are going to have to lead beyond the limits of their current formal powers and find ways to expand them to champion their more progressive agendas in the absence of state and federal support. The time is ripe for a revival of the study of city power and urban governance, both within academia and in the professions that will be called on to help adapt urban institutions to new conditions and circumstances: law, policy, economics, and public administration. The resurgence of academic centers that aim to cultivate both the scholarship and practice of urban governance, like the Fordham Urban Law Center (which hosted a conversation with Richard Schragger, co-directors Nestor Davidson and Sheila Foster, and myself earlier this year), is an encouraging sign. Hopefully this is just the beginning of a groundswell of interest and investment in a field that can change the trajectory of cities and impact the lives of millions of people.
To Truly Resist Trumpism, Cities Must Look Within

By TRACEY ROSS and SARAH TREUHAFT
JUNE 2, 2017

Credit Lisk Feng

Long before the nation’s attention turned to the investigation of the Trump administration’s ties to Russia, the president’s discriminatory and divisive policies and rhetoric were drawing intense criticism — and cities were being lauded as leaders of the resistance against them. Some of this praise of cities is deserved. But if they are to make meaningful change, local leaders also must look inward to confront the Trumpian forces that have long existed within their own boundaries.

In some ways, cities have in fact been the home of the anti-Trump resistance. From the Women’s March that took place the day after the inauguration in 500 cities across the country and worldwide to the protests against President Trump’s executive order on immigration in major airports, advocates, public officials and residents in cities across the country have led the fight against the policies of the Trump administration.

In January, a coalition of mayors from cities nationwide signed a statement opposing an executive order that threatened to make “sanctuary cities” — those that limit the cooperation of local law enforcement and federal immigration officials — ineligible for certain federal grants. And following President Trump’s withdrawal from the Paris climate accord this week, mayors representing 83 cities have announced that they will meet the United States’ commitment in the agreement within their own jurisdictions.

Individual cities are taking stands for equity, too. One example: In a move that offers a stark contrast to Attorney General Jeff Sessions’s push to revive the war on drugs, the City Council of Oakland, Calif., has created an “equity permit program” designed to ensure that new opportunities for cannabis entrepreneurship aren’t missed by those residents — disproportionately, people of color — who were most affected by marijuana arrests before legalization.

In response to actions like those, some organizations and mayors have characterized cities as the first line of defense against the Trump administration’s policies. But this glosses over their continued complicity in producing racial inequities that have lasted generations. Redlining and urban renewal, for example, are responsible for today’s racially segregated neighborhoods. And while movements to protect the rights of African-Americans, workers, people with disabilities, immigrants and L.G.B.T.Q. people have their origins in cities across the country, these cities’ current policies — such as
those preventing affordable housing from being built in high-opportunity neighborhoods — perpetuate inequities.

Even the most politically progressive cities are plagued by institutionalized racism. The infamous, ineffective and racially discriminatory stop-and-frisk policing practice for which President Trump has expressed enthusiasm was born in New York City. Even in sanctuary cities, black residents continue to be relegated to the most polluted and underserved neighborhoods.

This has a ripple effect. As Kent Oyler, the head of the Louisville, Ky., chamber of commerce wrote in a January op-ed published by The Courier-Journal, “This sustained inequity holds our entire city back from greater economic and civic success.” Mr. Oyler is right. Inequity and racial segregation undermine democracy and stunt economic progress for all.

That’s why as cities continue to stand up to harmful policies on the national stage, they must also fortify themselves from within, working on two fronts.

First, local leaders must implement policy agendas to advance racial equity. In many cases, this will require a close analysis of data broken down by race, neighborhood and other demographics. For example, in New Orleans, researchers in 2011 found that 52 percent of working-age black men were jobless. The city’s solution: forming a partnership with potential employers to connect job seekers to training opportunities, social service agencies and community advocates. According to the city of New Orleans, the effort, led by Mayor Mitch Landrieu through the Network for Economic Opportunity, has helped over 500 people — 60 percent of whom are black men — qualify for and find jobs. More cities should follow suit.

Second, local leaders must reimagine how government serves people. In 2005, Seattle became the first city in the United States to start a citywide initiative to eliminate racial inequities and structural racism. Now all city departments use a racial-equity analysis tool to consider the potential benefits and burdens their programs, policies and budgets place on various communities, and how they may contribute to racial disparities. This has led to hundreds of changes in city operations. Today, more than 50 city, county and regional governments have joined the Government Alliance on Race and Equity national network and have committed to similar initiatives. City governments that have not done so should emulate this approach.

Cities reflect the diversity that is in our nation’s future and represent our best chance to create a stronger country. When they insist upon equity, it doesn’t just benefit the most vulnerable people in our country; it benefits all Americans. After all, research shows that inequality hinders growth, prosperity and economic mobility, while diversity and inclusion fuel innovation and business success.

The Trump administration continues to push for policies that threaten to cause harm, to poor people and people of color in particular. It’s more important now than ever that city officials take the lead when it comes to rejecting Mr. Trump’s actions and address the factors standing between their own residents and the American dream — factors that existed within their borders, long before the last election.