Home Coming

Cities have made great strides toward ending homelessness among veterans. For everyone else, it’s still a big problem.

After years of living on the streets, Ronnie Vinston enjoys his first few moments in his new apartment in Washington, D.C.
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When managing security in an all-IP network, it helps to see the big picture.

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If you’re homeless and you’re a veteran, there may be an apartment waiting for you. If you’re not a veteran, the prospects aren’t so good.

By J.B. Wogan

Can government hiring move out of the Stone Age?

By Katherine Barrett and Richard Greene

Top financial officers today are expected to have expertise in more than just accounting.

By Liz Farmer

Telemedicine is rapidly evolving, and states are trying to catch up.

By Mattie Quinn

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DEPARTMENTS
THEY SAY healthcare reform is uncharted territory

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Cities are being confronted with a problem they simply cannot manage effectively on their own. The homeless individuals sleeping on our cities’ sidewalks are there because of three long-term trends: deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill, stagnant wages and an epidemic of homelessness. That last factor is largely unrecognized by policymakers, but Alan Graham, founder and CEO of a charity for the homeless in Austin, Texas, has been working on the issue for decades. “We believe the single greatest cause to homelessness is the profound, catastrophic loss of family,” he says.

While the causes of homelessness are national in scope, the consequences are decidedly local. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio recently reorganized his administration’s approach to dealing with homelessness amid criticism that he was not giving the issue a high-enough priority. And as J.B. Wogan reports in this issue, a perception that Salt Lake City was not doing enough to address homelessness was a factor in Mayor Ralph Becker’s defeat for re-election in the fall.

Much of the focus of Wogan’s story is on the largely successful effort to eliminate homelessness among military veterans, which he concludes continues to decline “for one reason: a federal strategy to deal with it has actually worked.” A large component of that strategy has been Congress’ expansion of rental vouchers for veterans.

Veterans constitute only about a tenth of all homeless people. Still, addressing that relatively small population was beyond the scope of cities without major federal support. Most mayors know that, and decisions by some to declare a state of emergency regarding general homelessness should be viewed, in part, as a call for help from state and federal governments. But given that Congress has cut housing support for the 90 percent of the homeless who are not veterans, the prospects of help coming soon seem dim.

While the forces contributing to homelessness have been building for decades, they do seem to have reached a tipping point in the last year or so, partly, perhaps, as the result of a large component of strategy has been Congress’ expansion of rental vouchers for veterans.

But housing subsidized by tax dollars is another factor enabling companies to hold down wages. A better approach is for governments to take the kind of actions that would allow wages to rise with productivity and household incomes to keep pace with rental costs. Strengthening families in that manner would go a long way toward dealing with our homelessness problem.
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Treatment Orders

In the December feature “Restraining Orders,” J.B. Wogan looked at the issue of psychiatric boarding. In most states, mentally ill patients brought to an emergency room must be seen by a psychiatrist and then moved to a mental health facility or psychiatric unit in a reasonable amount of time. But due to a shortage of beds in these facilities across the nation, patients are instead kept in ERs, often in seclusion or strapped down, for days or weeks at a time. The practice of psychiatric boarding, which was ruled unlawful in Washington state in 2014, is a problem nationwide. States have struggled to find a way to treat the mentally ill and increase the number of beds available to patients. One reader shared how Australia approaches the issue.

In Australia, most large public hospitals have a psychiatric ward. This is in combination with an extensive outpatient treatment program, as here we try as much as possible to get patients back into the community. There is one long-term secure hospital for violent and dangerous patients associated with the criminal justice system, and one other mental hospital for intractable patients or acute episodes. But the default approach is to treat the patient in the psych ward of the general hospital for a few days—until they are stable enough to be returned to outpatient care.

Where we probably differ from the U.S. is the amount of effort put into outpatient or semi-institutional services. There is an enormous effort made to ensure that outpatients continue to take medication. We have supported residential services, which are privately run. They’re basically group houses supervised by the state, with enough staff to make sure the residents have food, clothing and a place to sleep. The cost is several hundred dollars per week per person, and is usually paid for by the federal disability support pension. Most psych patients can be treated in less than fully institutional places, provided that there is sufficient support and they take their medication.

—Zvi F on Governing.com

A Housing Opportunity

Alan Greenblatt’s December feature “Demolition Dilemma” explored the conflict developing in many close-in suburbs between new and longtime residents. Young city dwellers “often make the choice to move to the suburbs when they have kids,” Greenblatt wrote; “but many of them would like an updated house and don’t want a commute that’s 40 minutes long on a good day. So they look for a close-in suburb, buy an old house there, tear it down and build what they want.” The downside is that it’s causing some longtime residents to be priced out of their communities. It’s also changing the character of these communities. One reader wonders if there is something to be learned from this.

Personal preference aside, this presents a unique situation for communities who try to balance location and character with the needs of individual homeowners and the housing market. I find myself wondering how other communities address similar issues; this will make a very good case study for urban/community planning or policy students.

—Tim S. on Governing.com

Correction: In the December feature “Restraining Orders,” J.B. Wogan introduced Dr. LaMarr Edgerson as the director of the American Mental Health Counselors Association. Edgerson is the director-at-large.
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BECKY KATZ has been pushing for bike-friendly policies in Atlanta for years. Now she can do that from inside city hall, as the city’s first chief bicycle officer.

The new position of chief bicycle officer signals two things. One is that thinking about what’s good for bicyclists is a priority for Mayor Kasim Reed. The other is that it’s starting to get a little crowded in the “C” suites.

In Atlanta, as in places across the country, there’s a growing number of people in government with the word “chief” in their titles.

In addition to familiar titles such as chief finance officer, lots of cities and states have decided they need chief data officers, chief connection officers, chief privacy officers and, at least in Oregon, a chief electric vehicle officer. This proliferation of lofty-sounding titles is in keeping with contemporary culture’s “everybody gets a trophy” ethos, suggests Steve Tobak, a management consultant in California. “Reward comes not just in the form of compensation, but titles,” he says.

Title inflation has been running rampant in the private sector for years. In many cases, naming more people as chiefs and vice presidents has been a way of handing out prizes and in-house acclaim. The elevation of more government workers as “chiefs” is a lot like the federal-level fashion a couple of decades ago of naming a “czar” as the go-to person for dealing with a crisis or an issue that’s newly viewed as essential. “It’s a means to signal that this [policy] is a priority,” says Sean O’Keefe, a public management professor at Syracuse University’s Maxwell School.

It’s a way of saying, “This is something that we’re going to be paying attention to and will be more responsive to,” he says.

That seems to be the case in Atlanta, where Katz’s position is foundation-funded. She now works to remind a variety of departments—public works, transportation and planning, among others—to keep bikes in mind. She’ll try to make sure, for instance, that bike lanes through parks connect to streets, so that bikes can really be used for transportation and not just recreation. “The value of having a chief bike officer or bike czar is they’re the person who connects all the dots and makes sure the people in the various silos are working together,” says Brent Buice, executive director of Georgia Bikes, an advocacy group.

There’s one other advantage. Someone like Katz can act as an ombudsman, giving residents one person to call when they have any kind of issue having to do with bicycling, rather than being bounced around from department to department.

That’s an important role, but a limited one. Ultimately, a free-floating “chief” who tries to coordinate among various state and local agencies will have a constrained impact, assuming she doesn’t have budget authority or other real power over her partners. The worst-case scenario is that new chiefs come in and act as just one more person who can call meetings. By contrast, when Boston Mayor Marty Walsh created a chief streets officer last year, he invested that position with complete oversight of the transportation and public works departments.

Boston’s new chief of streets, Chris Osgood, oversees the city’s transportation and public works departments. But many of the growing number of “chiefs” in government don’t have much actual authority.

When a new administration comes in with inevitably different priorities, it might either eliminate some of the newly named chiefs—or be unable to, if a chief’s constituents insist that the position be maintained. At that point, rather than cutting through the clutter, a toothless chief just adds to duplication and inefficiency.

“Organizational charts change a lot because they are easy to change. It can be done unilaterally by people at the top, and it looks like progress,” says Peter Cappelli, a management professor at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. “It is true, though, that simply changing the organizational chart does not necessarily change how organizations operate.”

—Alan Greenblatt
For Black Women, an Uphill Political Climb

California Attorney General
Kamala Harris is one of two
black women who currently
hold an elected statewide executive office position.

In 1992, Pamela Carter’s opponent in the Indiana attorney general race honed his campaign attack to a simple message: Carter was black and she was a woman. “He decided that the best way to beat me was to make sure people knew that,” recalls Carter, who at the time was an attorney in the secretary of state’s office. “And then he used that to try to undermine my competency.”

It didn’t work. That November, Carter was elected to the seat with 52 percent of the vote, becoming the first black woman to win a state’s attorney general seat. She served one term and later proved instrumental as a mentor to Karen Freeman-Wilson, who at that time was a city court judge in Gary. When Carter’s successor stepped down in 2000, Freeman-Wilson was appointed to serve out the remainder of the term.

Their relationship is likely the single reason that Indiana is the only state where two black women have served at the statewide executive office level. Black women have made strides in winning elected office over the past two decades, but they still remain underrepresented in state and local politics, particularly for statewide executive offices. Just 10 black women in nine states have ever held an elected executive office position. They have served as secretaries of state, attorneys general, state treasurers and lieutenant governors, but no black woman has ever been elected governor, and few have even run. According to a recent report on the issue from Rutgers University’s Center for American Women and Politics and the Higher Heights Leadership Fund, their absence in the governor’s mansion is likely because of the “dearth of black women in lower statewide office.” For two-thirds of all female governors, holding another statewide office was a precursor to winning the governorship.

Those who have won statewide seats were recruited by their parties and had full financial backing. But even that kind of support is no guarantee of a win—Freeman-Wilson had it and still lost her election to keep her job after her appointment. Freeman-Wilson, who is now the two-term mayor of Gary, says recruitment of black women for statewide offices just isn’t very common.

Party leadership at state levels tends to be white and male, and without an exerted effort to seek out a diverse range of candidates, recruitment also tends to skew white and male. “Having someone do what Carter did for her, ‘who is willing to nudge you,’” she says, “who’s clearly oriented to public service and thinks outside of municipal and county government—is what’s missing.”

Beyond the numbers, increasing black women’s representation is essential to “promoting policy priorities, perspectives and solutions that may be lost,” says Rutgers University’s Kelly Dittmar, author of the report on black women in elected office. For instance, in the recent book Sisters in the Statehouse, researcher Nadia Brown chronicles black women’s influence in the Maryland General Assembly on issues like domestic violence, marriage equality and elder care. She notes that because black women are more likely than white women to be victims of domestic violence, there’s a greater chance that black female lawmakers will have personally experienced or witnessed abuse. That experience has a direct impact on their interpretation and approach to legislation, Brown says.

This year could show major progress for black women in elected office. California Attorney General Kamala Harris and Maryland Rep. Donna Edwards are running for U.S. Senate seats vacated by retiring women. If either wins, it would be the first time in more than a decade that a black woman has served in the Senate. Conditions in California and Maryland seem amenable: Both states have a history of electing women to the Senate, and Harris and Edwards are both running for open seats. It’s far more difficult without that kind of tailwind. In 2014 in Georgia, for instance, five black women ran as Democrats for statewide seats, and four of those races were against incumbents. All five lost by a landslide.

—Liz Farmer
New Library Tries a Novel Idea: Books, and a Place to Read Them

THESE DAYS, PUBLIC LIBRARIES are as likely to have video production studios and 3-D printers as they are shelves of books. One library in San Diego is pushing things even further, with a new biotech lab, where patrons can examine cells under microscopes and even extract and copy DNA.

But in Seattle, a new private library is offering a surprising old-fashioned amenity: a quiet place to sit and read a book.

Called Folio, the nonprofit membership library opened last month, just a block from the city’s Rem Koolhaas-designed public library, with about 300 members. Well-established “athenaeum” libraries—institutions devoted to literary or scientific study, like the libraries in Boston; Providence, R.I.; and elsewhere—can boast 200-year-old collections and cultivate somewhat of an elite status.

But Folio, which bills itself as the first new atheneum library in more than a century, has memberships as low as $10 a month, and its chief aim is to be a place where book lovers and writers can congregate—albeit quietly.

Located in a historic downtown building, Folio’s growing collection of about 15,000 books is built on private donations. In addition to comfortable reading rooms with good lighting, it offers afternoon and evening programming and separate workrooms for writers. “The aim is to recreate an old idea with new wrinkles,” says founder David Brewster. “It’s really what libraries were before the public library.”

Indeed, when public libraries first appeared in America in the late 1700s, they served a similar purpose. But as the institutions have evolved, their mission to educate has expanded beyond books and reading. Particularly in the past few decades, public libraries have responded to the role technology has played in changing how people learn and educate. Starting with computers for conducting research on the Internet, libraries’ missions have expanded rapidly to other areas to spur creative thought, innovation and entrepreneurship.

Today that means podcast studios, video classrooms and e-readers alongside—or, in some cases, instead of—old-school tomes. “We realized there were opportunities to be at the center of community learning,” says Sari Feldman, president of the American Library Association. “So libraries are taking different directions based on what the community needs and interests are.”

Far from competing for readers with Seattle’s public library, Brewster envisions Folio as a book-focused partner. His nonprofit has already hosted a pre-event reception for one of the public library’s author engagements, and he hopes more collaborations are on the way. Ultimately he sees the institution as a cultural contributor to downtown and a place beyond the city’s trendy bars and coffee shops for people to meet. “We’re for people who love books,” he says, “and for people who love people who love books.”

—Liz Farmer

THE BREAKDOWN

7640

Number of days that Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad had been in office on Dec. 14, the day he became the longest-serving governor in the nation’s history. First elected in 1982, when he went on to serve four terms, and then again in 2010 and 2014, Branstad surpassed New York Gov. George Clinton, who was first elected in 1777, as the governor with the longest tenure.

28

Number of death-row inmates executed in America in 2015, the lowest since 1991. The death penalty is now illegal in 18 states, while another 12 haven’t executed anyone in almost a decade.

8.2


12

Minimum age of residents who could vote on a set of budget priorities in Cambridge, Mass., in a “participatory budget process” in December. While 12-year-olds won’t be voting in many jurisdictions, a number of places have debated lowering the voting age to 16.
ANYTIME NETFLIX customers log onto their accounts, they receive automated suggestions for movies they might like. The software uses the customer’s “previously watched” data to make informed predictions about similar films that probably align with the person’s viewing tastes. Such suggestion services are ubiquitous with online companies: Amazon proffers a book you might like; Twitter tells you whom to follow; LinkedIn guides you to new career connections.

Similar applications in the public sector are less common, but a recent pilot study in Los Angeles County used the same approach to anticipate and prevent criminal behavior among foster children, with some success.

Between 2012 and 2014, the L.A. County Department of Children and Family Services screened children and teenagers to assess their risk of committing a crime and winding up in juvenile detention. The department used an actuarial tool to score children’s risk based on factors associated with criminal behavior. For children identified as high risk, caseworkers connected them to specific services—drug treatment, additional schooling and therapy—intended to address problems that might lead to criminal behavior. The department also monitored a similar group of children identified as high risk who did not receive a suite of specialized response services.

An evaluation by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency found that after six months, the children who received services had no arrests, whereas 9 percent of the control group did. Jesse Russell, a researcher involved with the evaluation, says the results represent a tentative first step in applying predictive analytics in a child welfare setting. Localities already have evidence-based strategies for helping foster children once they’ve been arrested. But Russell says the difference with Los Angeles County was the timing of the intervention: identifying a child before he became involved in the juvenile justice system. The county attempted to predict which children might commit a crime and focus assistance on those children before an arrest occurs.

Although L.A. County is on the leading edge in experimenting with predictive analytics in child welfare, local officials actually avoid the term. “Predictive” is a loaded word, says Armand Montiel, a spokesman for the county’s department of children and family services. It can set unrealistic expectations for the public, implying that the county knows ahead of time who will commit crimes. Technically, the phrase refers to the practice of analyzing past data to make educated guesses about what may happen in the future. The results are not definitive, of course. The county can’t really predict when a parent will abuse a child, or when a teenager is about to commit a crime. But it provides the county with a sense of where to devote its resources.

The pilot builds off a recent effort in 88 counties to bridge programs and communications between local child welfare agencies and peer agencies, such as school districts and juvenile probation departments. Since 2008, the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform at Georgetown University has assisted counties in improving data collection and coordinated case management so that local officials know when a foster child is arrested or suspended from school. As more local governments experiment with predictive analytics in child welfare, Russell advises caution. Netflix “will make lots of recommendations [because] so what if they get it wrong?” he says. “The consequences are so low.” When officials are trying to predict whether a child is safe to stay with her family, or needs attention from a caseworker to avoid run-ins with law enforcement, “the consequences of getting it wrong are massive.” People still must decide whether to separate a child from her parents, Russell says. “[The data] cannot make those tradeoffs for you.”

—J.B. Wogan
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The Hipster Next Door

We’re in a second phase of gentrification. It’s creating a lot of new tensions.

A re you a hipster? Probably not, at least if you accept the definition of the word that Norman Mailer made famous in the 1950s. To be a hipster, Mailer wrote, is “to live with death as immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self.”

No doubt there are a few people like that still hanging around our cities, some of them perhaps even contemporaries of Mailer. But that isn’t what we mean today when we say a neighborhood is full of hipsters. Nowadays, one can qualify as a hipster merely by being under 40 years old, living single or childless in the center of a city, drinking pour-over coffee and craft beer, and listening to the music of obscure homegrown indie rock bands.

There is a growing body of criticism and even scholarship devoted to the “morphing hipster” question. But why would we take a once-powerful word and dilute it to the point of absurdity? In part, it’s because our cities are changing at a rate of speed few of us can easily comprehend, and we are searching for ways to describe what’s going on. Recycling an old word in watered-down form is one small attempt to do that.

But the word at the heart of the uncertainty isn’t “hipster.” It’s “gentrification,” an idea that some of us applaud and some abhor, but one whose relevance to 21st-century urban life is impossible to deny. It has all happened rather fast.

A couple of decades ago, gentrification was a concept that applied to a select group of large American cities aspiring to global status: Chicago, New York, San Francisco, Seattle. We might do well to call this the first phase of gentrification. It began with the transformation of working-class and light-industrial neighborhoods—Wicker Park and Bucktown in Chicago, Soho, Tribeca and later Williamsburg in New York—into residential enclaves favored by the avant-garde young. The street crime that would have scared them off a few years earlier had begun to recede. At first, the colonizers were largely gays, artists and even hipsters by Mailer’s definition.

In the beginning, the housing in these early gentrification sites was more or less affordable to groups of young people with at least one steady income. It was possible for restless teenagers in small Midwest towns to dream of making it in New York in dance or theater or haute cuisine and then to find a place in Lower Manhattan where they could give it a try.

As the years went by, the gentrifying population of these neighborhoods was less prominently gay or artistic and more frequently just singles and couples in their 20s and 30s who felt drawn to the amenities that city life provided. There was a great deal of turnover among the settlers. But affordable apartments were still available to newcomers, if sometimes on the slightly more dangerous fringes of the original gentrified neighborhood.

This first wave of gentrification did not displace many people. Most of the areas that became part of that wave were either blue-collar territory that the previous residents had largely abandoned or old factory districts where few people had been living at all. In some cases, long-vacant downtown office buildings were converted to residences with the help of subsidies from city government. There was scarcely any gentrification of neighborhoods housing the poor.

That’s what gentrification looked like in the 1990s, in the few American cities that had begun to experience it in a significant way. It is not what gentrification looks like in those cities anymore. They have passed through the first phase of the process and embarked on a new version that is quite a bit different and in some ways disturbing.

In this second phase of gentrification, demand for living space in the reclaimed neighborhoods far outstrips the supply of condos and apartments available. Wicker Park, Tribeca, the South End in Boston, downtown Seattle and virtually all of San Francisco become unaffordable even to a couple with two decent incomes. They emerge as the province of the extremely rich. Luxury high-rise towers sprout up wherever there is room for them. Much of this property becomes the domain of speculators, many of them from foreign countries and most of them absent for a large part of the year.

The soaring property values in the center of America’s hottest cities create a whole series of other consequences. With a large enough percentage of absentee owners and super-rich tenants, the community cohesion that nearly always marks first phase gentrification begins to break down. Commercial rents rise so much that local shopkeepers can’t afford them. The quirky coffee shops and mom-and-pop retail storefronts that attracted the original gentrifiers to the neighborhood begin to disappear, replaced by banks, chain drug stores and high-end boutiques.

As the second phase of gentrification takes hold, several other important things begin to happen. With the demand for housing in the original gentrified neighborhoods exceeding the supply, middle-class singles and couples, priced out of the original renewal area, decide to settle in neighborhoods farther from the center that had never been considered candidates for gentrification: African-American neighborhoods like Fort Greene and Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn; Hispanic enclaves like Logan Square and Humboldt Park in Chicago.
As this happens, tensions between the existing residents of color and the mostly white new arrivals inevitably heat up. (It was in Fort Greene in 2014 that the film-maker Spike Lee accused white newcomers of being part of a “Christopher Columbus syndrome”—although his exact words were more colorful.) The demographics of the central city as a whole begin to tilt in a white direction. It took only a few years for Washington, D.C., and Atlanta, both two-thirds black at one time, to lose their African-American majorities.

Suddenly and important changes begin to take place in the suburbs during the second phase as well. Poorer suburban communities take in minorities who either are forced to leave or wish to leave the gentrifying neighborhoods closer in. More affluent suburbs, most of them car-dependent communities built in the 1970s and 1980s, look for ways to attract the gentrification overflow. They convert failing shopping malls into outdoor lifestyle centers that attempt to recreate an urban shopping experience. They reconfigure some of their main streets, rush to create bike lanes and tout themselves, wherever possible, as pedestrian-friendly. This is a very rough picture of what has happened in the past 20 years in the cities and metro areas generally rated as the most successful in the country. The details will be familiar to anyone who has lived in one of these cities during those years. Not all of it is pretty. Even the most ardent supporter of gentrification will find it difficult to defend the invasion of the super rich and the decline of small-scale commerce that has occurred in Lower Manhattan. Or to dismiss the reality that, as the process moves farther out beyond the city centers, some displacement of the poor does take place.

Still, there are realities on the other side of the ledger as well. Crime-ridden and physically deteriorating neighborhoods like Bedford-Stuyvesant and Humboldt Park become safer and more attractive, and they acquire the grocery stores and other shops that have been missing for decades. Much of the time, public schools improve. The pros and cons of the gentrification process can be debated ad infinitum, but it’s impossible to deny that both positives and negatives exist. But there is one positive effect that is sometimes underestimated. At the very moment that the first phase is coming to a close in such places as Chicago and New York, it is just taking root in second-tier cities: Cincinnati, Indianapolis and Milwaukee, among others. In these cities, even more than in the first group, the changes are focused downtown. The downtown streets no longer empty out at the end of the workday. First to arrive are restaurants, more inviting than anything the city has had before, and nightlife that has not existed there for a long time. The millennials who patronize these businesses express a desire to live downtown. It is easy to build new residential towers because there is plenty of property there that has been unused or underused for decades. Displacement isn’t really an issue, because hardly anyone lived in the vicinity.

The interesting question for these cities is whether they will move on to the second phase, with all of its accompanying negatives. My guess is probably not. Indianapolis, Milwaukee and their counterparts aren’t global cities; they are not likely to attract the foreigners and speculators who have plagued New York and San Francisco. The demand for central city living may exceed the supply for a while, but there is enough undeveloped land in most of these city centers to meet the demand and prevent prices from becoming exorbitant in the near future. In the end, these second-tier cities may be better able to sustain the urbanist vision of community than the ones where the process began decades ago.

Many seemingly contradictory things are going on in American cities at the same time. They are enough to confuse anyone, even a serious student of urban life. Who exactly is living in these reclaimed neighborhoods? Why are they there? How many of these people will want to stay for life? You can make a reasonable case for almost any scenario. Or you can just call them hipsters and leave it at that.

Email aehrenhalt@governing.com

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Market Misfires

The private sector has answers to many policy questions. They aren’t always right.

It’s no secret that Americans like private markets better than they like government. In a 2014 Pew Research Center poll, 70 percent of Americans said they believed they were better off in a free market system. Only in South Korea and Germany do citizens like markets more.

From environmental policy to health care, this basic finding has framed the critical decisions of government in recent years. If we want to take on a new policy challenge, citizens and policy experts seem to agree, it’s better to trust the states than Washington. And the states should do as much as possible through private markets.

The strategy has launched some remarkable policy innovations. But most of the time, it hasn’t worked out so well in practice.

Take the movement to reduce carbon emissions. In the 2000s, many states embarked on a revolutionary cap-and-trade strategy. They would set a cap on acceptable greenhouse gas levels, businesses would pay for the right to emit the gases and the hidden hand of the market would reduce pollution by the largest amount at the lowest cost. By 2008, according to a count by the University of Michigan’s Barry Rabe in the journal Governance, 23 states had joined the effort. It seemed a perfect solution. New markets developed, and regional consortia planned to reduce greenhouse gases by 10 percent or more within a few years.

But that perfect solution didn’t last long. Rabe found that, within five years, more than half the states had walked away from their cap-and-trade commitment. The market-based alternative to command-and-control regulations evaporated as a state-based policy tool.

Then there’s the marketplace system at the core of the Affordable Care Act. It’s easy to forget that the Obama administration originally was trying to avoid using a Washington-driven hammer. Instead, the plan aimed to provide health insurance to everyone by encouraging the states to do the job—and having the states work through market-based insurance exchanges to make the policies available. Relying on state-based markets seemed a logical step, both ideologically and pragmatically. It stood to minimize complaints about big government by pushing policy implementation into the private sector, and it echoed the Pew poll results. After all, there’s scarcely a more popular refrain than the one that proclaims government should be run more like a private business. But as in the cap-and-trade example, this market-based strategy just didn’t work well. State implementation proved wildly uneven. Federal policymakers found themselves without the results they sought. And everyone came away more convinced than ever that government couldn’t solve problems like this, even though many of the problems were rooted in private market failures.

By the end of 2015, 38 states had declined to set up health-care exchanges, leaving the federal government to step in and create them. Three states—Hawaii, Nevada and Oregon—tried the exchange approach and backed out when enrollment was lower and costs were higher than expected. Some states, like Maryland and Washington, enthusiastically embraced the exchanges but fumbled the launch. Pressed by angry Republicans, who criticized the states’ lack of accountability for federal funds, the Obama administration took back $200 million in grants it had made to states that had struggled to launch their exchanges.

Cap and trade seemed like a perfect solution to reducing carbon emissions. Within five years, however, more than half the states had abandoned the program.
Why did these efforts fail? Part of the answer has to do with the partisan makeup of the statehouses. Republicans hold 31 of the 50 governorships, and many of the Republican governors came to office touting free markets and smaller government. In most states, the champions of aggressive policy innovation are on the run. Fewer citizens in these conservative states believe that climate change is manmade, and that reduces the incentives for state-level action. The fumbled launch of the Affordable Care Act website eroded public support for health-care reform. The appetite for strong state policy initiatives has gradually evaporated.

Moreover, as Rabe points out, managing the pollution market mechanisms turned out to be hard, and financially strapped states had a shrinking capacity to do the job well. That was even truer for the health exchanges, where some of the most ambitious states stumbled despite their aggressive efforts.

The fundamental flaw lies in two assumptions: that markets always work better than governments and that markets will run themselves if government gets out of the way. The first assumption is the stuff of fierce ideological debate, but the second is really a settled question. Markets just don’t run themselves in delivering public goods, because most of the time they are being asked to do things they aren’t used to doing. And because policymakers tend to assume that the markets will take care of themselves, they often don’t build governmental capacity to steer the process. The reformers then end up running after problems as they develop down the line.

It’s tempting to dance around the big battles over the size of government by assuming private markets can step in and fix everything. Too often, we end up abandoning the markets, disappointing the customers and undermining everyone’s confidence in leadership. There’s no sidestepping the fact that government requires governing.

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POLITICS WATCH

Vote, It’s the Law

Is mandatory voting anti-democratic?

There’s already one thing we can say for sure about this year’s elections: Not enough people are going to vote. Turnout in 2012 was 55 percent, down from the presidential election held four years earlier. In the midterm elections of 2014, only 36 percent of Americans voted—the worst showing in more than 70 years. Such anemic results have resuscitated an idea that’s been put into practice in about 30 other countries: making voting a civic requirement. “It would be transformative if everybody voted,” President Obama said last year.

But even supporters of compulsory voting don’t think it’s going to happen in the U.S. The very idea of forcing people to vote seems, well, anti-democratic. What’s more, it’s a partisan issue. As Obama himself suggests, the people who tend not to vote often look like Democrats—the poor, the young, members of minority groups. One recent study of ballot measures in Switzerland found that compulsory voting boosted the progressive position by up to 20 percentage points.

Most academic research, however, has found that mandatory voting does not move the average voter to the left, according to Jason Brennan, a professor at Georgetown University and co-author of Compulsory Voting: For and Against. “There’s a widespread belief among Democrats that compulsory voting would deliver more states to Democrats,” he says. “It turns out that’s not true. The people who vote and the people who don’t vote are roughly the same in terms of their partisan preferences.”

That doesn’t mean the population of actual voters perfectly reflects the nation as a whole. The biggest difference between voters and nonvoters is not partisan ideology but information, suggests Brennan. “The crop of people who are not voting are less informed than the people who are voting right now.”

That alone leads to conflicting opinions, even among members of the same party. Martin Gilens, a political scientist at Princeton University, says so-called “low-information members” of the Democratic Party hold views on issues such as gay rights, military force and free trade that are the opposite of Democrats who voted. But even supporters of compulsory voting don’t think it’s going to happen in the U.S.

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Battling the Rural Blues
Alaska is trying to make mental health care easier to access in remote places.

Barrow, Alaska, is America's northernmost city. The town of nearly 4,400 people is accessible only by airplane or boat. Because of its remoteness, Barrow wants to make sure it never faces a shortage of mental health workers. Last summer, the Alaska Health Workforce Coalition held a weeklong academy in Barrow for 19 high school students from 14 villages around the state to teach them about mental health. The coalition is made up of several state entities, including the Department of Health and Social Services, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and the University of Alaska. The goal of programs like the academy is to get kids interested in pursuing careers in mental health and interested in coming back to rural parts of Alaska to practice it. “There’s a real homegrown nature to it,” says the coalition’s director, Kathy Craft. “We’re keeping our talent inside Alaska.”

Barrow may be an extreme example of isolation, but the problem it faces is all too familiar across the nation’s rural landscape. Rates of mental illness are higher in rural and remote areas, a product of factors that include isolation, more conservative attitudes toward seeking help for mental health problems and a lower concentration of mental health professionals.

The numbers bear this out. Paul Mackie, president of the National Association for Rural Mental Health, found in a study that for every 10 miles you move from a city, it becomes 3 percent more difficult to find a behavioral health worker. “If you’re, say, a hundred miles from an urban center, you can only imagine how hard it is to get that kind of help if you need it,” he says. The need is especially great in Alaska, which has the nation’s second-highest suicide rate: almost 23.3 per 100,000 people in 2013. (Montana has the highest rate, 23.9 per 100,000.) Rural areas in general tend to have higher rates of suicide—for youth, the rate is almost double that of urban areas—so placing mental health workers in the most remote areas can have a particularly strong impact.

Mackie thinks the stigma in rural areas regarding people who seek mental health care is diminishing. But even so, the difficulty of finding mental health workers remains. And a potential bright spot in rural mental health care, telemedicine, has its downsides. Of the 19 million Americans without access to high-speed Internet, Mackie points out, 13.5 million live in rural areas. Additionally, telemedicine hardware and software require IT support, so even if a community health clinic gets a compatible device, it’s useless when something goes wrong: “I can’t tell you the number of clinics I’ve seen with expensive telehealth equipment collecting dust,” says Dennis Mohatt, vice president for behavioral health at the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. “It’s broken and they simply can’t find anyone to fix it.”

Nevertheless, experts think telemedicine can have an impact on rural mental health issues, but say it should be done in conjunction with finding and training community mental health workers, as the Alaska Health Workforce Coalition is trying to do. The initiatives the coalition puts together involve governmental organizations working together to create more holistic approaches, and, in one respect at least, Alaska’s sparse population may work to its advantage by making it easier to break through bureaucratic silos. “Everyone knows everyone,” Craft says. “If we want a state legislator to act on something, we can just call them directly. That’s a nice advantage of being so rural.”

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Creating a Climate for Change
Massachusetts launches a tool to help policymakers protect fish and wildlife.

Among the current presidential candidates, climate change is still very much up for debate—whether it’s the result of human action or whether it’s even happening. But for many at the state and local level, the matter is settled: Climate change is real, and it’s threatening plants, wildlife and infrastructure. The only question policymakers have regarding climate change is what they can do about it.

That’s where the Massachusetts Wildlife Climate Action Tool can help. Launched in November, the website provides urban planners, landowners and residents in the state with information about climate change impacts on fish and wildlife, as well as on-the-ground actions they can take. “We’re all struggling to understand what the implications of climate change are, but we can’t afford to sit around and wait until we have a full understanding to actually take some steps,” says Scott Jackson of the Massachusetts Climate Adaptation Partnership, which developed and now oversees the site. “With this tool, we try to point people to the best resources available to guide actions so they don’t feel helpless in the face of climate change.”

The website is the brainchild of John O’Leary, who until recently was the assistant director of the state Division of Fisheries & Wildlife. Over the course of his work on climate change adaptation, O’Leary came to realize that understanding vulnerabilities is not the same as giving people direction on what they can do to help. The Division of Fisheries & Wildlife partnered with the University of Massachusetts Amherst and the U.S. Geological Survey to create the tool. They targeted it at the local level because, according to Jackson, it’s at this level that people most seemed to need access to data.

The way the tool works is that users look up different species and habitat types to see what beneficial climate actions they can take. Entries include brook trout, which are impacted by warming stream temperatures and fragmented habitat, and the state’s forests of birch, beech and maple, which are threatened by warming temperatures. To save brook trout, for example, the site recommends restoring the grasslands along riverbanks to maintain cool water temperatures. “We want to use this tool as sort of a centerpiece for creating a community of practice,” says Jackson, “so that as people start to take action on climate change, their examples can be highlighted and integrated into the content of the tool.”

Along these lines, the tool could easily be replicated in other states. Jackson says that while states would need to create state-specific databases, the technology could easily be shared. Beyond that, the Climate Adaptation Partnership is trying to determine the next phase of the tool. Some of the ideas the group has thrown around include adding additional species and habitat vulnerabilities; integrating work done on the coast regarding risks posed by sea-level rise, storm damage and coastal flooding; and incorporating infrastructure vulnerabilities. “Even though we’ve assembled quite a bit of information, I don’t want to downplay the importance of new information,” says Jackson. “We’re going to be very keen to integrate it as it becomes available both from the science but also from practice. As people try things and as people do things, we want to learn from their efforts and we want to integrate that into the tool.”

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Methodology:
In August and September 2015, the Governing Institute conducted an online survey or telephone interviews with 41 state officials who have direct involvement in the implementation of WIOA. These respondents were screened to ensure knowledge of, and participation in, the implementation of WIOA within their state. States not interviewed or surveyed: Arizona, Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Washington.

In July 2014, Congress authorized WIOA for 2015 to 2020 to better align the workforce system with education and economic development. WIOA is a reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 and features key improvements, including increased accountability and performance reporting from government agencies.

How States Are Investing in INNOVATION & TECHNOLOGY to Meet WIOA Requirements

The Governing Institute surveyed and interviewed key decision-makers in 41 states about the benefits and challenges of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and where they are in investing in technology and innovation for WIOA.

CHALLENGES REMAIN:
WIOA benefits are promising, but states still have technology gaps.

1. CONNECTING DISPARATE SYSTEMS
   “Basic sharing of information between agencies and partners is the biggest gap.”

2. UPGRADING CURRENT SYSTEMS
   “We are having difficulty with a very old mainframe technology application that needs to be upgraded to become more flexible and mobile.”

3. ESTABLISHING A COMMON INTAKE PROCESS
   “We have no common intake, referral or reporting system.”

4. IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AND MOBILITY
   “We want to create mobile apps for citizens who don’t have technology in the home.”

5. ENSURING CONNECTIVITY
   “Internet access is often missing or broadband is low.”

1. All quotes are from respondents to open-ended questions of the Governing Institute’s survey.
States are implementing technologies to help meet WIOA requirements.

- Labor Exchanges/Online Career Portals
- Internal Labor Market Information Tools
- Case Management Systems
- Mobile Apps and Smartphone Resources
- Online Training and Certification Software
- Career-Readiness Databases
- Customer Relationship Management Software

Some states are pushing the status quo and implementing innovative strategies.

- Increasing use of non-governmental resources to support agency missions
- Using social media to benchmark performance
- Developing distance learning training
- Leveraging real-time labor demand and supply data
- Using specialized programming for incarcerated citizens, Native American tribes and dislocated coal mine workers

**Perceptions of WIOA:**
An overwhelming majority of states think WIOA is positive.

- 81% Positive Perception

**Benefits of WIOA:**
States believe WIOA can offer the following benefits.

- 76% Improved Collaboration Among Agencies
- 63% Increased Focus on Needed Areas
- 46% Better Career Pathways/Alignment with Education
- 22% Improved Collaboration Among Regional Areas

**Innovation Being Used:**

- Improved Collaboration Among Agencies
- Increased Focus on Needed Areas
- Better Career Pathways/Alignment with Education
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In debates over housing, there is often a false linkage between housing and height. If you want to substantially add housing, or what planning geeks call density, people sometimes talk as if you have no choice but to go up—often by a lot. Sometimes developers and their advocates promote this dubious assertion. It is an important issue, because as Americans and cities fall in love again with walkable neighborhoods, and with related amenities such as convenient transit and vibrant streetfront shopping, there also is a growing recognition that having more people per square foot makes these things possible. The Kitsilano method, which a planner friend of mine called “invisible density,” is one way to do it.

That’s not to suggest that nobody is putting up tall buildings in Vancouver. In the heart of downtown, for example, the city has its well known “point towers,” skyscraper-high apartment buildings atop street-level stores and businesses. They have given the city an identity and distinct skyline, as well as a lot of new homes. In the nearby West End, though, the city is going for a mix of these two approaches. This district has both single-family homes and mid-rise apartment buildings. It would be nice to have more of the latter, say city planners. To allow this to happen, the city is beginning to tackle one of the most productive avenues for adding more housing: parking policies.

Michael Gordon, a senior downtown Vancouver planner, says the city is now researching parking in the West End with the idea of encouraging what is called “shared parking.” Under such a plan, a parking space in a private garage could serve more than one driver. Apartment buildings whose spaces are largely empty during the day could serve business traffic, and spaces in commercial buildings could serve businesses. They have given the city an identity and distinct skyline, as well as a lot of new homes. In the nearby West End, though, the city is going for a mix of these two approaches. This district has both single-family homes and mid-rise apartment buildings. It would be nice to have more of the latter, say city planners. To allow this to happen, the city is beginning to tackle one of the most productive avenues for adding more housing: parking policies.

The Kitsilano neighborhood in Vancouver, British Columbia

Kitsilano, a lovely old neighborhood in Vancouver, British Columbia, looks much the same as it did a century ago when it was designed around a streetcar line. It still has enormous homes perched on lawns with alleys in the back, all within sight of downtown’s shimmering skyscrapers. But unlike in 1930, when the neighborhood was home to a population of about 28,000, a lot more people live in Kitsilano now. By 2011, about 41,000 were living there. With family sizes smaller, the number of residences has increased by an even larger percentage. But just where are these new people and their homes if Kitsilano looks largely unchanged?

They are tucked away, here and there. The big old houses have been split up into two, three or even five apartments, at first illegally and then in recent years with the city’s encouragement. Developers and architects have gotten good at swelling these homes with additional rooms and floors without much altering their curb appearance. Along back alleys, new freestanding homes, locally called “laneway houses,” have been added.

The result is a lot more dwellings, and that density has several advantages. It keeps housing prices lower and gives more people a chance to live in a popular neighborhood. The large number of people make it more likely that a nice shop or café will open up. And it gives the area the population it needs to make transit work, be it bus, streetcar or a public bike program. The one thing that hasn’t come to Kitsilano, however, is new tall buildings. The scale and character of the neighborhood has stayed much the same as it was when artists and hippies rediscovered the rundown area in the 1960s.
could serve residential parkers at night. If shared parking were possible, more buildings could be constructed without having to add parking spaces proportionally.

Reducing or even changing the supply of parking has long been an acutely sensitive subject, but Gordon believes this is changing because young people care less about parking. “We see a real generational divide,” Gordon says. “There are those who are all wound up about parking, and there are those who are really looking for a larger apartment so they can have a child or two.”

Other cities are exploring this as well. The popular Capitol Hill District in Seattle has produced a report called District Shared Parking that examines specific technologies that can be used to make the idea work: “A range of studies show that the more parking is decoupled from residential rent, the lower the cost of housing,” the report says. “Additionally, by only allowing one user for a given parking space, individual users are denied the opportunity to lower their costs through sharing.” A well-designed shared parking system should reduce the amount of parking spaces built in new construction and further separate parking payments from residential and commercial rents.

What is exciting is that technology, similar to that which is making Zipcars and Uber-style services possible, will probably make sharing a parking space easier. Apps and real-time feeds can tell us where parking spaces are available. When put in place with other policies, such as getting rid of minimum parking space requirements for new buildings, the result can be more housing at lower costs.

As many Americans and others embrace what some call urban lifestyles, and as the dream of the home in the suburbs with the three-car garage becomes less universal, just how to get to the kind of residential density that works becomes a more important issue. Understanding that adding homes doesn’t have to equal adding height is one step.

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Zoning Meets Airbnb and Feastly
The sharing economy is challenging traditional land use ordinances.

We used to work in offices. We used to stay in hotels. We used to eat at restaurants. But now many of us work at coffee shops, we stay in other people’s homes via Airbnb and we eat dinner in a chef’s home dining room thanks to emerging websites like Feastly.

The sharing economy is changing the way we do a lot of things. It’s also disrupting a lot of things, not least of which is how we zone. You can complain all you want about zoning being a tool of exclusion and a remarkable micromanager of the economy—I’ve done so on many occasions—but at its core zoning exists to protect people’s health and quality of life from, say, nosy industrial activities or excessive traffic. A complicated regulatory apparatus built up over a century, zoning was ruled constitutional 89 years ago by an extremely conservative Supreme Court. They concluded that modern urban life had become so complicated that restrictions on private property rights were warranted.

Now the sharing economy seems likely to toss the whole thing out the window—at least in urban areas. In practical terms, there’s little differentiation these days in big cities between where people work, where they sleep and where they eat. The cities that administer complicated zoning ordinances are too overwhelmed to actually enforce them.

But does this mean we should just get rid of zoning altogether? I don’t think we should—at least not entirely. We still need certain rules on land use segregation, for instance, to make sure that toxic activities don’t take place in residential areas. But the sharing economy surely strengthens the argument for a more market-based approach.

That’s where form-based codes come into play. Originally popularized two decades ago by the New Urbanism movement, a form-based code is a land use regulatory tool that focuses more on the form of the buildings than on what goes on inside them. Get the buildings right, the thinking goes, and let the market figure out what activities should go on inside them. Is it an apartment or a hotel? A dining room or a restaurant? The market will figure that out.

Of course, a more market-oriented approach to zoning comes with downsides. It’s worth bearing in mind that not all people—and not all activities—are treated equally by the market. Affluent folks can pay more to sleep in an Airbnb bedroom, for instance, but such uses could squeeze lower-income folks out of houses and apartments they need. So there will likely have to be some brakes placed on the market approach to land use—like, for example, dedicating Airbnb hotel taxes to affordable housing, as some California municipalities are considering. But even with some restrictions, market-oriented zoning is a better reflection of how people live today than old zoning regulations that had folks fighting over the color of doors and the size of lettering in store windows.

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If you’re homeless and you’re a veteran, there may be an apartment waiting for you. If you’re not a veteran, the prospects aren’t so good.

By J.B. Wogan

Photographs by David Kidd

Georgia Alexander gets the keys to her new apartment after signing a lease at a Washington, D.C., housing event.
A week before Christmas, Georgia Alexander found herself staring at her first apartment lease in six years. For the past few months, she had been living out of her car while her 6-year-old son, Jaylin, stayed with relatives. When she was pregnant with Jaylin in 2009, her doctor recommended that she leave her job at Target, where she unloaded trucks and stocked the store. She had been unemployed and frequently homeless ever since.

Now her homelessness was ending, and it was clear why: She’s a military veteran.

For 13 years, Alexander was a workgroup manager in the U.S. Air Force, installing software and making minor repairs to office computers. She lived all over, from Dayton, Ohio, to South Korea. But she grew up in the District of Columbia, and that’s where she returned after leaving the service in 2006.

In December, Alexander attended a “meet-and-lease” event for homeless veterans hosted by the D.C. Housing Authority. More than a dozen vets came hoping to find a place to live. Landlords sat at a long table, ready to offer apartments to those who had federal rental vouchers. Alexander had all her documents in order. As she filled out her paperwork, a D.C. housing official nodded and said, “Home for the holidays!” Afterward, Alexander hugged the housing official, a woman she had just met, and cried. “It’s just a relief of stress for me,” she said. “I finally have a place for me and my son.”

There are many stories like Alexander’s in the District of Columbia. The number of homeless veterans in the nation’s capital has declined by 36 percent since the end of the recession. And the district isn’t alone. Nationally, nearly 48,000 veterans were homeless on a single night in January 2015, representing a 35 percent drop from 2009. The reductions have been so dramatic in some places—New Orleans, Houston, Las Vegas—that at least a dozen mayors and one governor now say they’ve effectively eliminated homelessness among veterans.

But most people who are homeless are not veterans. And in many of the nation’s large cities, homelessness among the general population appears to be getting worse. Comparing 2009 and 2015, one-night counts revealed major increases in homelessness in Seattle-King County (up 13 percent), Los Angeles (up 24 percent) and New York City (up 53 percent). In the Portland, Ore., area, overall homelessness has gone down in the last few years, but since 2010, the number who live outside the shelter system—in cars, in abandoned buildings or on the street—has climbed almost 19 percent. Last fall, the mayors of Portland and Seattle declared states of emergency because of the rise in unsheltered homelessness, as did the governor of Hawaii. The mayor of Los Angeles also declared the situation in his city an emergency, though he eventually abandoned a plan to seek emergency legal powers.

The problems facing Los Angeles, Portland and Seattle should be familiar to political leaders in other large cities. According to counts conducted in 2014 and 2015, overall homelessness in the nation’s 50 largest urban areas increased by 3 percent during that one year. The number of unsheltered individuals in those cities went up 10.5 percent. The number of unsheltered people in homeless families grew by 18.8 percent. It’s the family problem that threatens to undo much of the progress made in recent years.

Homelessness among veterans continues to decline in large cities for one reason. A federal strategy to deal with it has actually worked. In 2009, the Obama administration set a goal of ending veteran homelessness in six years. To do this, Congress expanded rental vouchers for veterans, and federal agencies emphasized a “housing first” model, in which people could move into an apartment while receiving help to address employment, mental health...
or addiction issues. But the same strategy hasn’t been scaled up to help the 89 percent of the homeless population who are not veterans. In growing cities with a scarcity of affordable apartments, cuts to federal housing assistance have only made the problem worse.

Right now, it’s hard to say whether success in lowering homelessness will be limited to veterans, or whether this will be the first step in a longer campaign to fight homelessness among the rest of the population.

In December 2013, Salt Lake City became one of the first cities to announce an effective end to chronic veteran homelessness. It didn’t mean that no one would ever become homeless again, but federal and local officials said they had housed every veteran who had been homeless continuously for at least a year, or repeatedly for three years. They believed they had the funding and infrastructure to prevent any veteran from falling into a chronic pattern of homelessness in the future. The only exceptions were veterans who refused housing when they were offered help.

It was an achievement that made national news, but “what it turned into for me was huge criticism,” says former Salt Lake City Mayor Ralph Becker. “We had people saying, ‘Look at the people on the streets, on our benches, at our intersections impeding traffic.’ They said it was a bogus claim.”

The blowback Becker experienced stems from a contrast between reports of “ended homelessness” and the visual evidence of people still sleeping in public places. Salt Lake City officials were careful to couch their milestone as “effectively ending chronic veteran homelessness,” but the qualifiers got lost amid public debate. The number of homeless veterans was going down, but it was hard for citizens to know who was a veteran and who wasn’t. Nor was there any way for them to know how long a person had been without a place to live. They saw people in sleeping bags on park benches, and they concluded the problem wasn’t getting better. The conspicuous presence of homeless people in public places, and especially downtown, became an issue in Becker’s 2015 bid for re-election. Opponents accused him of not doing enough to address it, and polling showed most voters agreed. On Election Day, he was narrowly unseated after previously leading by 500 votes. The last thing they want to be is assessed again, especially when the system has failed them before.”

The data collected by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) confirm that on any given night, a fair amount of homelessness still exists in Salt Lake City and its surrounding county. In the 2015 point-in-time count, roughly 2,200 people in the city were homeless, about 90 of them unsheltered. Even among veterans, some were homeless: 288 overall and 10 veterans who were not in shelters. For a city of 190,000 people, it wasn’t a lot, but it wasn’t zero. Some veterans were still homeless. “As an absolute number,” Becker says, “[zero] is probably aspirational.”

The downsides of declaring victory too soon have made other cities more cautious. D.C. now keeps a list of all homeless veterans and how they’re interacting with public services. When the 2016 counts are released later this year, D.C. officials expect to help the 89 percent of the homeless population who are not veterans. In growing cities with a scarcity of affordable apartments, cuts to federal housing assistance have only made the problem worse.

...
veterans, especially in growing metropolitan areas. They aren't receiving it.

To some extent, general homelessness is tied to housing prices. In big cities and their surrounding areas, rental vacancy rates are the lowest they’ve been in more than a decade. The shortage of units has driven up rental costs, and wages haven’t kept pace. In 2014, real rents in the country were 7 percent higher than they had been in 2001, but household incomes were 9 percent lower, according to the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University.

Historically, federal vouchers have helped low-income renters afford apartment units in expensive real estate markets. But in 2011, spending cuts under the federal sequestration agreement resulted in the elimination of vouchers for roughly 100,000 U.S. households. (By comparison, rental vouchers for veterans actually received a funding boost.) Because these vouchers are not an entitlement, there is no requirement that spending meet the need. The result is that nearly three-quarters of the low-income households that qualify for assistance are not currently receiving federal rental vouchers.

Although the federal government still provides about 2.2 million rental vouchers to low-income households, the only vouchers that have increased in number under the Obama administration are those funded jointly by HUD and the Department of Veterans Affairs. Since 2008, the federal government has awarded about 80,000 vouchers to 101,000 veterans and their families. In recent White House budgets, HUD officials have requested an expansion of “mainstream” vouchers for nonveterans, but Congress hasn’t appropriated the money.

In the early 2000s, many cities and counties across the country released 10-year plans to end homelessness. These focused on the most pressing issue at the time, which was the small slice of the homeless population that lived in shelters or in public places for a year or more. To a large extent, this problem has been dealt with. Last year, about 42,000 unsheltered individuals were chronically homeless, marking a 44 percent decline from 2007. But in large metro areas, there has been a rise in family homelessness, a problem that is more difficult to solve. There are good reasons why the Obama administration sought to end homelessness for veterans first. It wasn’t
Each new tenant left with donated sheets and blankets.
After years of living on the streets, Ronnie Winston celebrates his first moments in his new apartment.

just because of their record of service. It was also because the numbers were comparatively small, and the federal government knew how to address their problems.

Experience has shown that when homeless individuals are placed in apartments and connected with support services, they tend to stay housed. Particularly for veterans, where enough federal vouchers are available, “it’s a possibility to end homelessness,” says Mary Cunningham, a researcher who studies the issue at the Urban Institute, a think tank in Washington, D.C. “I feel more skeptical on the families side.” Scale, of course, is part of the reason for her skepticism. Veterans, who tend to be single adult men, represent about a tenth of all homeless people. By comparison, more than a third of the homeless population are families with children, most of them households led by single mothers.

Family homelessness has closer links to larger economic forces. In general, parents don’t lose their housing because of psychotic episodes or substance abuse. The treatment homeless parents need is a job that pays enough to cover rent in an expensive city. In theory, the solutions for family homelessness are straightforward. “You either help people increase their income or you can increase affordable housing,” Cunningham says. Either scenario would require significant investment, more than a city or county could spend on its own.

Barb Ritter, director of Michigan’s Homeless Information Management System, describes the recent experience with veterans as a glass half full and half empty. It’s half full because government officials know major reductions in family homelessness are possible and they know what’s required to reduce it. Parents need help paying their energy bills and rent. They need help finding a job, or a better paying job. And they need access to those forms of assistance either before they become homeless or right after. But it’s just as easy to see family homelessness as a half-empty glass. Veterans, after all, receive bipartisan support in Congress and represent such a small part of the overall homeless population. “It’s possible to [solve the family problem],” Ritter says, “but the amount of resources would have to be exponentially higher because there are more people. Society would have to decide that they aren’t going to leave families homeless, period.”

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IS GOVERNMENT HIRING FINALLY MOVING OUT OF THE STONE AGE?

BY KATHERINE BARRETT AND RICHARD GREENE
During the Great Recession years, filling jobs in the public sector was uncomplicated. With unemployment rates high, there was no shortage of applicants. “When we had the downturn, we had no troubles hiring,” reports Rock Regan, the former chief information officer of Connecticut. “We got a lot of people.”

The unstable economy also meant that a huge group of older workers ready for retirement did not step down. The devastating impacts of the stock market near-crash between 2007 and 2009 caused many older workers to defer plans to live on retirement income.

Today, the hiring situation has been reversed. Although the number of applicants for most public jobs is still relatively high in many states, the national unemployment rate is hovering around 5 percent. That means the number of qualified candidates is shrinking. States and localities are trying to attract new employees by dipping into the same limited personnel pool as other governments and, more notably, the private sector. “When private industry is expanding and the economy is growing, we can’t compete,” Missouri’s then-CIO Tim Robyn told a National Association of State Chief Information Officers’ (NASCIO) conference last spring.

At the same time, the groundswell of retirements is materializing. Men and women who delayed that decision are beginning to leave their government jobs—ready or not. “You can delay retirement, but you can’t delay aging,” says Neil Reichenberg, executive director of the International Public Management Association for Human Resources (IPMA-HR). “So baby boomers are leaving their jobs one way or another.”

Numbers underscore the openings in government ranks. In its annual survey, the Center for State and Local Government Excellence found that 73 percent of states and localities were hiring—up from 66 percent in the previous year’s survey. For many governments, the report noted, “there is a sense of urgency about recruitment, retention and succession planning.”

Urgency or not, many governments are locked in antiquated systems and outdated processes that stand in the way of bringing in the best and brightest. At a time when state budgets are loosening, their strings and dormant programs are being refreshed, human resources departments are faced with the need to focus on improving their capacity to hire and to retain employees. Many governments are finding that if they want to hire the next generation of public employees, they’ll need to shift from the old ways of doing business.

In the meantime, governments are dealing with the consequences of being unable to hire the most competent people. One effect is that employees are overworked. A number of states are already experiencing that. In Pennsylvania, average overtime costs per employee have gone up 15 percent since 2010. In Arizona, overtime rose about 25 percent between 2011 and 2015. In some governments, when hiring doesn’t keep up with necessary staffing, it can create unsafe conditions. Corrections departments are a case in point. A study in 2015 by West Virginia’s Joint Committee on Governance and Finance warned that the increased inmate-to-staff ratio “can increase staff overtime and stress levels while reducing inmate and staff communication. This can affect the safety and security of the institution.”

Inadequate hiring protocols can affect economic development. If states and localities are going to attract businesses and citizens, they need to provide services that are competitive with other places. “Minnesota provides great service,” says Ann O’Brien, assistant commissioner of enterprise human resources in that state. “If we don’t get the talent we need to provide those services, then we’re failing.”

Difficulties in hiring depend on a number of variables. If a facility is in an out-of-the-way place—prisons and rural healthcare clinics, for instance—it’s tougher to find applicants. There are also certain positions for which hiring is particularly demanding, such as with jobs with hazardous working conditions, with a clientele that can be difficult or even hostile, or with irregular hours where employees have to work weekend or overnight shifts.

Additionally, jobs that require very specialized skill sets often remain vacant for a longer period. In the Center for State and Local Government Excellence Survey, hard-to-fill positions included accountants, corrections officers, dispatchers, engineers, firefighters, information technology professionals, mental health professionals, nurses, police officers, public works employees, social workers and water treatment plant employees.

The image of the public workforce has also taken hits, and the unstable economy has complicated the search for talent. “Now the millennials say, ‘What’s a newspaper?’” Regan says. “They are dissatisfied with it. They have a particular approach to working and they expect to be paid.”

Attracting millennials remains a challenge too. By 2025, they’ll make up 75 percent of the world’s workforce, so the search for ways to reach the group has become hugely important. The old approaches no longer apply. “The way people traditionally did recruitment was to throw an ad in the newspaper,” Connecticut’s Regan says. “Now the millennials say, ‘What’s a newspaper?’”

The flip side of hiring is the constant challenge of making sure employees don’t leave. “You can’t talk about hiring without talking about retention,” says Candy Sarvis, deputy commissioner at Georgia’s Human Resources Administration. “We’re just not seeing quality applicants, and to
the extent that we find them, we’re not able to retain them.” Turnover rates in her state have been on the rise, from 15.6 percent in 2011 to 18.4 percent in 2015.

Turnover is being pushed, in part, by aging employees. A fast-growing portion of people in mid- and upper-level management jobs are retiring. Delayed by the 2008 recession, they are finally departing the workforce. “We’re no longer on the edge of the retirement bubble,” says James Honchar, deputy secretary of human resources and management in Pennsylvania. “We’re in the midst of it.” In Pennsylvania, about a third of the workforce is eligible to retire in the next five years. Similar numbers crop up in other states. In Nevada, 44 percent of employees will be eligible to retire in the next three to five years, a third will be in that position in Mississippi in the next five years.

Not only does turnover leave states and cities scrambling to find people for mid-level positions, it’s also a very expensive phenomenon. According to a recent auditor’s report to the city council in San Jose, Calif., 16 percent of new hires left the police department within two years in the 2005-2007 time period. That number climbed to nearly 25 percent in 2012-2014. Given the significant amount of money a city spends to train police—in San Jose it’s roughly $200,000 per recruit—that hike in turnover is costly.

Unsurprisingly, much of the challenge on retention as well as hiring comes down to money. Uncompetitive compensation is one of the biggest issues confronting states in search of new hires. “Starting salaries are too low, and we can’t compete in the market,” IPMA-HR’s Reichenberg says. “We all hear, ‘It’s the people who matter’—until budget time and then the people fall to the bottom of the heap.”

In Minnesota, a compensation study found that the 2014 salary for agency heads was $119,517, which was 35 to 69 percent below similar base salaries for the private sector. The state raised salaries in early 2015, but compensation for many agency heads still remained far below market rates. The salary for the commissioner of human services, for instance, was 60 percent below 2014 median private-sector salaries in comparable positions. As a 2013 study on compensation in Minnesota reported, “The bigger the job, the bigger the pay gap with the private sector.”

Beyond a restructuring of the pay scales, states and cities face the problem of internal equity. When an entity increases salaries to attract new employees, old employees with the same level of experience end up demoralized if they’re being paid less. But the better new-hire salaries are part of the new competitive environment state and local human resources directors face. “They typically had the kitchen sink overdescribing the duties and requirements of the position. As CPIA-HR’s Reichenberg says, “We all hear, it’s the people who matter”—until budget time and then the people fall to the bottom of the heap.”

So what are states and localities to do? One commonsense solution is workforce planning. States and cities that make careful predictions of their employment needs in the future have the opportunity to get ahead of the game through heightened recruitment, optimized retention programs and even enhanced compensation where that’s possible. In Nevada, for example, agency directors are notified when someone on their staff is eligible to retire within the next five years. Armed with that information, they can begin to consider the best route to replacing them, says Lee-Ann Easton, administrator of Nevada’s Division of Human Resources Management.
In Denver, data analysis of retirement and other turnover has been very helpful for some departments, says David Edinger, chief performance officer for the city and county of Denver. By making the budget case that upcoming vacancies will create high overtime costs, departments have been given permission to hire a replacement before someone leaves. That is, they can hire on the statistical probability that the person will be heading out the door in the near future. “This smooths the curve out so as to avoid drops in service levels and overtime,” says Edinger. It’s a particularly effective strategy for a service-oriented department such as motor vehicles.

**About half of states say it takes 3-5 months to fill senior-level IT positions. Entry-level jobs take about 60-90 days to fill.**

Having a better idea of what future workplace needs are going to be is a great first step. But actually filling those positions is a different matter. As state and local governments have worked to reform their approaches to hiring, some best practices have emerged. Here are 10 recommendations:

**Enhance your benefits.** With many pension plans struggling to make sure future benefits will be available, there hasn’t been much talk about enhancing the income employees will get upon retirement. But softer benefits can be very attractive. Nevada’s Easton takes note of a guidance resource program her state offers employees. It’s a form of an employee assistance program. People get free counseling, health advice, legal advice and even help with more mundane services. Easton says she can call the assistance office and tell them she’s having a party for her 75-year-old mom and needs some ideas. “They will research everything and put a package together,” she says. The idea behind it is that it serves the state well to take care of outside challenges that might take an employee away from concentrating on their work.

**Loosen civil service requirements.** Ranked lists based on testing is fading as a hiring practice, and other inflexible civil service rules are withering away as well. Despite central control of its hiring system, Alabama recently allowed selected agencies to do their own hiring without any state-prepared list. After the direct appointment tool was provided to the state Alcoholic Beverage Control Board, there was a 25 percent reduction in that agency’s overtime costs. “Now it’s so much easier for them to hire,” says Jackie Graham, director of the Alabama State Personnel Department. “They have a pool of applicants and on short notice they can bring them in.”

Kansas is moving even further. Last spring, the legislature gave the authority to hire some people as unclassified—that is, not subject to civil service rules. In agencies that are taking advantage of various aspects of the new law, employees can elect to forgo civil service protection, often in exchange for a potential increase in pay or a change in job duties. As John Milburn, director of legislative and public affairs for the Kansas Department of Administration, says, “That gives them much more flexibility to utilize their human and monetary capital to carry out their mission.”

**Reexamine minimum qualifications.** Minnesota’s O’Brien reports that she is looking at the minimum qualifications to make sure that they haven’t gotten out of date. For example, some Minnesota jobs had physical requirements that are no longer necessary, such as the requirement that tax auditors be able to lift boxes of documents. That was important back when tax auditors hauled heavy files to take with them in order to do an audit. Now these documents are available online.

**Change your own expectations.** Rather than fight the trend among young employees to leave after a short time, there’s a way to embrace it. Denver’s new branding campaign emphasizes the variety in city and county jobs and the idea that working for the city-county exposes people to a variety of different careers.

**Grow your own.** When there aren’t enough qualified applicants available for a particular job category, governments can start out with unqualified men and women and help them learn the necessary skills. Michigan has a “grow your own” approach in the IT area. Normally an applicant would have to have at least a minimum of a bachelor’s degree for an IT job. Under Michigan’s approach, someone with an associate degree and no experience can be hired in an entry-level professional position. Then, as Matthew Fedorchuk, deputy director of the Michigan Civil Service Commission, explains it, “after two years, they become a fully functioning journey-level professional and if they then finish getting a bachelor’s degree they’ll move to a higher level.”

**Recruit online (and not just on your website).** “Public-sector HR practitioners consider their own organization’s website the most effective tool for recruiting both millennials and military personnel,” according to the IPMA-HR’s 2014 Talent Management Benchmarking Survey. But Internet tools can go further. The association’s Reichenberg reports that he’s seeing an increase in the use of social media—recruiters who are on LinkedIn, for instance, and able to go after candidates they spot there. In Denver, recruiters now all have LinkedIn recruiting access. Another Internet approach that’s catching on: posting short videos that showcase what a hard-to-recruit for job would be like. Louisiana’s civil service, which uses job preview videos, has one where Shalenia Reed, who works as a residential services specialist at a developmental disability center, describes her typical morning. She also adds: “I know I’m touching their lives. I’m making a difference in their lives. I know they love me. I love them.”

**Beef up your technology.** Not long ago, hiring systems in many states and cities were still fundamentally paper-based. This is precisely the kind of government operation that can be improved dramatically with technology. For example, Minnesota has a new applicant processing tool that will notify people when their application has been received. “Before, they never heard anything, so they felt like [the application] went into a black hole. Now they know where they stand,” O’Brien says. Applicants will also be able to see where their application is in the review stage, and they’ll receive notification if they don’t meet minimum
HELP WANTED

Focus on military vets. “If there’s an area where governments ought to be developing some sort of strategy, it’s really there,” says Reichenberg of the potential pool of veterans and military personnel as qualified applicants. To tap into that source, Michigan translates how military experience can provide sufficient experience for state jobs. The question, “Are you a veteran?” is asked on every application. Even if an applicant doesn’t strictly meet minimum qualifications, the agency attempts to find a combination of prior military experiences that would indicate the person could do the job. “You might want someone with a bachelor’s degree, but if we find a military veteran who has 10 years of that experience in the military, they can probably do the job and should be interviewed,” says Fedorchuk. “We’re not guaranteeing a job, but we’re making sure their qualifications are reviewed.”

Government is competing for the same limited personnel as the private sector.

Get serious about interns. Historically, internships have been loosely run programs aimed primarily at offering young people in universities an opportunity to gather public-sector experience. But a growing number of cities and states are now using internships as training grounds for new employees. Jim Smith, Maine’s CIO, has been revamping his intern program so that interns will be chosen as if they were being selected for employment after graduation. “We give them mentors when they come in,” he says. “We make sure they have meaningful work.” The state has been doing this for about two years and over 70 percent of its interns are now going on to become full-time employees.

In Pennsylvania, college students who have completed their sophomore year can do six-month internships (for example, two summer internships or a six-month stint after graduation). “Based on their work experience, they can move right into an entry-level position,” Honchar says.

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Chief financial officers used to be concerned just with balancing the books. But today’s CFOs have taken on a higher profile.

By Liz Farmer

Kenneth Rust is a key player in redeveloping an old post office in downtown Portland, Ore. Denise Olson is pushing new technology to save Phoenix money on procurement. Jim Beard figured out how to update and expand Atlanta’s water and sewer systems while avoiding a scheduled rate hike.

These tasks require different kinds of know-how, but Rust, Olson and Beard all have the same job title: chief financial officer. It’s a position that has morphed in recent decades. Where CFOs were once primarily in charge of numbers—making sure the books were balanced, bills paid and audits clean—they now are called on to be strategists with an eye to developing the city’s economy. And where CFOs came to the job touting experience in a local or state finance department (and perhaps a stint as city controller as well), they now hail from more varied backgrounds. Just as in the private sector, many public enterprises are looking for CFOs with talents that include creative thinking, communication skills and long-range planning—and for good reason. Today, just about everything a...
municipality does is either under the CFO’s purview or at least under his or her watchful eye. “Almost every major decision the city makes,” Beard says, “I get to be in the room.”

One of the first signs of change in the role of the local CFO came in the early 2000s when the Government Finance Officers Association established a standing committee on economic development. This was a reflection of a burgeoning reality: More and more, city finance officers were being pulled into negotiations on development projects. A decade later, University of Chicago professor Paula Worthington and then-Chicago CFO Lois Scott established the Municipal CFO Forum, a gathering of finance officers to discuss topics from pension negotiations to public-private partnerships to tax incentives. In fact, as it has become increasingly vital for the country’s top municipal CFOs to tackle new topics, they have begun building all kinds of networking groups to discuss best practices and grapple with issues outside the typical job description.

Beard, who worked in the private sector before he came to Atlanta, notes that his background was key when he helped the city negotiate its pension reform plan, new sports stadium agreement and water-sewer financing. “Dealing with Wall Street and local bankers,” he says, “they know I know the process from beginning to end and I know the questions to ask.”

Clearly economic development is only the beginning of the expansion of the CFO role beyond its usual expertise. Some of the new skills come naturally to a person with an accounting background; some take CFOs beyond their usual comfort zones. For cities, though, the emerging profile of the CFO can bolster local leadership, even as it poses unexpected challenges.

While the financing of economic development, handling pensions and the fiscal impact of tax changes might be seen as a natural extension of a CFO’s traditional expertise, the one area that is more of a divergence is communications. CFOs, normally backroom operators, are being called on to deal with the public and the media when money issues are in the news. This role grew out of the 2008 recession and fears the downturn raised about cities being able to meet their obligations. Public pension plan liabilities and possible credit rating downgrades were headline news and pushed finance officers into the spotlight. In many cities, it is now part of the CFO’s job to keep the public informed and calm about financial issues.

Facing an often suspicious press is not an aspect of the job for which most financial officers are prepared. “When you were the CFO in 1980, you were the bean counter of the place, and you were never likely going to have to be in front of the camera,” says Jeff DeWitt, CFO for Washington, D.C. Today, DeWitt says, he not only has to speak at both official and impromptu press conferences, but the press—cameras, microphones and notebooks in hand—follow him at will. “I can get ambushed at any meeting I come out of.”

For a newcomer, communicating with the media can be unnerving. When Chicago Mayor Rahm Emmanuel named investment banker Carole Brown as the city’s new CFO in May, it was, as Brown puts it, “a crazy time.” The city’s credit rating had just been downgraded, and a Cook County judge was expected to rule against the city on a pension reform plan that would have given Chicago more budgetary leeway. Without the reform, city leaders were facing up to a $1 billion budget deficit for the coming year.

Brown was well-known in Chicago. She had chaired the city’s transit authority board for seven years in the 2000s and had spoken to the press countless times in that role. Now she would be called on to speak for the city on a variety of issues and before a press corps that was exceptionally knowledgeable about the ins and outs of Chicago’s financial problems. After little more than a month
on the job, Brown was center stage with the press. “I was used to it,” she says of fielding questions on the fly in front of cameras. “But if you’re not, it would be terrifying.”

In larger cities—particularly those with a history of financial turmoil—it is important that financial communication with the public be straightforward and use simple language to convey complicated situations. Quotable sound bites take second place to an awareness of how what the CFO says will be shaped by the media. With many financial experts untrained in public relations, larger cities have stepped in to help out with this aspect of the job. They are building up communications departments to accommodate demand for more access to the finance chief. Some have a separate press liaison for the finance department.

Reframing the arcane language of public finance into something the local media can digest and use is just one aspect of the CFO’s role as a communicator. Finance officers also must present financial information, particularly the long-term effects of financial decisions, to their mayors, city managers and city councils.

When Portland’s development commission was looking into the post office redevelopment project, its CFO, Rust, evaluated the financing plan for the 14-acre site, which involved the risky business of extending the city’s line of credit. Rust’s role was to translate into meaningful terms the risks and rewards of the project. Late last year, before the city development commission voted on the financing plan, one of the commissioners told Rust, “If I vote for this, it’s because of you.” The commission, and later the city council, approved the plan unanimously.

As Rust’s experience suggests, communication for CFOs is a delicate dance. Their allegiance is to the numbers, but as the role becomes more prominent, politics are inevitably part of it. “They have to really know their city’s political dynamic,” says University of Chicago’s Worthington, “and what that environment’s going to be like.”

For Phoenix’s Olson, communication skills have been taking on another aspect. She uses them to stay in frequent touch with department heads to find out what their needs are and how she can help. One issue she learned about through her back-and-forth with those officials was how inefficient the procurement system was. With her 360-degree view of what the city agencies were buying and how, she pushed for a new e-procurement system that could take advantage of economies of scale and force departments to follow the same purchasing procedures—a system that should eventually save the city money.

With their growing expertise in so many areas of governance, CFOs today are following another private-sector trend: making the leap to top executive leadership. City managers from Lakewood, Wash.; Cincinnati; and Alexandria, Va., for instance, are former CFOs. In this shift, the recession has played a key role as city councils and other public figures are putting a premium on long-term financial health. CFOs who helped their cities survive the recession and thrive afterward had to get creative and step up their leadership role—words often associated with chief executive officers.

Cincinnati City Manager Harry Black, who previously was the CFO for Baltimore, says his experience guiding Baltimore through the recession and helping it become more financially nimble with outcome-based budgeting groomed him for the next level. As CEO in Cincinnati, he’s installed many of the financial management tactics he honed in Baltimore. But the “beauty” of being a city manager, he adds, is getting to expand those practices to other areas of government. Only now he can “move faster, and with greater focus,” Black says. “I don’t think I could have been more prepared to be city manager.”

Denise Olson is pushing new technology to save Phoenix money on its purchasing.
Telemedicine is rapidly evolving, and states are trying to catch up.

By Mattie Quinn
At Doctor on Demand, a popular online health site, patients can videoconference with physicians on a host of maladies, from skin rashes and flu diagnoses to getting a prescription for an eye infection. On Maven, a telemedicine app targeted to women, nurse practitioners chat with patients on issues such as birth control, breast feeding and postpartum depression. Opternative offers online eye exams that it says are just as accurate as in-person tests. It’s a boom time for telehealth. Just as smartphone apps have revolutionized ride-hailing and apartment-sharing, telemedicine technology is upending health care.

States have been playing catch-up. As recently as 2011, only 11 states had telehealth parity laws, which require that insurers reimburse telehealth providers exactly as they would for an in-person visit. Today, 29 states and the District of Columbia have parity laws. In three jurisdictions, if a patient with a sore throat wants to confirm she has a strep infection and receive a prescription for antibiotics, it makes no difference to insurance companies whether the visit occurs over the computer or in an office.

Forty-eight state Medicaid programs (every state but Connecticut and Rhode Island) offer some form of coverage for telemedicine. Congress is expected to take up legislation this year that would expand telehealth coverage for Medicare enrollees.

More than 200 telemedicine bills were introduced in state legislatures in 2015. Not all of them passed, but it has “given an indication that the time has come to have [the telemedicine] conversation,” says Jonathan Linkous, CEO of the American Telemedicine Association.

Despite the momentum, there are still plenty of gaps and question marks when it comes to telehealth policy. The 21 states without a parity law aren’t uniformly liberal or conservative. Kansas, South Carolina and Utah don’t have one, but neither do Illinois or Pennsylvania. Massachusetts, a state known for progressive health-care policies, doesn’t have a parity law. It currently only covers telemedicine under Medicaid with certain managed care plans, and not for fee-for-service payments.

Even among states that do have parity laws, the patchwork of policies can vary widely from one state to the next. Texas, for example, requires insurers to cover telehealth, but it mandates that a patient’s first appointment with a new doctor must be an in-person visit. Within Medicaid programs, about half of the states require that a patient be in a medical facility for tele-health appointments, rather than at home. The differences among states can be frustrating for telemedicine providers. Kofi Jones, vice president of public relations and government affairs for the telehealth company American Well, says she has 30 binders in her office filled with state-by-state regulations and legislation. “I’m waiting for the day when parity laws are uniform across the country,” she says. “I suspect it’ll continue to be a slog, but when that day comes, I’m having a binder-burning party.”

Traditional health-care providers can be slow to integrate new technology. After all, almost half of doctor’s offices polled in 2013 still used paper records, according to a survey from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Other recent surveys have found that only 2 percent of patients nationwide have access to video visits with their primary care physician. Less than half—45 percent—even receive a traditional phone appointment reminder.

But the explosion of born-online health-care services is fueling a rising consumer demand for more telehealth options. Telemedicine advocates see it as a way to cut down emergency room visits and increase health-care access for rural patients. Many in the medical community, however, maintain strong concerns

Legislating Telehealth

Parity laws require that insurers reimburse telehealth providers exactly as they would for an in-person visit. As it stands, 29 states and the District of Columbia have parity laws.
Florida is the nation’s third most populous state. And with its large population of seasonal snowbirds and transplanted retirees, Florida presumably has a lot of people who would like to seek medical help from their doctor back home. But the state’s medical license compact doesn’t have a parity law, is like “the Wild West” when it comes to telemedicine, says Christian Caballero of the Telehealth Association of Florida, a trade group formed last year to push for parity legislation in the state. The association in July received a planning grant from the state Health Resources and Services Administration to implement telehealth options in north Florida, which is more rural and underserved than other parts of the state. “When you give people health care on the front end, that just drives down the overall costs of health care,” says Caballero. “Now it’s up to us to give people in underserved areas those options.”

Florida lawmakers have considered telehealth bills in recent years, but none of the measures have become law. Advocates were optimistic about a proposed telemedicine bill last year, because unlike previous proposals, it stripped out language that would have required Medicaid to reimburse providers at the same rate as in-person visits. But the bill died in committee.

The difficulty in passing legislation in Florida echoes broader conversations about telemedicine across the country. In many cases, doctors have urged caution when it comes to adopting new technologies. The American Optometric Association, for instance, has come out hard against online eye exams, calling them a “substandard model of care.” The American Medical Association (AMA) is more open to telemedicine but has taken a cautious approach. The group released recommended guidelines for telehealth coverage and payment in 2014, but held off on releasing an ethics policy in November after concerns were raised that the draft proposed wasn’t thorough enough. “This is something I’m passionate about, and I’ve been engaged with it for a while,” says AMA board member Jack Resnick. “But we need to make sure that we’re doing it right—telehealth can’t just become another silo in health care. It’s important to us that a physician using telehealth practices understands a patient’s full medical history and is able to coordinate that care with their other providers.”

The problem, Resnick says, is that telehealth appointments are often “one-off visits, where information isn’t relayed back to that person’s primary care provider.” Mobile telemedicine apps may or may not catalog a patient’s health data from one session to the next; regardless, it’s up to the patient whether she chooses to share that information with her primary physician. “That’s bad care,” says Resnick. “And a potential hazard of telemedicine.”

There’s also the issue of privacy when it comes to patient data. Many medical professionals worry about the potential for hackers to access and expose patients’ sensitive medical information. Some private companies, including American Well, Doxy.me and Teladoc, offer HIPAA-compliant interfaces for physicians to use—at no cost, in some cases—which the companies say are safe and reliable ways to protect information. The concern over hackers is legitimate but overblown, says Robert Pearl, chairman of the Council of Accountable Physician Practices. And patients aren’t likely to care anyway: “If someone were to hack into your health and financial information, most people would be more freaked out over financial information,” he says. “Yet that possibility doesn’t stop people from online banking and ordering from Amazon.”

Cross-state licensure is another big issue that has stymied telehealth expansion in the past. How can a physician licensed in Virginia treat a patient who lives in New Mexico? But that, too, is changing rapidly. The Interstate Medical Licensure Compact, an agreement initiated by the Federation of State Medical Boards, provides an expedited way for doctors to have their licenses recognized by multiple states. Since the compact was introduced in late 2014, a dozen states have signed on—Wisconsin became the 12th in December—and bills are pending in at least nine more states. It’s easy to imagine that in a very short time, a doctor who’s licensed to practice anywhere in the country will be licensed to practice everywhere in the country.

Telehealth advocates don’t imagine e-health ever fully replacing face-to-face interactions between patients and physicians. Instead, the idea is for video chats, texts and phone calls to become more seamlessly integrated into the existing health-care system. Linkous, the American Telemedicine Association CEO, has been with the group since it was founded in 1993, when telemedicine mostly involved primary care physicians in rural areas communicating in real-time with a specialist in the next big city. As technology has advanced over the past 20 years, attitudes and expectations have changed too. That will continue to happen, Linkous says. “Who nowadays would ever use a bank that makes you come in to a branch to access your money? Five years from now the question will be, ‘Who is going to go to a doctor’s office’ that makes you come in every single time you have the sniffles?”

Email mgquinn@governing.com
The Governing Institute congratulates the 25 women selected for the Women in Government Leadership Program’s Class of 2016. These accomplished, driven elected officials represent cities, counties and states from Alaska to Florida. They are thought leaders who are using their personal experiences, professional savvy and power of persuasion to make a difference in their communities. Their stories are incredible; their devotion to their causes is admirable. Individually, they are inspiring. Together, they represent the strength found when courageous women run for office, win, and then channel their influence and hard work to advance good government.

The Class of 2016 joins a network of women created in late 2014 with the program’s founding. This legacy project of the Governing Institute will bring these women together throughout 2016 to focus on leadership development, job-critical skills and how the honorees can “pay it forward” by mentoring future generations of women to run for office. The investment is already paying dividends as women from the Class of 2015 are campaigning for higher office, spearheading new ventures and inspiring the next generation of women in their regions to run.

On behalf of everyone at Governing, congratulations to the extraordinary women in the Class of 2016.

Julia Burrows
Director, Governing Institute
“If I have both sides of the aisle upset with me,” she says, “I think have something bad happen to you,” she says, “nothing else matters.”

Several years ago, Marlene Anielski was at a city council meeting in her town of Wal- ton Hills, Ohio, when a coun- cil member, tired of Anielski’s questions, told her to go home to her kids. Instead, Aniel- ski responded by running for a council seat. She won, and then went on to become mayor. Anielski was elected three times to the position, which is notable for a Republican in a city that tends to vote Demo- crats. That’s fine by Anielski: “Raumesh will be inspired by her peers from across the nation as they will most assuredly be inspired by her exceptional qualities of leadership.”

“Gail’s resolve was tested in a way no parent ever imagines. Just as she was kicking off her first campaign for state representative, her son Joe, a high school senior, committed suicide. Anielski has since devoted herself to suicide prevention legislation, including a measure that established suicide prevention training in all Ohio schools. She has also gotten boxes installed in schools where students can leave private notes for the school counselor about them- selves or a friend. Her eff orts earned her an award from the Ameri- can Foundation for Suicide Prevention. She never imagined she’d be in any position where I can help move my city forward,” she says.

When Lois M. DeBerry, the longest-serving member of the Tennessee House, died in 2013, Akbari ran to fill the vacant seat. She won, and has established herself as a prominent voice on economic development efforts—including the Community Resurgence Job Tax Credit, a measure she championed that provides a $2,500 tax credit to businesses that create 10 full-time jobs in low-income areas.

Thanks to her impressive two years in the state House, Akbari was awarded the State Legislative Leader’s Foundation Lois M. DeBerry Scholarship to participate in the Governing Institute’s Women in Government Leadership Program. “She is bright, poised and dedicated to public service,” says the foundation’s president Stephen Lukis. “Raumesh will be inspired by her peers from across the nation as they will most assuredly be inspired by her exceptional qualities of leadership.”

“Tired of Anielski’s questions, told her to go home to her kids,” she says. “I think I’m doing a pretty good job.”

In 2010, Anielski’s resolve was tested in a way no parent ever imagines. Just as she was kicking off her first campaign for state representative, her son Joe, a high school senior, committed suicide. Anielski has since devoted herself to suicide prevention legislation, including a measure that established suicide prevention training in all Ohio schools. She has also gotten boxes installed in schools where students can leave private notes for the school counselor about them- selves or a friend. Her efforts earned her an award from the Ameri- can Foundation for Suicide Prevention. She never imagined she’d become a leading advocate for suicide awareness, but “when you have something bad happen to you,” she says, “nothing else matters.”

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**SPECIAL SECTION: WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT**

**Stephanie Bice**

Stephanie Bice always followed politics, but she’d never considered going into public service until she got a tap on the shoulder from an Oklahoma lawmaker. “The former senator who held my seat told me he was not running for re-election and thought I would make an exceptional legislator;” Bice says.

Elected in 2014, Bice has focused on business-friendly policies. That emphasis reflects her experience having worked in financial oversight for her family’s technology company, and later in business development for an Oklahoma City digital marketing agency. One example of this focus has been her effort to bring Oklahoma’s alcohol laws more in line with the rest of the country. Bice has sponsored legislation that would allow beer and wine to be sold at grocery and convenience stores, rather than just in liquor stores. Another measure would allow onsite beer sales at microbreweries. Both bills passed in the House and Senate last session, but contained differences that still need to be reconciled.

Bice is also eager to tackle education, mental health and prison reform. “As a freshman legislator, I see many opportunities for improving Oklahoma,” she says. “But making those changes will take time.”

**Mary Ann Borgeson**

Mary Ann Borgeson, who was once an X-ray technician, has spent more than 20 years working on health issues in county government. In fact, she now chairs the National Association of Counties’ Health Steering Committee and is also helping lead the organization’s efforts to address the large number of mentally ill inmates in local jails. But it wasn’t health that originally drew her to government—it was horses.

As an undergraduate studying public administration, Borgeson came across a proposal by Douglas County to buy the Ak-Sar-Ben Race Track and Coliseum in Omaha, which it eventually did. She opposed the purchase. In researching it, Borgeson became interested in county government and decided to run for the county board. After she won, one of the board’s first actions was to sell the once-treasured facility.

Borgeson says she loves county government because it’s “closest to the people,” especially in her areas of expertise. She was once one of four women on the Douglas County Board of Commissioners. Now she’s the only one. Other women, she says, are turned off by anti-government attitudes in the public and in the media. Borgeson says the response shouldn’t be to stay away from government, but to make it better. “That’s why we need to be here.”

**Toni Carter**

Before becoming county commissioner in 2005, Toni Carter served on the school board for 10 years, and prior to that she spent time as a middle school teacher. Her focus on children and education continues to impact her approach to county leadership: “I like to think of my experience on a school board as an entree to government,” she says. “Still, this work is far beyond what I could have imagined.”

During her tenure, Carter has made juvenile justice a key focus, spearheading efforts to develop mentoring programs and provide jail alternatives for low-risk youth offenders. She also has been working on legislation to make sure that social workers assigned to families of youths in the corrections system are spending enough time with them. Carter is the chair of the Human Services and Education Steering Committee of the National Association of Counties; she’s also the president of the Association of Minnesota Counties.

The first African-American leader ever to serve on a county board in the state of Minnesota, Carter says her focus remains local and she has no interest in seeking a state or federal office. “I’m not interested in that. I want to continue to be a mentor to young people who can take this work forward once I retire.”

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**Rebecca Casper**

Two years into her first term as mayor, Rebecca Casper has made economic and educational security her top priorities. She wants to see Eastern Idaho become a self-sustaining economic engine complete with a talent pipeline of qualified workers for the industrial and food science companies in the region. To that end, one of her goals is to establish a new community college in Idaho Falls.

Casper has many state legislators on board, but her real challenge is at the local level. “Tax” is a four-letter word in Idaho, and the city’s 60,000 residents would have to approve a special tax district for a community college to be built. “It’s hard to argue for that in a nice little sound bite or pamphlet,” says Casper.

Figuring out that answer is one of the big reasons Casper ran for elected office in the first place. Raised in Arizona, but having lived around the United States, the longtime political consultant and American government professor decided to run for mayor after she was approached about doing so three separate times in about as many days. She realized, she says, that “I can learn more that would be helpful to my future students than I can as a teacher just commenting on the process.”
SPECIAL SECTION: WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT

Growing up in Trenton, N.J., Joy Cooper was always drawn to public service; for three years in college, she worked in the New Jersey auditing department. But it wasn’t until she moved to sleepy Hallandale Beach, Fla., that she became interested in running for office. Vocal at public hearings, she attracted the attention of the then-mayor, who took her under her wing. She first worked as city commissioner, then as vice-mayor and eventually mayor. “I really wanted to make Hallandale Beach more than just a retirement community and bring it into the modern century,” she says, noting that she didn’t even have a computer on her desk when she first got to office in 1999. She established herself as “the technology mayor”—yes, she has a computer today—and last fall unveiled an OpenGov website for the city, providing transparent budget and expenditure data to citizens. Cooper is most recently proud of a $58 million bond referendum that will “transform every park in the city.” She’s now turning her attention to the city’s sidewalks.

Cooper plans to run for re-election when her current term is up. “I truly love being mayor,” she says.

West Hollywood, Calif., is just over 30 years old. Its mayor, Lindsey Horvath, is only a little older: She was 33 when she took office last April. Raised in the small town of Wickliffe, Ohio, Horvath moved to Los Angeles after college. While working in entertainment marketing, Horvath became involved in women’s rights issues. At 22, she established the Hollywood branch of the National Organization for Women. Her social activism led to an interest in local politics. In 2009, she was appointed to fill a seat on the West Hollywood City Council. “I was struck by her ‘can-do’ attitude,” says former West Hollywood Mayor Abbe Land.

But many residents still saw Horvath as inexperienced, and opted not to vote for her when the seat came up for election in 2011. That didn’t deter Horvath. Four years later, she ran for council again and won. A month later, thanks to another council member who passed her under her wing. She first worked as city commissioner, then as vice-mayor and eventually elected mayor. “I really wanted to make Hallandale Beach more than just a retirement community and bring it into the modern century,” she says, noting that she didn’t even have a computer on her desk when she first got to office in 1999. She established herself as “the technology mayor”—yes, she has a computer today—and last fall unveiled an OpenGov website for the city, providing transparent budget and expenditure data to citizens. Cooper is most recently proud of a $58 million bond referendum that will “transform every park in the city!” She’s now turning her attention to the city’s sidewalks.

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Charisse Millett has lived in Alaska her entire life. As a kid, she experienced the state from several vantage points. Her mother was part Native Alaskan, and her father worked for the Federal Aviation Administration, so the family moved around the state to follow his work. A decade ago, Millett began working in the state House as a legislative aide. A few years later, she ran for office herself and was elected to the House, representing the southeast side of Anchorage. In her freshman year, she helped write bipartisan legislation promoting Alaska’s adoption of renewable energy. The law provided $50 million a year for research development of renewable energy products and was studied by the federal government as a model for national renewable energy legislation. In 2014, she successfully championed a bill recognizing the plethora of languages spoken by Alaska Natives.

Millett, who is a Republican, has drawn praise from her Democratic colleagues for being an approachable leader who understands the needs of all Alaskans—perhaps a result of her having lived in many parts of the state. “She has a winning personality,” says Democratic state Rep. Bryce Edgmon, “and the ability to relate to rural and urban constituents alike.”

Public service runs in Linda Langston’s family. While she was growing up on the South Side of Chicago, her grandfather was a state senator. But it wasn’t until she moved to Iowa that she decided to run for public office herself—after 12 years of being an Iowan. “Previously I had worked as the director of a local museum, so I knew a lot about the local community and was very familiar with fund-raising,” says Langston, who in 2002 was elected as a supervisor for Linn County. She’s been on the county board ever since, and currently serves as the chair.

In 2008, Iowa was hit by a devastating flood. Ten square miles of Linn County were underwater—many called the event “Iowa’s Katrina.” Langston helped oversee the rebuilding efforts. “I worked really hard to get the area back up and operating, and get people back on their feet as soon as possible. People really responded positively to that.” Langston has a national profile as a past president of the National Association of Counties. She’s been courted for a congressional run, but says she thinks she can be more effective in county office. “Working at the local level allows you to make sure things really are working as they should be.”

When Amy Murray was 16, she spent a year as an exchange student in Kyoto, Japan—an experience that set in motion her entire private- and public-sector career. She became fluent in Japanese, and later spent several years negotiating Asian business deals for Procter & Gamble before setting up her own consulting firm for companies that want to do business in Japan. She’d never considered politics before reading in the newspaper one morning about Cincinnati’s year-after-year budget deficits. “As a businessperson, I thought, ‘How can this happen?’” she says. “I felt like I could add something.” In 2009, she ran for city council and lost. Murray is a Republican in heavily blue Cincinnati. She was later appointed to a vacant spot in 2011 and won outright in 2013. On the council, she chairs the Major Transportation and Regional Cooperation Committee, which puts her in charge of the city’s controversial streetcar project. She’s regarded as a good mediator and a fair negotiator, which she credits to her time in Japan. “Having lived there in the ‘80s, gender roles were very different,” she says. “Everything revolves around group decision-making and allowing people to save face. Now, on council, it’s about finding common ground. It’s about what’s best for the city.”

Andrea Lea’s first exposure to government bureaucracy came when, as a parent, she led an effort to establish a swim team at her son’s high school, a push that required new funding and multiple approvals from different groups. “By the time I’d done everything, I had learned how one person can make a difference in a community,” she says.

The experience led her to run for local office. She served on the city council in Russellville, about an hour northwest of Little Rock. Lea then served three terms in the state House, where much of her efforts focused on the budget or issues pertaining to government efficiency. Running for state auditor, then, seemed like a natural fit.

Since taking office in 2015, Lea has worked to transform the agency into one that is more customer-friendly. Some of the changes she has made involve small details, like redesigning envelopes so they don’t look like they’re from a government agency. She’s also ushered in new technologies: A redesign of the website has helped the office process 354 percent more property claims, and to help residents search for and file claims for unclaimed property, her office has set up kiosks with iPads throughout the state. “We’re taking it to the people,” she says, “instead of trying to get them to call us.”
As a child in the town of Holly Springs, Miss., Cherrish Pryor was inspired by the political passion of her grandmother, who tirelessly worked polling stations and crisscrossed the county registering new voters. “If there was a political rally in Holly Springs,” says Pryor, “she was there.” Pryor never forgot her grandmother’s political fervor. While at Indiana University as an undergraduate, Pryor advocated for diversity on her campus. After graduating, she volunteered at the NAACP in Fort Wayne, and she later interned in the office of state Rep. Bill Crawford, whom she calls “truly a history maker.” (When Crawford retired in 2012, he was the longest-serving African-American in state office anywhere in the country.)

After two years on the Indianapolis City Council, Pryor was elected to the Indianapolis City Council. During her first legislative session last year, she focused on family leave legislation. She’s also worked to promote education policy, making it a priority to attract top-notch teachers to the state.

In addition to her legislative role, Oban is the executive director of Tobacco Free North Dakota, a nonprofit. She helped pass a bill last year banning e-cigarette sales to minors. “I want to be someone who makes people feel like they can be involved, and that their voice matters,” she says.

When Oakland City Auditor Courtney Ruby left her post in 2014 to run for mayor, Brenda Roberts saw it as an opportunity for her first run at elected office. (Ruby lost the mayoral election to Libby Schaff.) Roberts had spent a career as a business executive and an accountant, working as an internal auditor for more than 10 years at places such as Safeway, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the city and county of San Francisco. Now she decided it was time to dive into public service head first. “I came to the conclusion, after reflection, that I had a way to give back to my community,” Roberts said. “I could use my knowledge skill set to be a part of that team to make Oakland better and better.”

Now in office, Roberts says she will focus on the needs of Oakland’s changing demographics and growing population, while also increasing efficiency and stepping up oversight to ensure the city’s slim resources are used appropriately. Roberts also plans to mentor college-aged women who want to work in business or government. She tells them two pieces of advice. “First, follow your dream. Second, be well-prepared,” she says. “A woman going into a job or interview who is fully prepared will have a better sense of success.”

Growing up in the small town of Ray, deep in the heart of North Dakota oil country, Erin Oban never gave a single thought to a career in politics. But as the middle child of her family, she often resolved disputes between her siblings. Now, as a state senator, her willingness to mediate between opposing parties has gained her a reputation as a pragmatist among her colleagues. (She also worked as a middle school teacher, wrangling 7th and 8th graders, which likely comes in handy too.)

After a stint working in the office of North Dakota’s at-large House representative, Earl Pomeroy, Oban decided to run for office herself. “I believe in the power of democracy,” she says. “I believe that if you have a strong sense of the issues that impact cities, towns and counties throughout your state, you can be a better sense of success.”

Shelley Taub’s career in public service began, she says, “on a dare.” In 1992, due to redistricting, her Oakland County commissioner seat had no incumbent. She mentioned the fact to her husband. “And he said four fatal words,” Taub recalls. “‘Why don’t you run?’”

A former teacher who managed her husband’s medical business, Taub was essentially a political no-name. But she hit the pavement and won her Republican primary by 239 votes. Since then, Taub hasn’t stopped moving. She created the human services coordinating council, a countywide work group that led to better cross-agency cooperation on social services. She was also instrumental in creating Michigan’s first-ever children’s summit, which focused on early childhood health and brain development.

Taub intended to retire from politics in 2007 after a failed state senate bid, but her passion for public service drew her back and she was re-elected to the county commission the following year. She’s now focused on expanding Oakland County’s youth assistance program to other counties across the country. The program aims to reduce youth delinquency, neglect and abuse by coordinating social workers and community groups. “Everyone talks about how it takes a village to raise a kid, but they don’t do anything about it,” Taub says.
Want to get a better handle on fraud, waste and abuse, and re-invent and re-invigorate your Medicaid program integrity initiatives and processes with predictive analytics?

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www.governing.com/Medicaid-Program-Integrity-Handbook
Loretta Smith spent more than 20 years working for U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden. All that time, running for office herself was never at the forefront of her mind. But when the county commissioner position opened up in 2010 and she was asked to run, she couldn’t turn down the opportunity. “I do think I have a unique voice as a single mom, and as a black woman,” Smith says. She won, becoming only the second black elected official in her county.

Her term ends in 2018, and while she hasn’t decided whether to seek higher office, she knows “there will be some opportunities” when the time comes. Regardless, she wants to stay in public service to inspire others to serve. “It means a lot to be a visible elected official,” she says. “If other women and people of color see me, they know they can do it too.”

Melanie Stambaugh may be young—at just 24, she’s the youngest legislator in the Washington House and the youngest woman elected to the body since 1936. But she sees her age as an advantage. “So often you see politicians bogged down by government work,” she says, “but I feel energized.”

Born and raised in Puyallup, which she currently represents in the legislature, Stambaugh says that as a young girl she had a penchant for introducing herself everywhere she went. “Little did I know that it would serve me well on the campaign trail.” Puyallup is just 10 miles from Tacoma and about 30 miles south of Seattle.

Elected in 2014, Stambaugh is passionate about both education and children, saying she’s particularly proud to have worked on a bill that closed a loophole in child privacy laws. She also helped craft a technical career initiative. “I want to expose students at a young age to the different options that they have,” she says. “College isn’t always the right path for everyone.”

One year into her legislative career, she’s eager to see where it takes her next. “I had no idea I’d be doing this two years ago, so it’s so hard to think what the next few years will hold,” she says. “I do know that I want to really make an impact.”

Tackling unemployment was at the top of her to-do list. She quadrupled the size of SummerWorks, an employment initiative targeted at underserved kids. Today it’s a thriving program that has placed 3,105 youth in summer jobs in the past six years. Now she’s turned her attention to infrastructure. “We have some seriously crumbling bridges here in Portland that need to be addressed,” she says.

Her term ends in 2018, and while she hasn’t decided whether to seek higher office, she knows “there will be some opportunities” when the time comes. Regardless, she wants to stay in public service to inspire others to serve. “It means a lot to be a visible elected official,” she says. “If other women and people of color see me, they know they can do it too.”

Before becoming mayor last summer, Ivy Taylor represented San Antonio’s Eastside on the city council, leading an effort to win federal grants that would revitalize one of the poorest urban neighborhoods in the country. Besides winning actual money, she helped her district become a test case for the Obama administration’s Promise Zone initiative, a place-based antipoverty strategy. In the past few years, Eastside has benefited from more than $86 million in federal assistance, due in no small part to Taylor’s advocacy. And few mayors could be better poised to oversee urban redevelopment. Taylor has a master’s degree in city and regional planning, and work experience at a housing authority, a planning commission and an urban renewal agency.

The idea behind Promise Zones is to give children better opportunities than their parents had—something Taylor understands. Her parents didn’t go to college, yet she attended Yale University and graduate school. Now the first African-American mayor to lead San Antonio, Taylor still lives on the Eastside. She ran on a platform of inclusive growth, promising to make the booming city won’t leave behind working-class residents. “We won’t have success,” she says, “if the people who’ve been there can’t share in the prosperity.”

At 22, Michelle Wu found herself as the caretaker of her mother (who had begun struggling with mental illness), the legal guardian of her sibling (who had begun struggling with mental illness), and the owner of the family business. She witnessed firsthand the ways government can help—and the ways it can frustrate business owners. “I saw how much government matters,” she says, “and I wanted to help take down barriers for all families trying to navigate bureaucracy and access opportunity.” In 2013, at 28, Wu was elected to the Boston City Council, the first Asian-American ever to join the body.

Wu has helped make Boston a national leader on paid parental leave policies. Thanks to her efforts, Boston now offers six weeks of paid leave to any new parent who has worked for the city for at least a year. Wu says the measure is about leveling the playing field for employees across Boston. “Implementing paid parental leave is least a year. Wu says the measure is about leveling the playing field for employees across Boston. “Implementing paid parental leave is fundamental to addressing income inequality and the gender gap,” she says.

Wu is regarded as a warm and empathetic official who genuinely cares what other people have to say, says Boston City Clerk Maureen Feeney. “She’s just so lovely—and you don’t often use that word when talking about an elected official.”
Even at this early stage of her career, Sarah Besnoff has racked up many rewarding experiences in the public sector she interned for Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, worked as a paralegal for the New York County district attorney’s office and served as the executive director for a national contest for college students to pitch ideas for improving public policy.

But nothing has topped the day she graduated from Barnard College in 2009. Not only did she give a commencement speech, she also got a shoutout from Hillary Clinton. Besnoff had said in her speech that her mother often told her, “When I grow up, I want to be Sarah Besnoff.” When Clinton came to the podium a few minutes later, she said she felt the same way about her own daughter. “I felt a remarkable kinship with Sarah’s mother,” Clinton said. Besnoff—and her mother—were thrilled.

Besnoff earned a law degree and a master’s of public administration degree from the University of Pennsylvania. She now works as an attorney for the federal court system. Besnoff credits much of her success to the support of people she has worked with. “When I have been willing to ask for help or ask for guidance, I have been astounded by how willing people are to give it.”

About the program: The Women in Government Leadership Program from the Governing Institute is a professional network of accomplished women who serve in state and local government. The program provides a community in which members share their experiences, mentor colleagues and encourage future generations of women in public service. The 25 women in the program’s inaugural Class of 2015 are elected and appointed officials from state and local governments across the country. The group includes Democrats and Republicans from 19 different states.

For more information or to nominate an individual for the Class of 2017, visit governing.com/womeningov.
Problem Solver

Are the Roads Getting Riskier?

New data hint at an unexpected spike in highway traffic fatalities.

The battle to reduce traffic fatalities may have hit a roadblock after showing impressive results over the past several years. The latest federal estimates show an 8 percent uptick in traffic deaths over the first half of 2015 compared to the prior year. While the projection covers a short time period, it’s the highest first-half tally since 2009.

Traffic safety advocates point to two main factors behind the increase. One is the improving economy, as Americans are traveling more. The other likely culprit is the wide variance in state laws that, according to advocates, aren’t doing nearly enough to curb fatalities.

When the economy took a downturn, so too did traffic deaths. But economic recoveries generally coincide with higher fatality rates because families have more discretionary income, take extra vacations and travel more on weekends. Parents also tend to purchase more cars for teenagers, who face the highest risk of accidents.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports that the vast majority (94 percent) of fatal crashes are caused by human error. So the agency has looked to bolster measures that influence motorists’ behavior. In November, NHTSA Administrator Mark Rosekind called on states and localities to “reassess whether they are making the right policy choices to improve highway safety.”

But most state legislatures have showed little interest in strengthening traffic laws in recent years. Some, in fact, have raised maximum speed limits or considered repealing motorcycle helmet laws. “We’ve reached a plateau,” says Jonathan Adkins, executive director of the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA). “States have generally improved their safety laws, but we haven’t got them to take that next step.”

One of the most effective strategies in saving lives is getting motorists to buckle up. While seat belt use has climbed significantly over the past several decades, states without strict seat belt laws lag behind. The 34 states that treat failure to wear seat belts as a primary offense report average seat belt usage rates about 10 percentage points higher than those in other states. “We’ve reached a plateau,” says Jonathan Adkins, executive director of the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA). “States have generally improved their safety laws, but we haven’t got them to take that next step.”

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Helmet laws for motorcyclists also have been a priority for public health and safety advocates. Nineteen states currently require all motorcyclists to wear helmets, while most others maintain more

![Traffic Deaths Mirror the Economy](chart)

Over the past several decades, traffic deaths have largely declined. Annual changes in fatality rates often track with the economy. This chart compares year-to-year changes in the national employment-to-population ratio with fatality rates per billion vehicle miles traveled.

**Sources:** NHTSA Fatality Analysis Reporting System; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics for Employment-to-Population Ratio for Workers Age 16 and Over.
limited laws. No state enacted a new helmet law last year, and lawmakers in 10 states introduced legislation that would have repealed existing helmet mandates. About 96 percent of motorcyclists wear helmets in states where all riders are required to wear them, compared to just 51 percent in other states, according to a 2014 NHTSA survey.

Ignition interlock devices have been shown to reduce repeat DWI offenses by 70 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Half of the states mandate installation of the devices on vehicles for all drunk driving offenders. These motorists account for about a third of traffic deaths nationally.

Speeding plays a role in more than a quarter of all fatal crashes. States have continued to increase maximum speed limits, however, and a handful have statewide maximum speeds of 75 mph or more.

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, a national group that lobbies Congress and state legislatures, rates states on whether they’ve passed laws covering seat belts, teen and impaired driving, and a dozen other safety concerns. In the group’s latest report, Delaware, Illinois, New York and Oregon had adopted the most safety laws (12), while six states had enacted five or fewer of the recommended laws. The least restrictive traffic laws are found in predominantly rural and Western states. “When the deaths were going down, people were quick to pat themselves on the back,” says Jackie Gillan, the safety group’s president. “There is still a major unfinished agenda.”

Lawmakers’ willingness to pass additional traffic safety mandates doesn’t always align with political ideology. In general, though, those who oppose tighter rules view them as unnecessary government intrusion. “Government exists to protect us from each other, not to protect us from ourselves,” said Maine Sen. Eric Brakey, as he argued last year for a bill repealing the state’s primary seat belt enforcement law. The bill did not pass.

Gillan says sanctions passed by Congress have proven more effective in pushing states to pass safety laws than incentive-based grant programs. A law enacted in 1995, for example, withheld federal highway funds from states that failed to pass “zero tolerance” laws making it illegal for those under age 21 to drive with small amounts of alcohol in their system. Every state had adopted these laws by 1998.

In addition to state laws and the economy, a litany of other factors push traffic fatalities up or down. Warmer weather typically contributes to higher death totals. Some attribute changes in driving habits to fluctuations in gas prices.

Increasingly negative public perceptions of law enforcement and the proliferation of body cameras may also be affecting the way laws are enforced. GHSA’s Adkins suspects that, in some areas, police are less likely to make traffic stops for minor violations than before the recent series of controversies over aggressive police behavior, in part because of concerns for their safety.

New technology and automated vehicles have further shown promise in enhancing traffic safety. Adkins says, but they’re still a long way off.

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BEHIND THE NUMBERS

By Mike Maciag

STATES’ DIFFERENT SAFETY LAWS

Federal officials and safety advocates have called on states to strengthen traffic laws, which can vary greatly from state to state. Three of the top safety measures include primary enforcement of front seat belt laws, requiring all motorcyclists to wear helmets and mandating ignition interlock devices all for convicted drunk driving offenders. Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota and Wyoming do not have any of the above laws.

Review traffic fatality data for each state at governing.com/trafficdeaths

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A great deal of attention has been paid to the management of state prisons in recent years. Much of it has been aimed at corralling the growth in corrections costs, which have been consuming ever-larger portions of the total budget. But it’s equally important to look at jails. These are generally run by counties and cities, and, while populations move through jails at a more fluid pace than prisons, these facilities hold a population of about 740,000 at any one time, according to the Prison Policy Initiative.

A look through a number of local jail audits and other independent reports reveals a management miasma that all too often is hobbling the smooth and safe functioning of jails. One of the big issues confronted by these lockups is lack of staffing. This is often the result of insufficient funding, but it can also be a product of difficulties in hiring enough personnel to fill jobs in jails. After all, it’s not exactly a kid’s dream job—the way firefighter or police officer might be. “People don’t want to work in a jail when they grow up,” says Brandon Wood, executive director of the Texas Commission on Jail Standards, adding that the ups and downs of the economy and employment rates aren’t necessarily the problem. “Meeting the staffing ratios is a challenge at all times,” he says.

Denver budgeters have also had a difficult time coming to grips with staffing shortages. According to a thorough audit, the department that runs the city and county jail has underestimated its staff budget by $8 million or more every year, which translates into roughly 100 full-time positions. The result has been high overtime rates as well as high turnover. One report found that an average jail employee worked about 24 hours of mandatory overtime every week. Denver is taking steps to rectify the situation.

The overtime costs of understaffing are expensive, but there are other ramifications. If a parks department, for instance, is understaffed, weeds will fester and playground equipment will become wobbly. If the department of sanitation has too few workers, the streets will get dirty and garbage collection may suffer. But while well-painted jungle gyms and cleaner byways are worthy goals, jails are filled with inmates who are potentially dangerous and can’t be ignored. When that happens, both the correctional officers and the inmates in these overcrowded and understaffed jails are at risk.

A worn-out, overworked correctional officer is less likely to be effective at dealing with inmates. “The risk of an inappropriate response to a jail incident,” says Valerie Walling, deputy auditor of Denver, “is higher when an employee is mentally or physically fatigued.”

Even when jails are able to increase staffing, they often neglect to keep up with staff training. In Hamilton County, Ohio, for example, all corrections officers undergo initial training. But according to an audit, there is no ongoing training nor is specialized training mandated or offered to employees. Instead, corrections officers who want to obtain state certification as a law enforcement officer must do so on their own time and at their own cost. The deputies, the audit points out, are working a minimum of 80 hours...
per week with “diminished ability to protect themselves, other deputies, civilian employees and inmates.” The audit goes on to make a more damaging point: “This lack of training results in officers being confused, embarrassed, unable to make proper decisions” and opens the community to potential lawsuits.

Jails are often low on the list when it’s time to allocate scarce resources. But over-time, badly trained staff and safety issues are just the beginning of the litany of problems that arise when jails are under-funded. An audit in Chesapeake County, Va., for example, found that the sheriff’s office had a disproportionately high percentage of worker’s compensation claims relative to its number of full-time employees. A reason cited for the increased number of claims was that inmate populations were far above rated capacity.

Mismangement due to underfunding often stops an enterprise from utilizing data in order to run more efficiently and save money over the long term. The Denver audit, for example, found that the county faced a number of issues with quality and consistency of data used and reported by the Denver Sheriff Department. There were numerous instances of conflicting data being reported, as well as discrepancies in collection between facilities. Furthermore, at the time of the audit, the department’s Data Analytics Division, which is charged with building and maintaining data reporting systems, did not have adequate staff to perform its duties. Staffing was not expected to be expanded.

It’s never popular to pump money into jails. It’s money that would come out of the budget lines for such programs as education, sanitation and transportation. One solution that could make a big difference in many communities is to bolster programs and resources that go to alternatives to jail, including bail reform, better services for the mentally ill and community diversion programs. In order to save money down the line, these are, we suspect, more palatable to the public.

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The Power of Public Spaces
When done right, they strengthen the bonds of citizenship.

When Joseph P. Riley Jr. first ran for mayor of Charleston, S.C., in 1975, he wanted to heal racial tensions in a deeply Southern city where the Civil War began. Visiting older European cities, he found his signature strategy. He saw people of all socioeconomic classes enjoying these cities’ fine public spaces. Riley became convinced that when the public realm—streets, squares and parks—is built well, the bonds of citizenship are reinforced. People know that everyone owns it.

Riley, who last month concluded four decades as Charleston’s mayor, calls himself a disciple of the urbanist William Whyte, who first came to prominence as the author of The Organization Man in 1956. While working with the New York City Planning Commission, Whyte pioneered the use of direct observation to study pedestrian behavior, work that led to two influential books: The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces in 1980 and 1988’s City: Rediscovering the Center. That last book, which I read shortly after it came out, pulses with energy and is still as vibrant and relevant today as when it was first released.

Amanda Burden had Whyte as a mentor. As New York City’s planning director under Mayor Michael Bloomberg, she focused on the impact of urban design on the everyday lives of people. “If there is any single lesson I’ve learned, it is that public spaces have power,” she said in a 2014 speech. “It’s not just the people using them, it’s an even greater number of people who feel better about their city just knowing they’re there.” Burden is credited as a major force in saving the High Line, transforming the abandoned elevated railway into an urban park that now gets about 5 million visitors annually.

One of the reasons that public spaces are underutilized as tools to bring citizens together is that there are real obstacles to doing it right. Finding the money is always going to be a challenge, of course, but there are other barriers. Fred Kent, who worked with Whyte and went on to start the nonprofit Project for Public Spaces, talks about how designers, architects and planners focus on order and control, too often leaving the community out of the conversation. Kenten talks about how developers see people only as customers. They wanted, for example, to put shops along the High Line. That, she said, would have made it a mall, not a park.

Today Charleston boasts a collection of public spaces that rivals much of what Riley saw in Europe four decades ago. For Riley, the key is the quality of those spaces. When “we work hard to make it nice,” he says, the average citizen appreciates that, “and their citizenship becomes more valuable.” No one knows better than those who lead our cities how important that civic bond is to effective governance.
Hacking Gets Physical

Worries grow as our utility infrastructure relies on the Internet more than ever.

By Tod Newcombe

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) released a report last year that showed the nation’s water grid, not just its electric grid, was vulnerable to attacks by hackers. In fact, water utilities were most likely to have reported what DHS categorizes as an “advanced persistent threat,” which involves exploiting flaws in software programs that run water valves and controls, among other things. The worst of these attacks can go undetected for long periods of time.

Water utilities have in recent years—like pretty much everything else—become more reliant on the Internet to operate the networks of pipes and pumps. These controls can help monitor conditions around the clock, and the benefits for both water and electrical utilities can be greater reliability and lower labor costs as fewer workers are needed to monitor the valves, controls and switches.

But hackers are looking for ways to test the vulnerabilities of critical infrastructure, and while so much attention has been paid to America’s power grid, water utilities are particularly exposed. Hackers and state-sponsored terrorists are “mapping the control systems for water and wastewater [systems] to understand where the controls systems are located,” says Paul Stockton, a former assistant secretary of defense and managing director of Sonecon, a Washington-based security consulting firm. “This kind of mapping could be preparatory work in anticipation of attacks that are designed to disable and disrupt critical infrastructure.”

Indeed, the FBI confirmed in 2014 that operatives in China, Iran and Russia were doing just such a mapping operation, looking for cybersecurity weaknesses in the country’s water and electric infrastructure.

In case of such an event or a natural disaster, most utilities operate mechanical backup systems. But maintaining a dual control system is expensive. “Utility companies want to reduce their costs as they transition to a new generation of industrial control systems,” says Stockton. The risk is that “they will stop maintaining these backup systems and stop retaining the staff that operate them.”

To keep utilities running backup systems, Stockton and other experts suggest that public utility commissions and the feds help utilities recover the costs of running two systems while also investing in promising strategies to protect infrastructure from cyberattacks. State regulators could also help reduce risks by working more collaboratively with federal regulators to push utilities to focus on creating comprehensive cybersecurity strategies rather than just complying with regulatory requirements, according to a report by the Government Accountability Office.

Other methods for mitigating a possible cyberattack on water infrastructure include the adoption of a set of standards for the entire industry; better sharing of information by utilities about cybersecurity vulnerabilities, incidents and best practices; and stronger requirements that smart grid and water control systems have built-in security features.

If all else fails, the National Governors Association’s Council of Governors has developed plans for a cybersecurity National Guard that would provide a unified response in the event of an attack that disrupts, damages or destroys utilities. Let’s hope it’s not needed.

Email tnewcombe@governing.com
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Mark Zuckerberg is now a big-time philanthropist. Two months ago, Facebook’s chief executive and his wife Priscilla Chan launched a plan—the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative—to give away most of their wealth. It’s not clear what specific causes the initiative will target or what it will do. But what it does is not nearly as important as how it does it. Without spending a dollar, it has already brought disruptive change to philanthropy.

How? It’s all about the organization. The initiative is set up not as a traditional tax-exempt nonprofit, but as a for-profit company. It is not bound by the rules that charitable and tax-exempt foundations are. Organized as a limited liability company (LLC), the initiative can call on a variety of capitalistic tools, such as funding nonprofit organizations, making private investments and participating in policy debates. Traditional nonprofits still do good work, but the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative makes “philanthrocapitalism” the center of gravity for a modern charity.

Zuckerberg and Chan are expected to plow more than $45 billion worth of Facebook stock into their initiative. That’s a lot of money for just two people. For comparison, that’s also about what California will spend on K-12 education this year. But to a big city or state budget director, $45 billion is hardly a long-term game changer.

Yet those of us in state and local finance shouldn’t ignore the initiative or what it represents. Philanthrocapitalism could bring disruptive change to our front door, and in a good way.

Think for a moment about South Carolina and the devastating floods that rampaged through that state this fall. To prevent another such disaster, state and local officials say they need $2 billion to invest in stormwater infrastructure. This is a classic scale problem. Local governments there will need to borrow money to make those investments. But investors who are willing to put money into state and local infrastructure—usually through municipal bonds—won’t invest without a plan from the government to pay them back in full. It’s tough to have such a plan for stormwater infrastructure because it’s not always clear who should pay for “use” stormwater drainage and how.

So in South Carolina, and many other places, stormwater investment is a huge economic and political challenge. That’s where philanthrocapitalism could come into play. The initiative or similar LLCs could guarantee loans from other lenders. It could buy stock in a public-private partnership. It could corner the market on goods and services needed to develop stormwater infrastructure. What if the initiative leveraged a small amount of its capital to encourage other investors to buy into small, mid-sized stormwater systems? Beyond stormwater, a philanthropic LLC could leverage money for rural broadband, government cybersecurity or any of the dozens of other infrastructure needs where the market is a bit undersized and the revenue sources aren’t clear. The potential benefits to health, safety and commerce are huge.

Consider another scenario. Underfunded pensions are a huge problem for many public schools, especially districts that aren’t part of a statewide plan. Zuckerberg clearly cares about public education, as evidenced by his $100 million investment in Newark, N.J., public schools a few years ago. What if the initiative backedstopped some of the most financially stressed, small public school pensions? Insuring that retirees get pensions they’ve earned could give school boards the financial and political latitude to pursue new models for curriculum, staffing and mentoring students. Tying up just a few hundred million of philanthrocapitalism could transform dozens of struggling school districts.

Of course, philanthrocapitalists such as Zuckerberg could pursue disruptive change through the political process. Many of them made their fortunes in social media. They believe in the power of that medium to change public opinion. That could mean a variety of challenges, both positive and negative, for state and local finance.

Zuckerberg and his peers have ushered in a new playbook and a new agenda for philanthropy. Let’s hope positive change through meaningful partnerships with state and local governments is a core part of that agenda.
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Behind America’s oldest executive mansion sits a new green and white chicken coop, home to Hillary, Dolley and Camo. The three egg-laying chickens came to roost in Richmond, Va., as the fulfillment of a campaign pledge. Gov. Terry McAuliffe promised his two kids in 2013 that if he won his race for governor, they’d get chickens. “The small flock makes McAuliffe the first modern Virginia governor to keep farm animals at the 200-year-old mansion,” according to The Washington Post. McAuliffe is thought to be the only current governor with a coop. Pat Quinn kept nine hens at the Illinois governor’s mansion in 2014, before his successor, Gov. Bruce Rauner, removed them. Caring for poultry ties in nicely with the agendas of both the governor and First Lady Dorothy McAuliffe. He is a big promoter of agriculture, the state’s largest industry, and she is a champion of improving children’s nutrition. The coop “is a fun way of promoting healthy eating habits,” she says, “and reminding us where our food comes from.” —David Kidd
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