Cities Now and Tomorrow

Jeff Gerritt
www.freep.com/cities

New Ways to Think about an Urban Agenda

- Put urban and city issues back on the political map.
- Redefine “urban” to include metropolitan regions and smaller cities.
- Make advocacy for cities non-partisan.
- Think of cities as the solution, not the problem.
- Make lowering prison incarceration rates part of the new urban agenda.
- Bring together issues of social justice and “place.”
- Take a comprehensive approach. Stop thinking in silos.
- Create a sense of hope and optimism. Other states and cities are showing that, with smart policies, things can change.
The Issue: Political Neglect

- After decades of decline and political neglect, cities need a national urban agenda to help revive them. Cities must become an important part of the current political debate.
- America’s prosperity and strength depend on cities and the metropolitan regions they anchor.
- Whether rich or poor, all cities, in varying degree, face similar problems that federal and state governments must help solve.

The Issue: Poverty

- Cities have become places of concentrated poverty. We can’t solve the national problem of poverty without solving it in cities.
- Using economic incentives, the federal government should push cities to create collaborative plans to fight poverty and encourage public and private agencies to cooperate instead of compete, or work in silos.
- The U.S. spends less on homeless programs in a year than it does in five days in Iraq.
- The War on Poverty in the 1960s actually worked, cutting U.S. poverty rates in half.

The Issue: Public Safety

- Crime is concentrated in urban areas. The federal government has chopped aid to local law enforcement, disregarding the safety of the nation’s cities.
- Law enforcement programs must be balanced, including prevention and intervention efforts.
- The nation needs stronger gun control legislation, as called for by mayors and police chiefs.
- More support is needed for prisoner re-entry programs. More than 600,000 people a year (12,000 in Michigan) leave prisons and re-enter their mostly urban communities.
### The Issue: Transportation

- Developing transportation policies for the new century will take the same national commitment and creativity that built the interstate highway system in the 1950s.
- Energy and environmental needs demand a greater investment in mass transit.
- Metropolitan areas must get a fairer return from the next 6-year federal transportation bill.
- Gasoline taxes are no longer a good way to fund transportation.
- A bi-partisan commission recommended double the spending, up to $340 billion a year.
- Mass transit in southeast Michigan desperately needs a first success.

### The Issue: Education

- Cities can’t rebound without good public schools.
- Mayors must get involved. School boards have failed to provide needed accountability and leadership.
- President Bush deserves credit for making education a national responsibility, but he needs to match the rhetoric with resources.
- Fully fund Head Start
- Community colleges play an important role in the new economy.

### The Issue: Incarceration Nation

- Get tough policies have failed to reduce crime and made the U.S. the world’s leader incarcerator, with more than 1 in every 100 adults in prison. Half of those locked up are African American men.
- Michigan spends $2 billion a year on prisons. It is one of only four states that spend more on prisons than higher education.
- Half of those released from prison go back. We can reduce that number with better re-entry and prisoner education and training programs.
- Change sentencing guidelines to divert more low-level and non-violent offenders into lower cost and more effective community programs.
- Treat more mentally ill and drug-addicted offenders in the community and release sick and dying inmates who pose no risk.
- One in 14 African American children has an incarcerated parent, making them seven times more likely to go to prison themselves.
The Issue: Regional Cooperation and Government

- We are a nation of interconnected metropolitan regions that cross city, county and even state lines.
- Local governments must become more regional in how they deliver services, tax residents, and plan investments and developments.
- Federal and state governments should provide economic incentives to encourage shared services and even government mergers.
- Township governments, creatures of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, ought to be abolished.

The Issue: Economic Development

- The decline of cities like Detroit has undermined the regional economies that fuel the economic engines of states and the nation.
- A new set of federal policies are needed to revive the economies of central cities and their regions.
- Using tax credits, grants and low-interest loans, government can stimulate private investment and take it to places it would otherwise not go.
- The federal government should restore the Urban Development Action Grant program and fund Community Development Block Grants at 1990s levels.
- Depleted cities like Detroit and Youngstown, Ohio, need to consolidate and creatively downsize.
- Green development and new energy technologies are central to 21st century economies.
- Cities need a middle-class tax base to support services and investments.
- Murals and other public art can uplift a community and spark investment in blighted neighborhoods.

The Missing Link – An Urban Agenda

- Questions