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DESIGNS FOR A NEW CALIFORNIA
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LIFE'S LABORATORY
WHERE POLICY MEETS EXPERIENCE

EDITOR'S NOTE

BLUEPRINT

A magazine of research, policy, Los Angeles and California

THIS ISSUE OF BLUEPRINT was sent to our printer in the midst of a mushrooming crisis. As you read these articles, our nation might be recovering from COVID-19 — or the coronavirus pandemic might be growing more deadly. We can only hope for the former and weep at the thought of the latter.

That creates room for wonder: Does anything else matter when a scourge is coursing through the land? The answer, we think, is yes. The articles presented here examine an important idea — that research meets its test when it confronts the real world. That theme was conceived before the coronavirus crisis, but it seems even more meaningful in the midst of it.

The concerns at the heart of these chapters are not about COVID-19 per se, but about education, transportation, housing and homelessness. These are abiding challenges of our time. They raise questions — addressed here — about the interaction of research and human life. And those questions are precisely at the center of the coronavirus crisis, as well.

While researchers grapple with the spread of this disease, they are learning, adapting to the world even as they attempt to affect it. What works in China may not work in Iran or Italy or the United States. Italy has universal health care; that did not prevent the virus from wreaking havoc. The United States has a complex hybrid of public and private health insurance; it, too, has proven vulnerable to this affliction. Each society and government must use the tools and methods suitable to its culture.

Nonetheless, there are constants. Societies with confidence in government fare better than those whose governments have earned skepticism and derision. Leaders who command respect are more effective than those who lie, deflect, sow doubts and disparage science. Experimentation is useful and may chart the way forward. Patience is hard to muster, but essential for success.

These lessons are on display in this issue of Blueprint. A new idea — a better way to educate a child or to prevent a family from becoming homeless — begins with the intelligence of researchers and then demands the sturdiness of leadership. Lasting change requires a willingness to explore and explain, to admit when a theory has not worked and to rally around one that has. Candor is essential.

These are days of paradox. We need to work together to defeat a virus, but defeating it requires us to be physically apart. To ease an old problem, homelessness, we need to try new ideas. We try community schools to improve education, or strategic pricing to create more parking, knowing that these approaches may fail. What we know for sure is this: Refusing to try is the only guarantee of failure.

The future will tax our intelligence and strain our hearts. We and those we love will suffer. But those are reasons to push forward, not to give up. The work featured in this issue of Blueprint reflects wisdom, courage and a willingness to try. Those are mandates for our era. They will bring us closer to fulfillment for ourselves and generations to follow — a goal worthy of our work.

In the end, science and experience command the same from all of us. We must stay safe. And we must always take care of one another.



JIM NEWTON
Editor-in-chief

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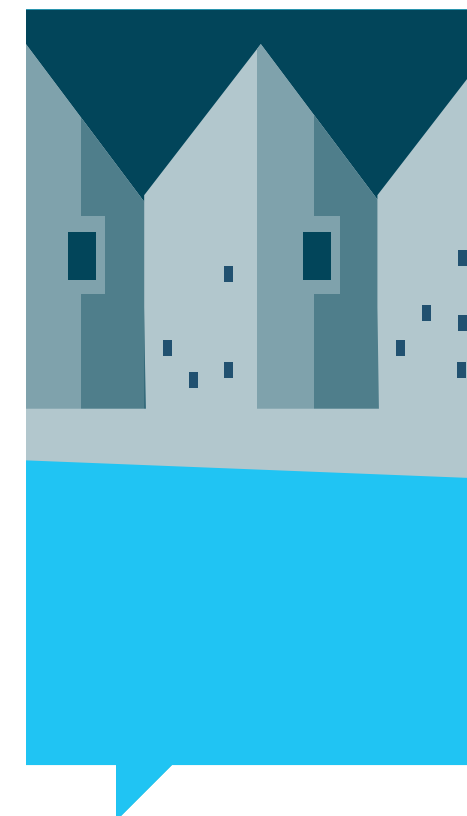
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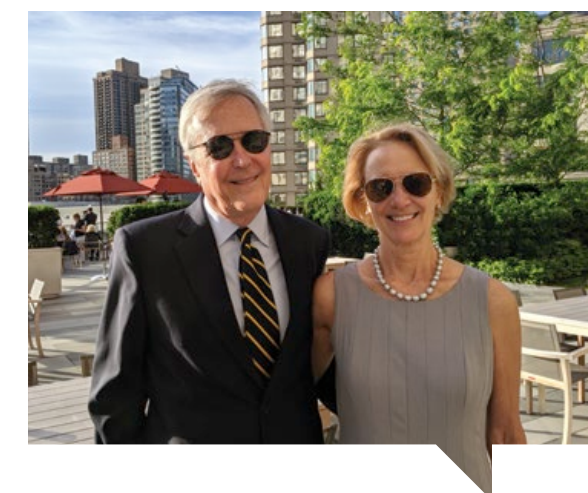


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IN
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THE FIGHT
FOR FREELANCERS

DAVID HILL IS TIRED OF TALKING about California’s Assembly Bill 5, the unexpectedly polarizing piece of legislation that was signed by Gov. Gavin Newsom last September and went into effect in January. But AB5 — which codifies a 2018 Superior Court of L.A. decision to reclassify some independent contractors as employees — has become a flash point in the national conversation about gig workers’ rights, whether it pertains to Uber and Lyft drivers, journalists or even strippers.

Hill, a bookish freelance writer in his early 40s, is 1st vice president of the New York-based National Writers Union. He and his cohort at the NWU provided crucial input leading up to passage of NYC’s Freelance Isn’t Free Act of 2017, which held local businesses legally culpable for delaying or falling short of agreed-upon payments to independent contractors. That measure has been a relatively uncomplicated success, and is being used as a springboard for statewide legislation in New York. Yet, at Hill’s union meetings and in his ongoing dialogue with lawmakers, individual workers and members of the media, the conversation invariably comes back to California’s new law.

“[AB5] has been a sticky wicket for us from the beginning,” said Hill, speaking in the commanding voice of a union organizer even in the relative quiet of a restaurant near his home. “We’re a small union. I wish we had more clout than we do. They wanted to hear from freelance writers, so they turned to our union, and our input was ultimately ignored.”

Hill and the NWU were particularly concerned about an AB5 provision that seemed to misunderstand the nature of freelance work (and that, thanks to almost-unanimous pushback from those it directly affects, has since been struck from the law’s language). While some professionals (e.g., travel agents and commercial fishermen, to name a pair) were largely exempt from AB5 and could go about business as usual, freelance creative classes such as journalists and photojournalists were capped at 35 submissions to a given vendor per year, at which point that company would be compelled to reclassify them as full-time employees. Abstractly, that seemed logical, but the 21st-century freelance ecosystem

works on a quietly accepted agreement: Companies minimize their tax burdens and overall per-employee compensation costs by working with independent contractors, while the freelancer retains flexibility of schedule and the ability to work on myriad projects for multiple outlets at once. And then there’s the nature of online journalism: Today’s blogger might surpass 35 submissions for a single website in less than a month, let alone 12.

“It took all these months for them to realize that submissions cap was going to be more controversial than they thought, so it’s gone now, and I’m glad,” Hill said. But that’s not the whole battle. Some publishers take advantage of freelancers and will keep at it, creating “a lot of loopholes to exploit people by putting them on 1099s when they shouldn’t be and avoiding paying taxes. So even though we fought really hard for what we thought would be the best thing for freelance writers in that bill, we still wanted that bill to pass.”

What Hill was getting at is the dilemma for anyone not quite in business for themselves but not afforded the privileges of salaried staff. “The big question is: Is the whole notion of freelance exploitive, inherently?” he asked. He’s inclined to say yes.

“A LOT OF ... COMPANIES AT THE FOREFRONT OF FIGHTING THESE BILLS ARE RADICALLY RESHAPING OUR ECONOMY.”

But it has its benefits. Some writers are perfectly content to trade union-organizing rights and employer-sponsored health care for the chance to saturate the internet and social media with their bylines and spread their work around. Choice can be a luxury, one perhaps not as accessible to your average Lyft shifter multitasking fares among other piece-meal, part-time work to pay rent. Drivers are fighting for better pay and continued independence, while employers are motivated to hold down costs and are more than willing to use the appeal of independence to achieve that.

“A lot of these companies at the forefront of fighting these bills are radically reshaping our economy by misclassifying people as 1099 contractors, by calling themselves ‘technology companies’ instead of employers of these people,” Hill said.

“The problem these bills are addressing is a real one,” Hill continued. “And it’s one that’s affecting media in ways it’s already affected other people in this economy. We just don’t see it because we’re not that far down the road yet, but it’s coming. We as freelancers in media should help fight that fight, because it’s about our future.”

Freelancers may not all have the same goals or priorities, but they share an interest in being paid fairly for their work. To get that, Hill said, New York is working to create thoughtful rules and is “learning from some of the mistakes in California.”

— **Kenny Herzog**

“A LIGHTER LOOK”

Rick Meyer’s regularly appearing column takes a lighter look at politics and public affairs around the world. This month: “A Revival or a Hanging.”

MAYBE NATIONAL POLITICAL conventions should be outlawed.

“There is something about a national convention that makes it as fascinating as a revival or a hanging,” H.L. Menken once said. “It is vulgar, it is ugly, it is stupid, it is tedious, it is hard upon both the higher cerebral centers and the gluteus maximus, and yet it is somehow charming. One sits through long sessions wishing heartily that all the delegates and alternates were dead and in hell — and then suddenly there comes a show so gaudy and hilarious, so melodramatic and obscene, unimaginably exhilarating and preposterous that one lives a gorgeous year in an hour.”

Politico offers these examples:

In 1860, Democrats got so crazy they had to take a time-out. The issue was slavery. When Sen. Stephen Douglas of Illinois couldn’t muster enough votes to be nominated, the convention adjourned and departed Charleston for a month and a half. It reconvened in Baltimore, where the party split. Northern Democrats nominated Douglas, and Southern Democrats nominated Vice President John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky. Both claimed to be the official Democratic candidate.

Republican Abraham Lincoln won the presidency.

In 1924, the Democrats met at Madison Square Garden and balloted 103 times before finally choosing compromise candidate John W. Davis over former Treasury Secretary William Gibbs McAdoo, who was supported by the Ku Klux Klan, and New York Gov. Al Smith, a Catholic and ardent opponent of Prohibition. Reporters called it a Klanbake. Delegates yelled: “Ku Ku McAdoo!” and “Booze! Booze! Booze!” They fought fist to fist in the aisles. The Kluxers were “on their tiptoes,” wrote Mencken, “their hands clutching their artillery nervously and their eyes apop for dynamite bombs and Jesuit spies.”

Republican Calvin Coolidge won the presidency.

In 1968, within memory for some of us, the Democrats met in Chicago. Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy had won most of the primaries, but party bosses supported Vice President Hubert Humphrey, tarred with President Lyndon Johnson’s war in Vietnam. Campuses erupted with antiwar protests. Kennedy and Martin Luther King were assassinated. “The world has never been more disorderly within memory of living man,” wrote columnist Walter Lippmann. The party bosses killed a platform plank calling for peace. In response, several thousand protesters marched on the convention hall. Inside, police, allied with Mayor Richard Daley, roughed up liberal delegates and news reporters. Outside, the police assaulted the protesters. Historian Josh Zeitz recalls: “When Sen. Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut rose to denounce the ‘Gestapo tactics on the streets of Chicago,’ slack-jawed TV viewers observed Daley stand up, jab his right index finger in Ribicoff’s direction, and let loose a string of inaudible obscenities. Those who could read lips made out some of his harangue: ‘Fuck you. You Jew son-of-a-bitch!’”

Republican Richard Nixon won the presidency.

Three nuns walk into a bar. The bartender says, “What is this, some kind of joke?”

No joke at all. These three conventions and their consequences are as real as lightning on a dark night.

Lincoln, Coolidge and Nixon. On the greatness scale, maybe one of three is acceptable.

But Mencken would argue otherwise.

As a renowned journalist and critic of American life during the 1920s and 1930s, he liked to cover political conventions. “He didn’t take them too seriously,” says Danny Heitman, editor of *Forum*, the magazine of the national academic society Phi Kappa Phi. “He had a low opinion of the intelligence of the average voter, which made him skeptical of democracy.”

In *Humanities*, the magazine of the National Endowment of the Humanities, Heitman writes that Mencken “loved the gaudy pageantry of political conventions, [although he] was wary of what they produced.”

During convention season in 1920, Mencken said:

“As democracy is perfected, the office of president represents, more and more closely, the inner soul of the people. On some great and glorious day, the plain folks of the land will reach their heart’s desire at last, and the White House will be adorned by a downright moron.”

— **Richard E. Meyer**

FIRST PERSON:
TWO LOOKS AT LIFE UP CLOSE

Blueprint regularly features first-person articles in our Landscape section. This issue, two authors see Southern California from very different perspectives.

THE MEANING OF DACA AND A LIFE IN THE SHADOWS

MOST OF THE DEBATE over the immigration program known as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, involves abstract policy questions. Does the program reward illegal behavior or protect from harm those who have done nothing wrong themselves? Do the children brought to this country at a young age by their parents deserve protection or ejection from the United States? How much deference should judges or legislators allow the president in setting immigration priorities? Those are real and serious questions, debated by legal scholars and politicians. It is not my intention to discount them; however, they are not the questions that I confront.

My parents brought me to the United States when I was 4 months old due to the violent, political turmoil they faced in my war-torn birthplace. Although they entered the country with permission, they stayed in the U.S. longer than they were permitted to do so and raised me here. The United States is the only country where I have ever lived. But I’ve grown up here in a kind of half-life, able to participate in certain activities but not others, alive for family and friends, but cut off from services and opportunities that others take for granted. It is life layered atop civil death.

Growing up, my friends studied for their driving exams and, once they proved their ability, were issued permits and then licenses. Their driving licenses granted them the freedom of mobility: They were liberated from parents and siblings. I was not. As we grew older, my friends opened bank accounts and began to save money for college or other expenses. I could not. Nor could I obtain a credit card. In the simplest, millennial terms, this meant that I could not retain a monthly Apple Music subscription, order Ubers or Postmates or engage in any form of online shopping. Most people probably do not consider the connection between immigration status and music access. I do.

Like many of my classmates, I worked hard in school. I spent 18 years attending public school, graduating with a 3.8 high school G.P. A., only to be denied even the chance to apply for federal

financial aid and public loans for my higher educational expenses. Most jobs were unavailable to me, too, as I could not produce evidence of employment authorization. Some of those who attack immigrants question their willingness to work and pay taxes; I wanted to do both but was prevented from doing so by a status I had no part in creating. Nor could I fully participate in other aspects of young life: As my friends celebrated their 21st birthdays in places reserved for adults, I could not go to those nightclubs or even purchase a glass of wine.

I cannot travel. If I would dare to leave the country, I would be unable to return home. Immigration officers of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security would be more than eager to dispose of me in a foreign land. The ability to explore is a privilege reserved for the documented.

Some of that lightened a few years ago when President Obama implemented the DACA program. Under its protections, I was able to obtain a state identification card, learn how to drive, experience the Hollywood and DTLA nightlife and get

a job. It was a reprieve, a resurrection from my civil death. I attended community college and then was admitted to UCLA, though my move to that world-renowned university was hindered by discovering two weeks before I began that my state financial aid grants had been de-

nied due to technicalities related to my complex legal status. The UC system safeguarded me and filled in the gap with private grants and loans. I graduated a few months ago, and am prepared to join the workforce, pay my taxes and reach my full intellectual potential in this country.

But the protections of DACA were temporary and fragile. The Trump Administration has rejected DACA, and a court decision could take away everything that I have spent my whole life dreaming of and working to attain. The effects on me and my others are not abstract; they are real and tangible. As the Supreme Court considers questions of presidential authority, separation of powers, history and precedent, it won’t take into account what this means for my iTunes account or, more important, my post-graduation career. But I will. With one stroke of a tie-breaking justice’s pen, I could lose everything. I would be forced back into the grave with yet another civil death.

— D.Z.

Note: The writer of this article has asked not to be identified, given the continued uncertainty over the legal status of DACA recipients.



THE COACHING CHRONICLES

A FEW MINUTES AFTER our flag football team’s 46-0 drubbing, I had to address a group of downtrodden 9- and 10-year-olds. As they all took a knee, I opted not to sugarcoat the loss or offer excuses, such as our limited practice time or missing our best player due to injury. I praised their effort and attitude, but the other team was simply much better. I told the boys there’s an expression for this kind of result.

“Some days you eat the bear,” I said on the chilly November evening in El Sereno, “and some days the bear eats you.”

Did they get it? Not even close, and the eight youngsters looked at me like I’d just read them a passage from Dostoevsky through a mouthful of marbles. But that’s one of the things about coaching kids: Do it long enough and you’ll hit this kind of game, and what happens next matters much more than what just occurred.

I’m in my fourth season coaching my now 10-year-old son’s basketball team, and I have one flag football season in my pocket. It’s all at city park leagues, meaning a relatively low level of competition. Forget those expensive and weekend-destroying travel or club squads—I dig the local rec center, where seasons last less than



PHOTO COURTESY OF JON REGARDIE

three months, the price is below \$100 including uniforms, all coaches volunteer, and your team is like the proverbial Forrest Gump box of chocolates—given the everyone-in pool, you have no idea what kind of athletes you’ll get.

I coach basketball because I love the game (I coached football because no one else was available). Although my jumper would make Kawhi Leonard wince, I know how to impart fundamentals and foment team play. Not every kid can shoot, but with patience you can teach even newbies to raise their arms, move laterally and be a pest on defense. The key is to identify how each kid can contribute, convince them that defense and passing are as important as scoring, and offer positive reinforcement. Then you hope for parental involvement — I generally ask for at-home practice, though one enterprising mom augmented that by offering her 7-year-old daughter Elsa (kids’ names have been changed) a bounty of \$10 per steal. Elsa collected two that season, which I guess makes her the first professional I’ve coached.

I’ve helmed a 23-2 basketball victory and been on the sidelines for a last-second loss that left kids crying. But in coaching one thing you learn is that their resiliency is amazing—nothing halts tears like the post-game snack of a juice box and Oreos, and then goofing around with their teammates. You may want to dissect each play during the car ride home, but most kids have a capacity of about two minutes of post-game analysis before asking what’s up for the rest of the day.

In coaching, like many other things, you steal from those who came before you. I’ve learned to hand out a “conduct code” at the season’s first practice; I ask players to read it with their parents and sign their name. It’s simple stuff stressing accountability and behavior, with lines like, “I will always try my best. I will never quit,” and “I will respect the referees.” I never say so aloud, but the conduct code is for the parents, too.

COACH JON REGARDIE URGES ON HIS TEAM.

“SOME DAYS YOU EAT THE BEAR, AND SOME DAYS THE BEAR EATS YOU.”

Like the kids, I improve each season, and I’ve learned things that have surprised me. I won’t say winning’s not important, because it’s more fun to win than to lose. But some victories have nothing to do with the score.

At this age, individual breakthroughs matter. Evan may be able to drop 15 points a game, but there’s a different kind of achievement when he finally opts to give up a shot and instead passes to Randall, who hasn’t scored all season but is open under the basket (that Randall will probably blow the layup doesn’t matter). When Keith, who could barely dribble at the start of the season, snags a rebound, puts the ball on the floor three times without getting called for traveling and makes a crisp pass, then you can see he’s actually learning basketball. I remember that moment from last season, but honestly, I can’t recall if we won that game.

You can’t really measure the kind of wins that coaching provides. Well, except for Elsa’s steals—in that case it’s \$20.

As for me, coaching my son’s team, I always feel like I eat the bear.

— Jon Regardie

Robert Hertzberg
tackles California's most
challenging problems

The BIG ISSUES

WRITTEN BY
JIM NEWTON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
DAVID SPRAGUE



SMART PUBLIC POLICY, said California State Sen. Robert Hertzberg, begins with a question: “What is the problem we are trying to solve?”

An afternoon with Hertzberg returns to that question again and again. It undergirds his work on initiative reform, redistricting reform, creation of a state rainy day fund (several funds, in fact) and bail reform. No weighty issue gets resolved, he argued, without first addressing the underlying problem.

Hertzberg, the Legislature’s most exuberant wonk, gets excited as he talks about these things. They’re not barnburners. No one is picketing or holding candlelight vigils for the fate of state Assembly districts. But this stuff lights him up.

In a recent interview, he reflected on his repeated attempts to tinker with the machinery of California government to improve representation, to downplay partisanship, to bolster the state against gyrations in the economy. Hertzberg acknowledges that the payoffs from this work rarely deliver any immediate help to any particular group. Collectively and over time, however, they are correcting fundamental problems in the way California works and bringing rationality and fairness to systems that have gone awry.

They are made for a wonk, and they have found their champion in Bob Hertzberg.

“WHAT’S THE PROBLEM YOU’RE TRYING TO SOLVE? WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY ABOUT HOW TO GET THERE? AND THEN HOW DO YOU CONVINCE PEOPLE?”

— Sen. Robert Hertzberg

HERTZBERG’S SAN FERNANDO VALLEY OFFICE is in Van Nuys. It takes up much of the top floor of a strangely shaped, yellow building that houses state offices surrounding a covered courtyard. The courtyard once filled with rain, but Hertzberg persuaded Gov. Gray Davis to build a roof.

His suite is testament to his senses of history and humor. One nook houses a “Valley Hall of Fame” that honors, among others, John Elway and Marilyn Monroe. As he showed it off recently, an aide suggested that they make room for the Three Stooges, who were born in Brooklyn but made their fame in Hollywood. Hertzberg took note.

Offices inside the suite are named for California luminaries – William Mulholland, Upton Sinclair and the like. On this Friday afternoon, interns milled around a conference table, sipping soft drinks and plotting strategy. David Fleming, a lawyer and longtime Valley civic leader, has a corner office; he serves as a special adviser.

Hertzberg’s own space is chock-a-block with the ephemera of a life in politics, one that began in admiration of his father’s constitutional law practice. On one wall is a photograph of Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, who taught Hertzberg’s father at Harvard. There is an editorial from the Los Angeles Times calling for his help with new ideas. There are stacks of law books and maps.

Hertzberg grew up in Los Angeles and later Palm Springs. His first political work was at the side of Mervyn Dymally, during Dymally’s campaign for lieutenant governor. Hertzberg drove him up and down California, visiting college campuses and all 58 counties. When Dymally won, he appointed Hertzberg to the state Youth Commission, and Hertzberg’s life in public office began.

Recognized early for his political acumen, Hertzberg helped launch dozens of careers, steering the campaigns of up-and-coming politicians. One of those he helped was a young labor organizer named Antonio Villaraigosa, who won an Assembly seat in 1994. Hertzberg followed two years later, and Villaraigosa, who quickly ascended to the Assembly speakership, cleared the way for Hertzberg to take that post as well.

As Speaker, Hertzberg tackled issues related to water and education, two of California’s most persistent and difficult challenges. Married with two sons, both now grown, he worked grueling hours, chairing late-night negotiations with abundant enthusiasm. “He all but explodes with plans,” a Los Angeles Times editorial said in 2005. “A high-velocity wonk, he loves BIG ideas, and will flesh out every one of them for you if you give him the time.”



The editorial praised Hertzberg’s 2005 campaign for mayor, while also complaining that his support for breaking up the Los Angeles Unified School District gave aid and comfort to those who were then touting an ill-advised proposal to break up Los Angeles. In his bid for mayor, Hertzberg fell short to his old friend Villaraigosa, who beat incumbent Jim Hahn and went on to serve two terms.

TERMED OUT OF THE ASSEMBLY, Hertzberg left politics, but he did not go far, nor did he stay away long. After working in the private sector to develop green energy and serving on such policy groups as the blue-ribbon Think Long Committee, he won a seat in the state Senate in 2014. He is now the Senate majority leader — the first person to have held both that post and the speakership.

This has given Hertzberg plenty of opportunity to push policy, and he does so with relish and verve. Each time, he starts by asking what the problem is that needs solving.

His approach might sound obvious, but it is significant. Many politicians begin by asking not what problem needs solving but rather “Whose problem are we trying to solve?” That can lead down a path of service or toward satisfying special interests. Asking instead about the problem itself is more constructive. And once the problem is clearly framed, the challenge, Hertzberg said, is to identify a solution, then to build the constituencies necessary to win over legislators or voters. That last part is politics, but it comes after the policy goals are identified.

In other words, Hertzberg said: “What’s the problem you’re trying to solve? What does the research say about how to get there? And then how do you convince people?”

SOME EXAMPLES:

INITIATIVE REFORM

Ever since the Progressive Era, California initiatives have provided voters with a check on government but also moved decision-making away from experts and into the hands of amateurs and special interests.

Confronting that problem more than a decade ago, Hertzberg and others consulted historians and political scientists and proposed a solution: Before appearing on the ballot, an initiative could come to the Legislature, where officials could take a crack at it. If the Legislature delivered an alternative that met the goals of the initiative’s sponsors, they could withdraw their initiative up to the last minute.

Supporters wooed the business community, good-government groups and community activists, urging them to back a measure that would protect the initiative process but curb some of its shortcomings and excesses.. Voters were persuaded and approved those changes in 2014. The Legislature has since headed off ballot initiatives by taking action on consumer protection and the minimum wage.

REDISTRICTING

Californians were understandably concerned that leaving the Legislature in charge of redistricting would produce voting districts that were unfair and influenced by political considerations of the legislative majority. Hertzberg supported creation of a bipartisan California commission with 14 members (four Republicans, four Democrats and the rest unaffiliated) that would take over the job. Supporters, including leaders of California Common Cause, fanned out across the state to meet with editorial boards and other opinion makers and build support for the package. Voters approved it in 2008.

THE RAINY DAY FUND

California’s budget relies heavily on income and sales taxes, which gyrate wildly with the economy. That’s not all bad – the income tax is progressive, making it politically popular – but this dependence made the state flush in good times, and then plunged it into the red when the economy turned down, decreasing revenue when services were needed.

One solution would have been tax reform, but that was more than governors or the Legislature wanted to take on. Instead, Hertzberg, along with Gov. Jerry Brown and others, supported increasing the percentage of the budget that the state salts away in preparation for downturns. California today has rainy day funds for overall spending and smaller ones for specific functions of government. The state is still vulnerable to the economy, but it is better equipped to weather shortfalls than at any point in recent history.

“WE’VE BUILT THIS CORRUPT ARCHITECTURE.”

— Sen. Robert Hertzberg, on cash bail

BAIL

Bail is intended for just one purpose, to insure that people charged with crimes show up in court. It does this fairly well, but at a cost: Those who cannot afford bail end up doing time in jail, in some cases only to be found not guilty. The result – and the problem – is that bail treats the poor more harshly than the wealthy, and may not be better than other methods of insuring court appearances. “We’ve built this corrupt architecture,” Hertzberg said.

His effort to reinvent that system has riled opponents, mainly bail bondsmen and those they employ.

That’s hardly a remote constituency. Hertzberg’s office is only a few blocks from a bondsman. There are others throughout the state, near most jails. Hertzberg led the Legislature in approving a bill to eliminate cash bail, basing that in part on research that shows defendants are just as likely to make their appearances if the court provides timely reminders and holds out the threat of longer jail terms for those who miss dates. The bail industry has responded by funding a referendum that will appear on the ballot in November. Hertzberg is leading the campaign to defeat it.

MAKING POLICY IS NOT ALWAYS PRETTY. It requires a fusion of good ideas, compromises, coalition building and, all too often, money. Proposals that seem sound in theory sometimes fail once they are rolled out. When that happens, policymakers have to start over.

For some politicians, this is drudgery. There is not much conventional payback from ideas whose beneficiaries are diffuse, and there’s always the possibility of angering powerful interests — bail bondsmen, to name just one. But for Hertzberg, this is the fun of government, the reason to hold office at all.

“I have a son who is a classical music composer. He thinks in terms of all 116 instruments,” Hertzberg said. “I think the same way. I just do it in public policy.”

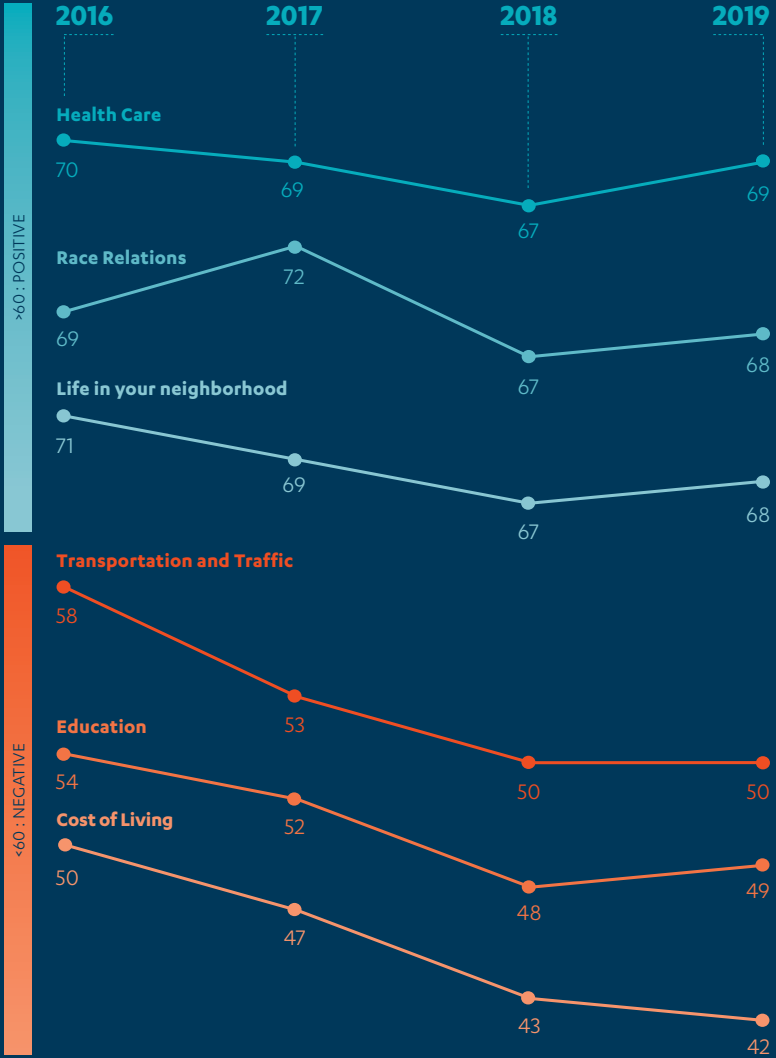


SEN. ROBERT HERTZBERG MEETS WITH HIS STAFF AT HIS SAN FERNANDO VALLEY OFFICES.

Producing Results — WHERE POLICY MEETS LIFE

LOS ANGELES QUALITY OF LIFE

The annual Los Angeles County Quality of Life Survey asks local residents to identify what works — and what doesn't — for them in their lives. Respondents rate as many as 40 aspects of local life, giving a thorough picture about how policies are being receive by those they are intended to affect. Because the scale is **from 10 to 100**, scores **above 60** are considered positive, while those below it are considered negative.



WHERE DOES THE MONEY GO?

With cost of living representing the single greatest source of local dissatisfaction, researchers probed further, wondering whether California's reputation as a high-tax state, for instance, was a significant contributor to unhappiness. Taxes registered high, but not nearly as high as the cost of housing.



DRIVING PEOPLE OUT?

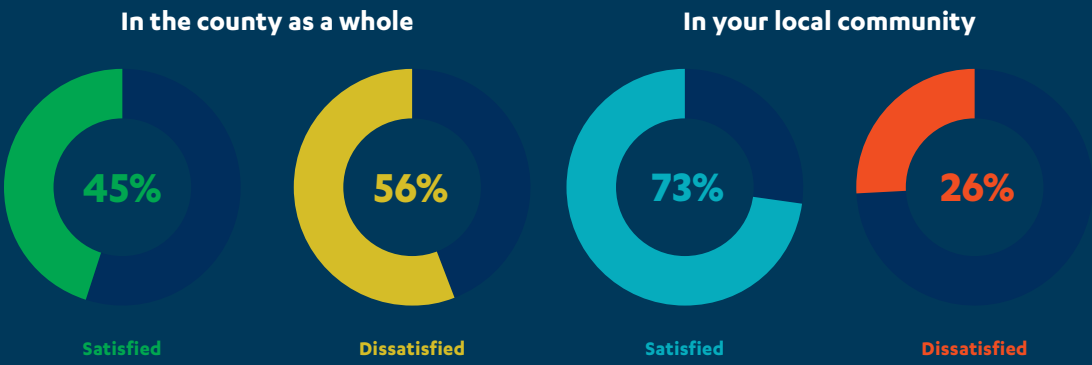
Are costs so high locally that it is pushing people out? There has been a significant jump in recent years in people answering yes to this question: Have you or a close friend of family member considered moving from your neighborhood in the last few years because of rising housing costs?



LIFE OF THE NATION VS. LIFE ON THE GROUND

The American Enterprise Institute has conducted a national look at what people think about the country compared to how they regard life in their communities. The results are striking, if not altogether surprising: Americans are worried about the country, but mostly happy where they live.

HOW SATISFIED OR DISSATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE WAY THINGS ARE GOING?



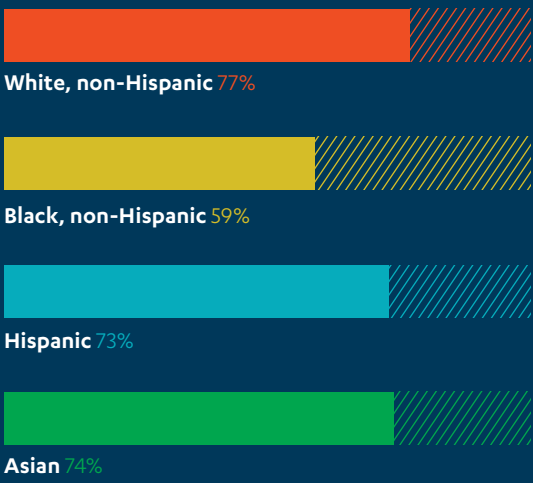
SATISFACTION IS WIDESPREAD

Community satisfaction is not uniformly shared, but cuts across ethnic and socio-economic lines. Majorities of all ethnic and socio-economic groups are happy with local life, though the size of those majorities differs.

Sources: AEI Survey on Community and Society; Social Capital, Civic Health, and Quality of Life in the United States, February 2019

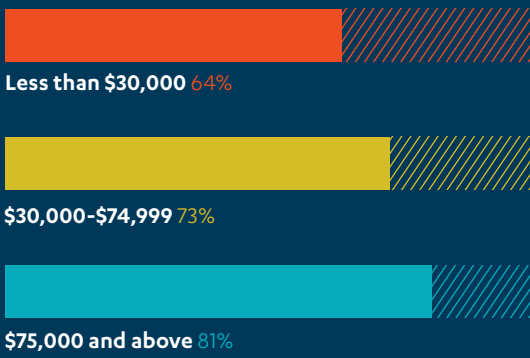
BY RACE

Percentage who are satisfied with life in their communities



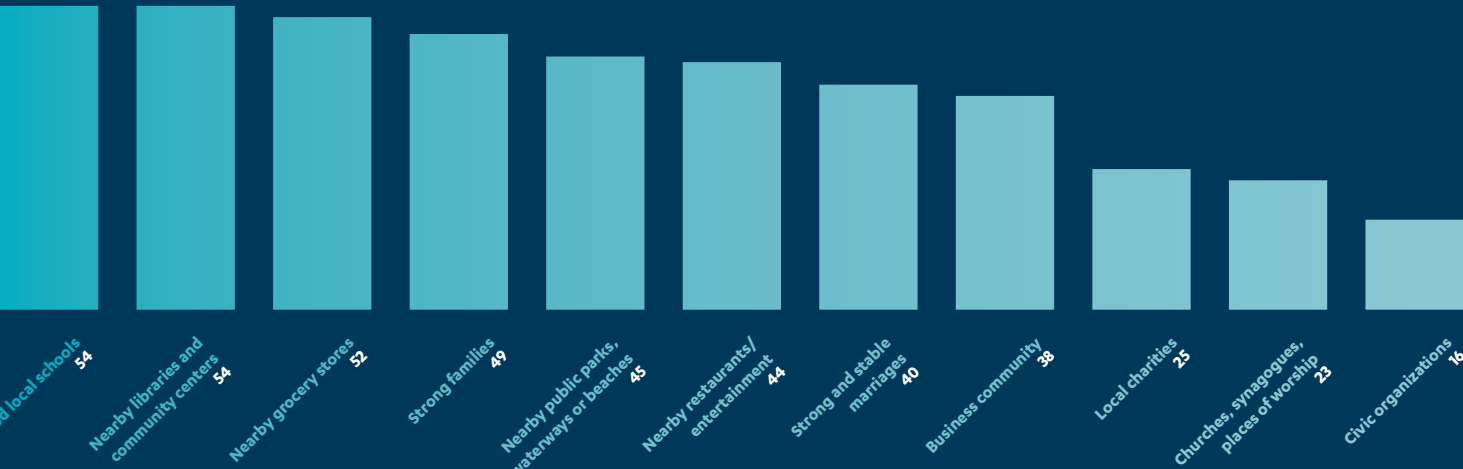
BY INCOME

Household income



WHAT WORKS?

How much do you think the following groups make your local community successful?





EVALUATING SCHOOLS

WRITTEN BY
JEAN MERL

The challenges of measuring what works — and what does not — in education

ASK JOHN ROGERS WHAT WORKS to improve education and what doesn't, and he will very politely tell you it's just not that simple.

"Education is a complex enterprise," said Rogers, director of UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education and Access (IDEA). "Yet there is generally a presumption that education problems can be thought of as technical issues." That, he said, is more appropriate for "making widgets."

Rogers, a professor at the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, said education reform often has "implications for equity" that raise questions about who is being served and why. In addition, he said, there is a question of whether the responsibility for improving education should rest with schools or be seen in a broader context of the larger community.

"Which lens are we using?" Rogers asked, during a recent telephone interview. His hobby is photography, and he said he displays some of his photos — a mix of images of protest marches and landscapes of beaches, deserts and forests — in his office at Moore Hall. The lens metaphor comes naturally.

"Telephoto, which focuses on a specific classroom practice?" he asked. "Or wide-angle?"

Fuzziness about basic questions, including equity, responsibility and context — and whether to take the close-up or long view — have caused good intentions to tumble into traps of unintended consequences, often because of a failure to recognize that such questions are important, or that they even apply.

EAs an example, Rogers pointed to the emphasis on raising standardized test scores that was a hallmark of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. That led some educators to "teach to the test" and focus on students with promise while shortchanging those who needed help the most.

Increasingly, he said, generous philanthropic donations to school districts are coming with strings supporting a particular program or a subject matter that pleases the donor but may not always be best for students.

And a growing number of charter schools, which are publicly funded but exempt from major rules governing traditional schools, have shifted away from their beginnings as "lighthouses" showing innovative ways to improve education and have often set up competition for students that can destabilize the very systems they were intended to help.

IN THE LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT, the issue of charter vs. traditional schools has dominated several cycles of bitter, high-spending school board elections. In a 2018 research and policy brief, Rogers noted that more than 160,000 students in kindergarten through 12th grade — more than a fourth of all LAUSD students — were enrolled in charter schools.

He was part of a symposium of business and civic leaders, education experts and others who had joined together two years earlier to help the district. Their report, *We Choose All: Research to Inform Public Education in Los Angeles*, highlighted "emerging evidence from around the country about charters, choice and competition."

The report articulated shared values. In its introduction, Rogers noted that "it pointed to the need for us to learn more about how different stakeholders in Los Angeles think about these issues."

He offered this "self-critique" of the effort: "We had one powerful session that brought people together. What we needed to do was to have a series of conversations. ... With ongoing dialogue, everybody is served better."

“YOU CAN’T EDUCATE STUDENTS WHO ARE DEPRESSED, OR WHO ARE CONCERNED ABOUT OTHER THINGS THAT ARE FLOATING, ENGAGING INSIDE OF THEIR MINDS AND PUTTING THEM IN DARK PLACES.”

— **Abel Valenzuela, UCLA professor of Chicana/o studies and urban planning**

CONTINUING DIALOGUE IS IMPORTANT in two movements that have gained recent momentum: community schools and what is known as “improvement science.”

Community schools take a wide-angle view of school reform and are intended for impoverished areas. The schools team with nonprofits and other public entities to provide services to students and families dealing with housing instability, neighborhood violence, inadequate health care and other issues that affect the ability to learn.

In a recent Opinion article in the Los Angeles Times, researcher William R. Johnston at the Rand Corp. told about gains he and his colleagues had found during a study of New York City’s community schools initiative. These schools served some of New York’s most disadvantaged families.

The initiative provided, according to need, dental and vaccine clinics, food banks, legal aid and mental health assistance. One elementary campus stayed open at night, on Saturdays and during school breaks to offer sports, English language learning and art classes.

Three years into the program, researchers found a small improvement in math achievement and big gains in student attendance. More elementary and middle school students were passing courses and moving to the next grades on time. High school graduation rates also rose.

L.A. Unified also has created community schools. In a commitment that was part of the agreement to settle last year’s teachers’ strike, the district will transform 30 traditionally organized campuses by the end of the 2020-2021 school year. Each school gets an additional \$400,000 in funding.

Still, Johnson wrote, it will take a while to see results, especially in high schools. “It may take years to see the positive effects of such ambitious whole-school reforms.”

ABEL VALENZUELA JR., director of the UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, supports the principles of community schools but would like to see them expanded to colleges and universities.

Valenzuela laments “silos” that prevent

schools at all levels from addressing issues that affect students, something that community schools try to do.

“I think better coordination between the different educational systems is important,” he said in an interview at his office on Le Conte Avenue, a busy outpost at the edge of the UCLA campus. “But then [also] better coordination [is important] with systems outside of education ... systems of work, systems of neighborhoods and housing and exchanges that occur at that level, systems related to government and services.”

Valenzuela, a professor of Chicana/o studies and urban planning, said his work with the undocumented shows how issues outside of academia can affect a student’s success. The undocumented need special help, he said, and sometimes their families do, too.

“If a student’s parent or sibling is separated, their quarter is lost because they’re devastated,” he said. “They’re trying to figure out how to get their family members back, or how to deal with this familial crisis.”

Valenzuela said colleges and universities must become more student-centered and recognize “some of the cleavages that confront students.

“You can’t educate students who are depressed, or who are concerned about other things that are floating, engaging inside of their minds and putting them in dark places.”

He said Chancellor Gene D. Block is calling for more attention to student mental health, which Valenzuela said will make UCLA a better place.

A GROWING NUMBER OF CAMPUSES around the country, including some community schools, are using methods based on the growing field of improvement science, not so much a specific innovation as a way of testing the effectiveness of educational programs.

It works this way:

- 1) Set a particular goal
- 2) Develop an idea for achieving it
- 3) Rigorously assess and refine how to accomplish the goal while placing it into the hands of teachers and others working in the schools.

“It’s both a set of methods and tools” to reach a goal — improved reading instruction, for instance — and “a philosophy about how one should do the work of change,” said Louis Gomez, a professor in the Graduate School of Education and Information Services.

Although the concept is not new, it has caught on more broadly within the last decade, Gomez said, largely because of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. He said the model can be applied in any kind of school — traditional, organized, charter, community or private.

In recent years, the Carnegie Foundation has highlighted the achievements of a number of schools using improvement science.

» In California’s Central Valley, a network of schools helped significantly more of its fifth graders reach the state standard in math in only two years.

» In Menomonee Falls, WI, improvement science helped a high school advance from a federal designation of “in need of improvement” in 2011 to being named “a top high school in the nation” by U.S. News & World Report just six years later.

» In New York City, New Visions for Public Schools worked with 110,000 students — many living in poverty, some still learning English and others struggling with disabilities — and increased graduation rates by more than 9% and college readiness rates by 16%.

While these schools are on the right track, Gomez said, “Real transformation of education is a multidecade commitment.

“Our work needs to be disciplined both by the sense of urgency that we should all feel about improving the lives of children; but by the same token, we have to understand that it has taken us decades to create the system that we’ve created, and it’s going to take us a certain amount of time to reshape that system to be something better.” ▀



HOMELESS PREVENTION

The best way to address homelessness may be to prevent it. But how to do that?

WRITTEN BY
JON REGARDIE

WHEN IT COMES TO COMBATING HOMELESSNESS, the most effective tool may be preventing it in the first place. After all, it's easier and cheaper to keep someone in an apartment than to get that same person off the streets and back into housing. That holds particular sway in Los Angeles, where nearly 60,000 people live without shelter.

Yet acting before someone becomes homeless is not as simple as it sounds and prompts some pointed questions: What does "prevention" actually entail? Is it just giving money to someone in need, or is more required? Who should receive scarce prevention resources?

Finding the answers is complicated by the fact that it's impossible to tell just by looking at someone whether that person will wind up on the streets. In practice, local officials often cast a wider net than is required to stave off homelessness.

As Phil Ansell, director of the L.A. County Homeless Initiative, said in an interview, "Investing in homelessness prevention has been challenging, because it generally takes assisting 10 families or individuals to actually prevent one family or individual from becoming homeless."

APPEARANCES MAY DECEIVE, but data are helpful. In fact, according to a team at UCLA, a person's data, thoughtfully examined, can help experts predict, with a high degree of certainty, whether that person is likely to become homeless.

The case is laid out in "Predicting and Preventing Homelessness in Los Angeles," which was released late last year by the UCLA California Policy Lab and the University of Chicago Poverty Lab. The 14-page report details how researchers examined records of service interactions from seven L.A. County agencies to anticipate who would become homeless. While the report looked at past records, researchers hope that honing the research and refining the response could make future homeless prevention efforts more effective and efficient.

Prevention is not a new concept. Chicago and New York City have developed prevention programs to help keep at-risk people in housing, and Los Angeles has undertaken similar work. In these instances, the process starts when someone calls a hotline or visits a government agency and asks for aid. That is followed by a screening process.

Beth Horwitz, vice president of strategy and innovation at All Chicago, which handles the city's response, said qualified individuals can receive funds within three to five days of asking for help.

“Predicting and Preventing Homelessness in Los Angeles” lays the groundwork to help a different pool of people, says Janey Rountree, one of the report’s authors and the executive director of the California Policy Lab.

“What’s different about our work,” Rountree said, “is that it allows the county to be more proactive and to identify people who maybe are not going to walk in the door and raise their hand and say they are at risk for whatever reason.” Rountree said.

RESEARCHERS UTILIZED COUNTY DATA compiled from 2012 to 2016. They examined the interactions that 1.9 million people had with agencies such as the Department of Health Services, the Sheriff’s Department and the Department of Public Social Services.

Through a computer-aided process of determining which interactions were the most critical, the team sought to predict who would experience a homelessness spell in 2017. While the material was not accompanied by names, researchers compiled a “risk list” based on the interactions.

Rountree said the team did not enter with presumptions about what factors would be most meaningful in anticipating homelessness, but treated all interactions equally at the beginning. During the data analysis the computer considered everything to determine what interactions were actually predictive. The team learned that frequently, low-income individuals who lost housing often lacked a community or family safety net.

The report said that of the 3,000 people deemed at highest risk, almost 46% became homeless in 2017, and that those individuals were 27 times more likely than the average county client to lose housing. The research also holds in a broader context; if expanded to the 19,600 people most at risk (or the top 1% of county clients), 35% experienced a homelessness spell in 2017.

The report posited that effectively serving that 1% would prevent 6,900 homeless spells a year.

Till von Wachter, another of the report’s authors and faculty director of the California Policy Lab, said this kind of work has been facilitated by advances in data collection and data science. He also noted that it takes time to determine which interactions are the most meaningful; for example, the number of visits to an emergency room may be less important than what caused those visits.

Ultimately, von Wachter said analyzing and honing data creates a “predictive probability” that a person will lose their housing in a set period.

“That is essentially a summary measure of all the services that the person receives weighted by how likely each of the services would contribute to a new homelessness spell,” said von Wachter, who is also a professor of economics at UCLA. “And the result is a single number for each individual that is the probability of becoming homeless.”

Having that number allows the creation of a ranked risk list. It can count the 3,000 people most at risk, or 19,600 people, or any desired figure.

Rountree said one of the most predictive features was the level of poverty in the area where someone receives services. Yet she noted that losing housing is a result of more than just being poor, that a catalytic event often leads to someone winding up on the streets.

This could be a mental health issue, a medical matter, a job loss or something else. She added that the event usually happens quickly, and a bad six-month period can be devastating.

“While you and I might survive [the event] without losing our housing,” she said, “for people living in that type of extreme poverty, it’s often a triggering event and destabilizes their housing.” she said.

ONCE THOSE AT RISK ARE IDENTIFIED, changing circumstances can affect their situation. The risk list needs to remain fresh, with continual new streams of data that allow professionals to know which county clients are in the most danger of becoming homeless — potentially even before the person recognizes the threat.

“IT’S WORTH NOTING NO ONE HAS EVER DONE THIS BEFORE.”

— Janey Rountree, executive director of the California Policy Lab

“A risk list calculated a year or six months earlier will be less useful than a risk list calculated a couple of months before,” von Wachter said. “We will be using data that [is] very timely to refresh the risk list on a regular basis.”

The report’s authors and the county are working together to create a pilot program to apply the predictive capabilities in a real-world setting. The funding is coming from Measure H, the quarter-cent sales tax approved by county voters in 2017 to pay for homeless services. The aim is to have a pilot project in place by the end of this year.

Yet having data that identify risk means little if there is no effective intervention — in this case county government must be able to take the information and respond quickly.

Ansell said this will be accomplished by establishing a County Centralized Homelessness Prevention Unit, with staff dedicated to working with the risk list and directing help where required.

THEN THERE IS AN IMPORTANT QUESTION: What form does help take?

The researchers and Ansell say it will be varied and tailored to the individual or family at risk. It could be monetary, or it could involve connecting a client to legal aid if someone is facing eviction. It could mean enrolling individuals in a county program they are qualified for but have not utilized. Ansell says there are a wealth of possibilities.

“Our current prevention efforts focus heavily on short-term financial assistance, either payment of back due rent, or current rent, or paying to turn the utilities back on that have been turned off,” he said. “By intervening sooner, in advance of an immediate risk of homelessness, we anticipate that the range of assistance that will be most appropriate will vary more greatly than is currently the case with families and individuals who are at imminent risk of homelessness.”

Moving from a study to actual homelessness prevention is a big step. Horwitz of All Chicago said success in her city has come from building a network of strategic partners and having people on the “front lines” who can quickly aid individuals experiencing a housing crisis.

She said the All Chicago team will be closely watching what happens in Los Angeles. She called the California Policy Lab work “an important step forward” but also acknowledged concerns.

“Predictive analytics ... can come at a cost — they are built using algorithms on general trends but may not be true about the individual, and if not used carefully, can end up being used to pathologize certain groups,” she said.

The Los Angeles team recognizes that identifying people at risk, and intervening before they lose housing, is a new and untested approach.

“It’s worth noting no one has ever done this before,” said Rountree, pointing specifically to the computer-aided, data-focused predictive component. She added that the pilot program is “where presumably we learn a lot about how to reach out to these people and what their needs are.”

The irony is that, if local efforts succeed, it may be impossible to know precisely who was helped on an individual basis, and only raw data will tell the case. After all, it’s easy to identify someone who falls into homelessness. Pointing out a person who avoided homelessness because they were given the right help at the right time is much more difficult. ►



PHOTO BY IOANA CRISTIANA / UNSPLASH

THE EVANGELIST OF



UCLA's Donald Shoup has led a
revolution in thinking about parking

WRITTEN BY
JON THURBER

"Parking is land."



PHOTO COURTESY OF DONALD SHOUP

DONALD SHOUP IS AN EVANGELIST. What he preaches is nothing short of a reformation. About parking.

Shoup, a distinguished professor of urban planning at UCLA, says the subject is not compelling for most university researchers. He calls himself an academic “bottom feeder.”

But many of his ideas have taken root and led some cities and fellow urban planners to reap-praise parking, land use and traffic, along with meter revenue and the public good.

Avuncular, with bright eyes and an engaging laugh, Shoup is an economist by training. He has been called a “parking rock star” by the Wall Street Journal. As a result, he uses the handle Shoup-Dogg. Devotees of his theories have formed a Facebook group called the Shoupistas, which has more than 4,500 members.

A book he has written, *The High Cost of Free Parking*, and one he has edited, *Parking and the City*, have become bibles for his crusade.

“Donald Shoup,” said former Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis, the Democratic Party’s presidential nominee in 1988, “has done more to revolutionize the way we think about parking than anybody else on the planet.”

But systemic change is slow at the curb and between the parking lot lines. It requires much political capital, as well as a willingness to embrace a broader picture. Most people see parking as “a personal issue, not a policy question,” Shoup said, during an interview in his office at the Luskin School of Public Affairs. Parking “is the most emotional issue in transportation.”

That is why reason and logic often go out the window in discussions about parking. Market rate pricing is fair game in the cost of vehicles, tires, batteries and insurance. But parking? Many seem to see free parking as a right, almost a divine one.

“Analytic faculties seem to shift to a lower level,” Shoup writes in *Parking and the City*. “Some strongly support market prices, except for parking. Some strongly oppose subsidies, except for parking. Some abhor planning regulations — except for parking. Some insist on rigorous data collection and statistical tests — except for parking.”

For Shoup, this means connecting dots in unconventional ways.

“I always try to show how parking affects whatever people do care strongly about,” he said, “such as affordable housing, climate change, economic development, public transportation, traffic congestion and urban design.”

PARKING POLICY IN THIS COUNTRY has been around since the 1920s, when suddenly there were too many cars and too few parking spots on Main Street America. Off-street parking was developed as a solution to the crunch. It was not a bad idea in theory, Shoup says in *The High Cost of Free Parking*,

except that regulations required enough parking for peak demand at any business.

Generally, peak demand comes at a fixed time, so parking lots sit half-empty or completely deserted for long periods.

Availability of parking at peak demand also encourages people to drive. They shop at one store, climb back into their cars and drive to the next store. Parking begets driving, driving begets cars, cars beget pollution and traffic congestion — all at the expense of walking, quality of life and human engagement.

In his preface to *The High Cost of Free Parking*, Shoup notes that 87% of all trips in the United States are made by personal vehicle, and only 1.5% by public transit.

But parking is land, Shoup said, and land always comes at a price.

Parking requirements for new condominiums, apartment complexes and commercial buildings perpetuate a theology of cars being the standard for transportation. If a tenant has two parking spots, the inclination is to have a vehicle in each.

ONE OF SHOUP’S FAVORITE STORIES is about long delays and huge cost overruns during construction of the Walt Disney Concert Hall in downtown Los Angeles. Much of it was caused by parking requirements. The Disney Hall garage has six levels, holds 2,188 vehicles and took \$110 million to build. The seasonal schedule for the hall, he said, was set with an eye on parking revenue to pay debt service on just the garage.

Then, Shoup added, came the issue of usage. Disney parking might be full for four hours several evenings a week. But at 10 a.m. on a Tuesday? Not so much.

The Disney Hall experience is in sharp contrast to what one finds at the Louise M. Davies Symphony Hall, the much older home of the San Francisco Symphony. It has no parking garage. People arrive by public transit, taxi, Uber ... Before or after events, concertgoers engage in the neighborhood, at local bars and restaurants.

The community thrives.

Land use is obviously at play, Shoup said, and as construction costs soar and housing stock plummets, land use policy takes on a greater significance.

Too many Americans are sleeping on the streets, he said, while too many vehicles are living inside.

A parking reformation, Shoup said, is imperative.

HIS THINKING HAS THREE TENETS:

- 1) End off-street parking requirements: Setting the right number of parking places is, at best, an inexact science, Shoup said, and cities need to back off. He favors



“IF L.A. STARTED CHARGING FOR CURB PARKING AT THE FAIR MARKET PRICE, WE’D HAVE ENOUGH MONEY TO FIX ALL OUR BROKEN SIDEWALKS.”

— Donald Shoup, distinguished professor of urban planning at UCLA

letting developers and businesses decide how many parking spaces to provide.

- 2) Price on-street parking right. Some call this finding the Goldilocks formula. On-street fees should balance supply of spaces with demand at any time of day. The right price is the lowest that will leave one or two spaces open on each block. The price must not be too high or too low but just right to facilitate supply.

- 3) Spend parking revenue to improve public services on metered streets. If people see positive results, then the meters become more acceptable. This has been the key to success of parking benefit districts like the one in historic Old Pasadena, which has been returning parking revenue to area infrastructure — smart-looking alleys, tidy sidewalks, well-paved roads — since the early 1990s.

Some of Shoup’s advice is being followed with good success in areas of Santa Rosa and Redwood City in California as well as Washington, D.C.

The most notable example of his influence is in San Francisco, where SFPark is meeting 60% to 80% of its occupancy goals by varying prices to keep some on-street parking spots open. Recently, Mayor London Breed has spoken of possible congestion pricing on crowded roads at peak times and of charging for parking in the evenings and on Sundays, which Shoup has long advocated.

SHOUP, A NATIVE OF LONG BEACH, parked at Yale long enough to earn four degrees, one in electrical engineering and three in economics, including a PhD in 1968. He came to UCLA in 1974.

At the Westwood campus, he has been a leading force in making UCLA leadership understand the real costs of building additional parking structures, and his lobbying helped create a financial incentive program for students, staff and teachers to take public transit to work.

He and his colleagues also are studying the abuse of placards for disabled parking. Shoup says the cost of placard abuse in Westwood Village alone totals more than \$1 million annually. It is a statewide problem.

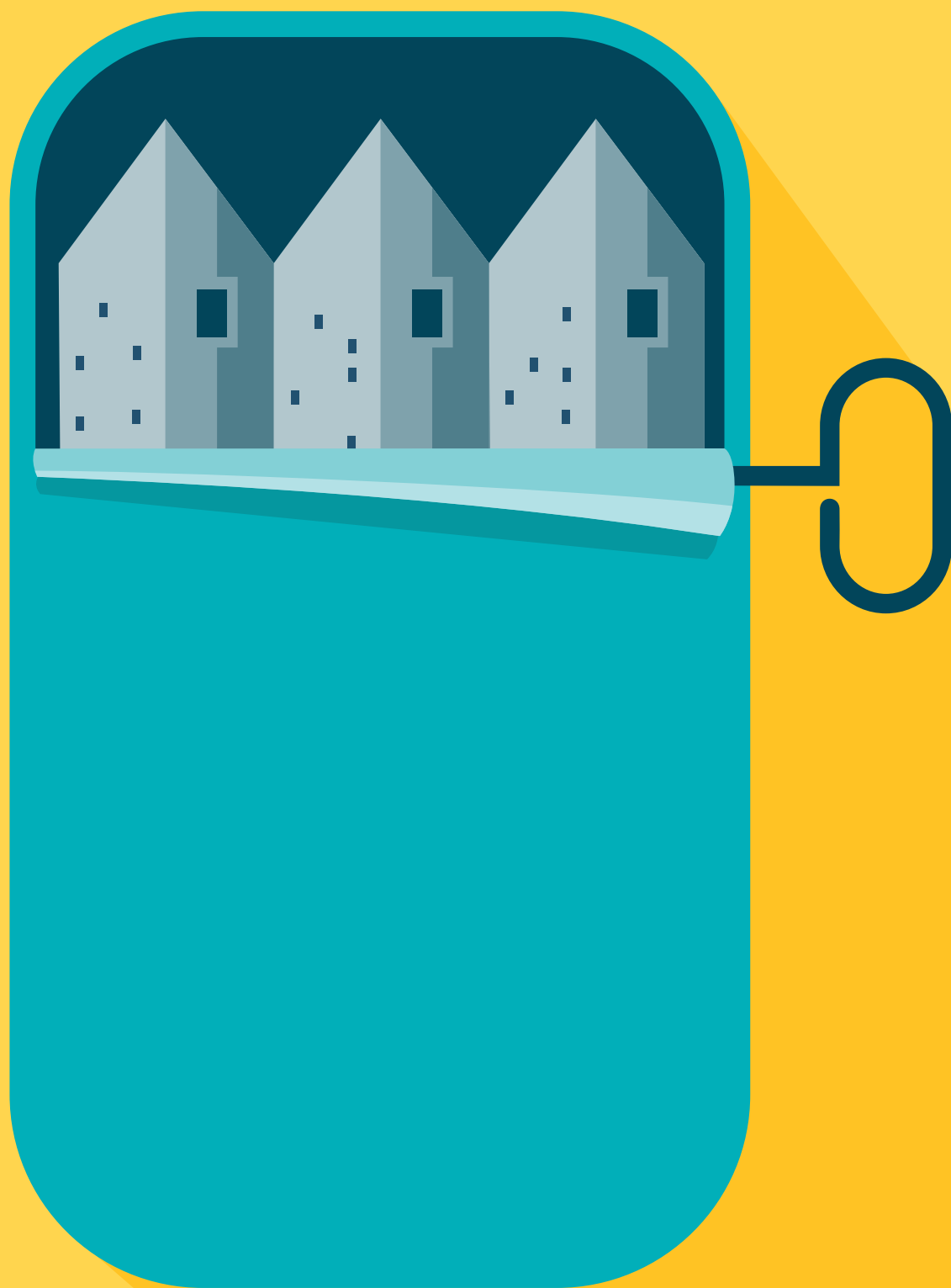
“Equal access under the Americans With Disabilities Act should mean convenient, free parking for every person with a fundamental disability,” he has written, “not free parking for every car with a disability placard.”

Shoup suggests a two-tiered solution modeled after existing practices in Illinois and Michigan. That model takes into account different levels of disability, so that drivers with severely limited mobility can park free at meters.

He also has been thinking for several years about solutions for L.A.’s sidewalk infrastructure problem. “If L.A. started charging for curb parking at the fair market price,” he said, “we’d have enough money to fix all of our broken sidewalks.”

“I walk through this neighborhood on my way to campus, and the houses sell for \$3, 4, 5 million. It’s like a full-time job to live in them. And the sidewalks are in terrible shape. It’s a perfect example of what John Kenneth Galbraith called private affluence in public squalor. That’s what we have in L.A.”

As our interview ended, Shoup confided, “Most of my good ideas come to me when I’m swimming. And what I was thinking today is that — I’m teaching a course on parking — and I’m going to say that L.A. pays for its free curb parking with its broken sidewalks.” ▀



WHERE ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

Housing advocates bump up against politics in the attempt to confront one of California's most difficult problems

WRITTEN BY

LISA FUNG

AT A TIME WHEN THE NATION IS WRESTLING

with a severe housing shortage, politicians, policymakers and communities are scrambling for responses. But Dana Cuff sees solutions hiding in plain sight, in nearly every neighborhood.

Cuff, a professor of architecture/urban design and urban planning at UCLA, is exploring ways to add affordable housing in places like backyards, public schools, college campuses and a variety of underused spaces that dot our cities.

"We have lots of opportunities to add housing if we think more creatively," said Cuff, who is also the founding director of cityLAB, a design-research center at UCLA that seeks ways to make housing available to a wide spectrum of Californians. "This is the moment when design really matters in terms of trying to figure out how to solve parts of the housing crisis."

As wages remain stagnant and housing prices increase, the need for affordable housing across the United States has hit emergency levels. It is a crisis that contributes significantly to economic inequality. A survey by ATTOM Data Solutions, a property data company, has found that home prices are rising faster than wages in 80% of U.S. markets.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, an estimated 12 million renter and homeowner households

nationwide now pay more than 50% of their annual income for housing. This is an alarming figure, considering that HUD defines anyone paying at least 30% of their income on housing as "cost burdened" — a threshold that can make it difficult to buy food, clothing, transportation, medical care and other necessities.

To address the problem, California would need to build 2.5 million new housing units by 2025 to accommodate future growth as well as to address its backlog of past unmet needs, according to a 2018 University of Southern California analysis. Cities desperate for answers are looking at subsidies, increased density, zoning changes, adaptive reuse of older buildings and other options.

"In the past, it might be that you could pay \$300,000 for a house when your income was \$50,000 and you could still pay your monthly mortgage without spending more than 30% of your monthly income. But now that's not true," Cuff said in a telephone interview. "The cost of housing has gone up across California — particularly in the cities — and wages have stagnated. The difference between what we earn and what we pay for housing has gotten greater."

The crisis, Cuff and other researchers say, calls for real-life experimentation to determine what will work to ease the emergency and what won't.



1



2



3

1,3 PROTOTYPE BIOHOMES ARE DESIGNED TO SERVE AS LIGHTWEIGHT DWELLING UNITS, QUICK TO ASSEMBLE AND SUITABLE FOR USE AS A RENTAL UNIT OR TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL FAMILY HOUSING -- FOR AN ELDERLY RELATIVE OR A RECENT COLLEGE GRADUATE, SAY -- ON A SMALL FOOTPRINT. THE SO-CALLED "ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS" FIT IN MANY BACKYARDS AND COULD HELP ALLEVIATE LOS ANGELES' HOUSING SHORTAGE.

2 DANA CUFF, UCLA PROFESSOR OF ARCHITECTURE/ URBAN DESIGN AND URBAN PLANNING, INSPECTS A FRESHLY BUILT BIOHOME.

ONE OF THREE CALIFORNIANS pay more than half their income in rent — and the percentage is even higher in the Los Angeles area.

California Senate Bill 50, authored by Sen. Scott Wiener (D-San Francisco), was a bold and aggressive attempt to address the housing crunch. The bill, also known as the More HOMES (Housing, Opportunity, Mobility, Equity and Stability) Act, called for overriding low-density zoning restrictions to permit more mid-rise housing to be built near job centers and public transportation. It would have allowed fourplexes in most single-family neighborhoods, with requirements for low-income units.

Opposition was especially intense from high-income residents able to fend off development by pressuring their local elected officials, as well as from underserved, often lower-income communities fearful of being displaced by the newly gentrified areas. Wiener made numerous changes to the bill, including provisions that would have given cities two years to come up with their own plans to meet construction targets.

But in February, the legislation was voted down. Although Gov. Gavin Newsom did not formally endorse SB 50, its defeat was seen as a setback to his ambitious goal for the state to build 3.5 million homes by 2025. "Doing nothing is no longer an option," Newsom said in his State of the State address in February. "It's time for California to say yes to housing. We cannot wait."

Many agree, but much of the problem is with one-size-fits-all remedies.

"People say, 'OK, you say we need to build more housing so that housing will be affordable,' but how much housing do we need to build? There are a lot of moving parts in that question," said Michael Lens, an associate professor of urban planning and public policy. "What we do know is if you keep pushing the number toward zero, more and more people are going to suffer."

A 2001 BROOKINGS INSTITUTION and USC report found that "sprawl has hit the wall" in the Los Angeles region, which has limited additional land on which to grow and few additional resources left to consume.

"Our old solution in California — and especially in Los Angeles — of just moving farther out is no longer viable," said Cuff, who holds a bachelor's degree in design and psychology from UC Santa Cruz and a doctorate in architecture from UC Berkeley. "It's too far to drive — we have more super-commutes than any other region in the country, meaning people who drive more than 90 minutes each way to work. People have already moved out as far as they're going to get. And because of the housing crisis, now those areas have become very expensive."

In places where "sprawl has hit the wall," the only option is to build more housing within ex-

isting boundaries, ultimately increasing density. "People think density is just a bad word," she said. "There's land available. You have to rethink the planning context and the building — what it means to build a new home."

Cuff has experience turning creative thought into action. She co-wrote a bill with California Assemblyman Richard Bloom (D-Santa Monica) making it easier for homeowners to build accessory dwelling units (ADUs), also known as "granny flats." Los Angeles alone has more than a half-million single-family lots. If only 10% of those property owners build ADUs, 50,000 new units could be added to the housing inventory. Bloom's bill and a companion bill from Sen. Bob Wieckowski (D-Fremont) went into effect in 2017.

Although not all ADUs are "affordable" housing, data show that about one-third are below market rate, said Cuff, who lives in an ADU in Santa Monica.

"We worked for 10 years to pass ... [ADUs] at the local level, and every time we had a near-majority, some city council member would get pressure from a neighbor and they would turn their vote, and we would lose again — and it would be a single (resident) neighbor, usually, that got in the way," Cuff said. "That isn't local interest, that's single interest. And now we see it's gotten to such a heightened problem that no neighborhood wants to make supportive housing."

The "not in my backyard" syndrome is common, and it is the reason that some advocates of "up-zoning" push for measures like SB 50, which would take such decisions out of the hands of local officials.

"Our city council and our mayor are just like everybody else's city council and mayor in that they end up having to listen to a tiny minority of homeowners that say no to everything," said Lens, the associate professor of urban planning and public policy. "If they didn't have that responsibility and that control over local land use to that extent, that minority wouldn't have the power to say no."

Not all communities are obstructionist. For example, many community groups along Los Angeles' Crenshaw corridor opposed Wiener's legislation because they had already negotiated neighborhood development plans that drew on their input and included more density and affordability, says Michael Storper, UCLA distinguished professor of regional and international development in urban planning, who was critical of SB 50.

"That's a real lesson of what we just went through with SB 50: These communities need to be consulted, and they need to be given opportunities to be part of the solution," he said. "The mandated affordability in SB 50 was lower than they'd already negotiated — they already had a better deal. This is what you might call bottom-up policy, not top-down policy."

Storper argues that any legislation must in-

“OUR OLD SOLUTION IN CALIFORNIA — AND ESPECIALLY IN LOS ANGELES — OF JUST MOVING FARTHER OUT IS NO LONGER VIABLE.”

— Dana Cuff, UCLA professor of architecture/ urban design and urban planning

clude clarity about affordability, as well as a clear roadmap to who is paying the costs. And, he says, simply building more units won't be enough to end the housing crisis.

"The equation of more equals cheaper is wrong," he said. "You could carpet San Francisco with skyscrapers, and there's a decent chance that it would actually get more exclusionary and not less."

CREATING AFFORDABLE HOUSING CAN BE ANYTHING but affordable. In California, it requires an average of \$500,000 to \$600,000 to construct each unit. Architects, developers and builders have been experimenting with new forms of manufacturing, including mass-produced housing, 3-D printed houses and other new technologies to bring down costs.

Cuff and cityLAB are exploring ways to take advantage of excess or underused land around public school buildings, community colleges and state universities to provide affordable housing for teachers and staff or for commuting college students.

"There are about 11,000 public school campuses in the state of California," Cuff said, "and some of those — not all of them, but some of them — would be better if they had affordable housing built on them, because it's publicly owned land, and we could guarantee that [the housing] was going to stay affordable."

Potential solutions include infill projects, building above parking lots or on vacant land, adding height to existing buildings and renovating abandoned buildings — without affecting green space, playing fields or playground areas.

Los Angeles Unified School District has already experimented with affordable workforce housing, such as the 90-unit Sage Park Apartments on the north side of the Gardena High School campus. The workforce housing site in Glassell Park includes an early education center. Such innovations serve entire communities, Cuff said, and can help overcome political resistance to the affordable housing.

"With school-lands housing, the beauty is similar to the backyard ADUs — you don't have to buy the land to build housing; you already own it," she said. "In the case of schoolyards, it's owned by the public, and it's already dedicated to public use."

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti has set a goal of permitting 100,000 new housing units by next year, ensuring that at least 15,000 affordable units are built or preserved for low-income households. Many argue that subsidies or setting aside a percentage of units for lower-income residents are keys

to guaranteeing that affordable housing is built.

"New housing has always been something that is out of reach for lower-income households unless there are massive subsidies," said Lens, who sits on the citizens oversight committee for Proposition HHH, a \$1.2 billion bond measure to more than triple the annual production of supportive housing and build 10,000 units for the homeless. "If we think new housing is important, and that housing is only going to people who can pay quite a lot, let's make sure we mandate some of these new units to be set aside for other people."

ACCORDING TO A REPORT by the state Legislative Analyst's Office, an average California home costs 2.5 times the national average, while California's average monthly rent is about 50% higher than rent in the rest of the country.

"Right now, to think about affordability, we need a very decisive combination of affordability set-asides and have to figure out who pays for them," said Storper. "I believe we need to reactivate public housing in America, especially for the lower 30% to 40%. There isn't any way for the market to produce housing that those people can afford with the kinds of incomes and jobs they have. Period."

Public housing was popular in the 1940, '50s and '60s, when high-density, high-rise buildings were constructed in major cities across the country. While many such complexes still exist, they largely fell out of favor in the 1970s and were replaced by housing vouchers, which allowed recipients a choice of where to live. Public housing began to be viewed as crime-infested and dangerous, an image it has not been able to shake.

Lens has done extensive research into public housing. It "works around the world," he said. "We just don't spend on it like other countries do. It's a federal program, so it's underfunded everywhere in the U.S. Upkeep has been a problem for a very long time."

Nonetheless, it is an option many American cities are starting to revisit. In Los Angeles, Councilman Mike Bonin has proposed looking into public housing — rental property owned and managed by the government, by nonprofit organizations or a combination of the two. He has called for a study of housing models in Austria, Sweden, Finland and Singapore.

Lessons also can be found in Japan, Cuff said. "There's no minimum house site in some parts of Japan. They let the market determine it, and that means that very small and tall houses get built in a city like Tokyo.

"One of the things we just have to look for is how to use the land that's so vast in Los Angeles more intensively," she said. "The housing crisis is so vast that it's going to take, in my mind, 50, 100 different solutions. Every possible solution has to be exploited." ►

Communities Take Charge

Not all experiments succeed, but even as the nation is divided and sometimes paralyzed, local communities are trying new things, often with notable results.

Reno, NV

Tech ●●

Reno had among the highest foreclosure rates in the nation in the 2008 recession. The “Biggest Little City in the World” rebranded itself as a technology hub. Apple opened a data center in 2012 in return for \$89 million in tax abatements and opened a shipment warehouse in 2019. Other tech companies followed, including car-maker Tesla with a \$1.3 billion incentive package. In January, the iconic Harrah’s hotel/casino was sold to be renovated into a mixed use building of apartments, office space and retail shops, but no gaming.

Red Oak, IA

Housing ●

Red Oak, a small community in Iowa’s southwest corner, approved a plan in 2018 to convert the town’s middle school to income-based loft-style apartments. The developer received Federal Housing Tax Credits of nearly \$400,000 annually for 10 years and historic preservation tax considerations. The repurposing of the school will save the district \$1 million budgeted for demolition costs and provide affordable housing.

West Des Moines, IA

Housing ●

Communities across the nation have begun transforming their vacant, often historic schools into housing for seniors, low income families, artists and, yes, even teachers. In West Des Moines a non-profit company used a mix of grants and loans to renovate the former elementary school into apartments and studio space for artists. Other communities in St. Louis and San Francisco have transformed unused school buildings into affordable housing for teachers.

Detroit, MI

Tech, Startups ●●

Once a symbol of a failed city, Detroit has become a model of urban revitalization. In 2006 the city began a microloan program for small businesses that range from \$5,000 to \$35,000. The program has provided more than \$1.3 million in loans. Immigrants also are helping: More than 23,000 immigrant entrepreneurs are at work in the metro area. They also filled critical employment gaps in areas such as healthcare.

San Antonio, TX

Waterfront, Tech, Startups ●●●

San Antonio’s River Walk has been hailed as a model for cities throughout the world on how to revitalize a city through its natural elements. A \$384 million expansion in 2018 increased the parkway substantially and transformed the city and surrounding areas. Tech startups joined restaurants, businesses and entertainment venues that draw tourists from around the world. The San Antonio River flows for 15 miles through what was once a weed-choked drainage ditch and is now lined with parks, bike paths, museums, thriving business districts and nature preserves.

Greenville, SC

Waterfront, Retail, Startups ●●●

When the textile industry moved overseas, former textile capital Greenville, South Carolina was nearly brought to its knees. State and local leaders took steps, including emphasizing personal contacts, to lure big companies to the area. BMW opened a plant in the 1990s. In the 1970s city planners made the city more walkable by narrowing the city’s streets, discouraging driving and beautifying

and broadening tree-lined sidewalks. They worked with stakeholders to bring a minor-league stadium downtown, built on the site of an abandoned lumberyard and required the developers to build adjoining condos. A concrete highway bridge that blocked the view of local waterfalls was demolished. The Falls Park is now one of the city’s biggest attractions with clubs, restaurants and gardens near downtown.

Hawthorne, CA

Tech, Retail ●●

Hawthorne, California had been a center for the aerospace industry in Southern California, but had fallen on hard times when Elon Musk established his SpaceX company headquarters there more than a decade ago. This has led to a renaissance of growth in the area

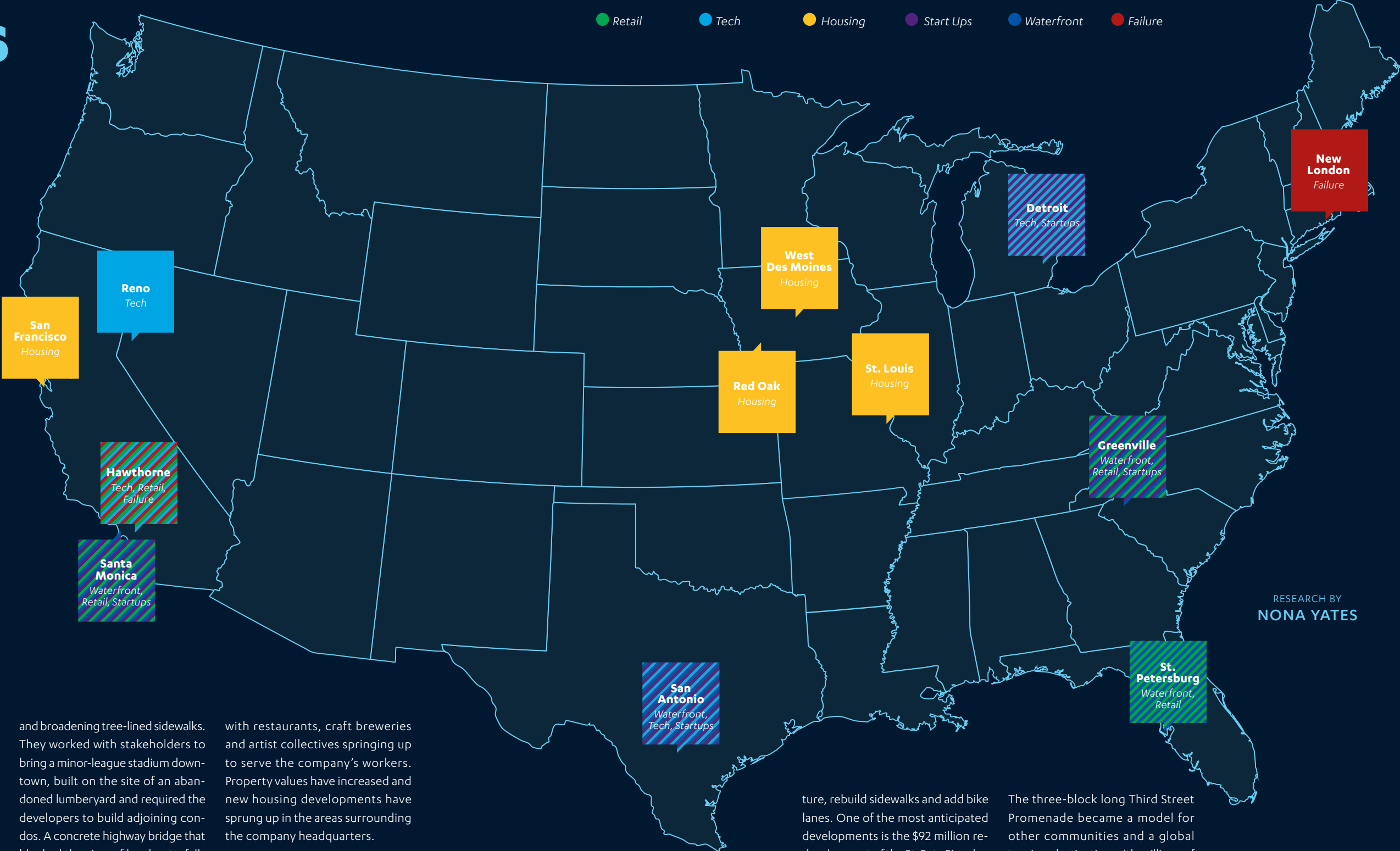
with restaurants, craft breweries and artist collectives springing up to serve the company’s workers. Property values have increased and new housing developments have sprung up in the areas surrounding the company headquarters.

Failure

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Hawthorne is also the site of a failed redevelopment plan. The Hawthorne Plaza mall stands nearly empty and abandoned only a few miles from the SpaceX headquarters. A Hollywood-based developer had worked with the city to undertake a \$500 million overhaul of the hulking mall that would have included an office building, movie theaters, a bowling alley and housing. But the developer never began work and the city finally pulled the plug on the deal in 2018.

- Retail
- Tech
- Housing
- Start Ups
- Waterfront
- Failure



RESEARCH BY
NONA YATES

ture, rebuild sidewalks and add bike lanes. One of the most anticipated developments is the \$92 million redevelopment of the St. Pete Pier, due to open in May. The 26-acre project will include public art, a playground, restaurants and vendors.

St. Petersburg, FL

Waterfront, Retail ●●

Once known as “God’s Waiting Room,” St. Petersburg, Florida has undergone a transformation over the last two decades. Derelict buildings have given way to waterfront cafes, businesses and restaurants. Large and small hotels have been refurbished. Small, entrepreneurial businesses have enlivened a more walkable downtown. Starting in 2019, the city had plans to upgrade outdated water pipes and infrastruc-

The three-block long Third Street Promenade became a model for other communities and a global tourism destination with millions of visitors each year.

New London, CT

Failure ●

In the 19th century, the City of New London, Connecticut was the third-busiest whaling port in the world. By this century the city’s shipping had largely fallen away. Enter Pfizer, the pharmaceutical giant, which planned a new \$300-million research facility and wanted a project that would enhance its corporate headquarters. City officials targeted the working-class neighborhood of

Fort Trumbull for eminent domain. The residents fought the city all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, arguing that their properties were being taken for private rather than public use. They lost in 2005. The families were moved out, and the city bulldozed the neighborhoods. However, financing for the project never came through. The hotel, conference center, condominiums and high-end shops never materialized and the 90-acre parcel sits empty. Pfizer left New London in 2009 along with 1,400 employees.

S
BLUEPRINT
SPECIAL
REPORT
A Closer Look

HEALTH CARE: A RIGHT, AN OPTION OR A DEBATING POINT?

WRITTEN BY
BILL BOYARSKY

THERE'S NO BETTER ILLUSTRATION OF THE SEPARATE WORLDS of California and Washington than the story of Covered California, where consumers routinely buy health insurance through the Affordable Care Act. Washington's experience has been characterized by bitter partisan rancor between Democrats supporting Obamacare and Republicans determined to destroy it. California's experience, after initial misgivings, has been one of bipartisan commitment to Obamacare and to the extension of coverage it offers. Today, however, both efforts are hanging in the balance.

The Supreme Court has agreed to hear a lawsuit by the Trump Administration and 18 state attorneys general to declare the Affordable Care Act unconstitutional — a case fraught with political and practical implications. If the act is invalidated, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “20 million people would lose health insurance, and millions more would face higher costs for health insurance and health care.” Moreover, the center said, well-off Americans would receive tax cuts worth about \$45 billion a year.

The threat of the suit, probably to be decided after the November election, assures that health care, which cost Democrats

the Congress in the 2010s, and then helped them recapture the House in 2018, will remain an issue in this year's presidential and congressional elections.

The intense political squabbles of the primary season have obscured the great changes, and improvements, Obamacare has made in our health care system.

“No question that it has made California healthier,” Peter Lee, executive director of Covered California, told me. “Having health insurance matters.” Referring to two of the states that have not taken advantage of all of Obamacare's provisions, Lee said “No question there are more people dying in Texas and Florida because they have not implemented the Affordable Care Act.”

This is a crucible moment. The nation is preoccupied by questions of health. The leading achievement of one president, Barack Obama, is under assault by another, Donald Trump. The Supreme Court is poised to weigh in. And voters are approaching a chance to express their views. With that in mind, Blueprint devotes this Special Report to examining the state of American health care and the divergent approaches of Washington and Sacramento as leaders address the issue.

PUBLIC OPINION about the Affordable Care Act has changed markedly since President Obama signed it on March 23, 2010. In January 2011, a Kaiser Family Foundation poll showed 50 percent of those surveyed had an unfavorable opinion of Obamacare while 41 percent approved. But by January 20, with the congressional elections less than a year away and more people actually enjoying the program's benefits, public opinion had shifted in favor of the Affordable Care Act, with 53 percent viewing it favorably and 37 percent unfavorably. And Americans worry about health care. Of those polled by the family foundation, 26 percent said health care was the most important issue, compared to 23 percent who listed the economy and 14 percent who said climate change.

Such numbers indicate that President Donald Trump and his supporters will be on the defensive with their lawsuit hanging fire, threatening to wipe out Obamacare or at least eliminating some of its most popular features, including the provision that bans insurance companies from denying coverage to those with pre-existing conditions.

All the Democratic candidates have fought hard for government support of health care. But they're split on what to do about it. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, who has suspended her campaign, want Obamacare replaced by a universal government health insurance plan, Medicare-for-All, while the others want expansion of the Affordable Care Act.

I began reporting on health care in 2007. I was drawn to the subject because of the relationship between hard times and access to health care. As the recession afflicted people ranging from the poor to the middle class, signs of poverty increased. Once well-off families who had been

donors to community welfare agencies now were going to them for help. Foreclosures and unemployment forced families out of their heavily mortgaged homes. Income inequality became worse.

As I pursued stories on the recession, I saw blocks in the Inland Empire covered in foreclosure signs. Health care was intertwined with the economic disaster. Health insurance was expensive, unaffordable to many and particularly hard on the middle class. The federal-state Medi-Cal was limited to the very poor, unavailable to the growing number of unemployed.

Obama's Affordable Health Care Act barely passed a Democratic-controlled Congress. In the short run, it was politically disastrous to the president and the Democratic Party, which subsequently lost control of the Senate and the House. The conventional wisdom was that Obamacare was poison, and

HEALTH CARE “IS NOT A 15-MINUTE ISSUE.”

— Peter Lee, executive director of Covered California

Obama had made a terrible mistake by championing it.

I never saw it that way. I was influenced by what I had seen reporting on the harm caused by the Great Recession and its aftermath. The need for health insurance was so great that the public, once it began to use it, embraced the program. Obamacare, rather than being a word of scorn, would go down in history as a tribute to the name Obama.

“IT IS NOT A 15-MINUTE ISSUE,” said Covered California chief Lee, explaining that the subject doesn't fit the short, punchy style favored by

PHOTO BY BUSRACAVUS ©ISTOCK



journalists and producers of political advertisements.

Let's start with the basics. The best-known government health plan is Medicare, enacted in 1965, covering 59.9 million people over the age of 65, 6.2 million of them in California. Added to this was Obama's 2010 contribution, the Affordable Care Act, divided into two parts — Obamacare, and Medicaid, or Medi-Cal as it is known in California.

Covered California is the state's version of Obamacare. A total of 1.53 million have bought insurance policies from private companies through the Covered California exchange. Nationally, 8.2 million people buy their insurance through such exchanges.

Before Obamacare, insurance companies often were best known for denying benefits. The new law changed that. All plans sold on the Covered California exchange are required to cover a large variety of services. They include visits to a physician; emergency care; hospitalization; maternity and newborn care; mental health and substance abuse treatment; free or reduced-price prescription drugs; preventative and wellness services; chronic disease management; and pediatric care.

A total of 11 companies sell insurance policies through the Covered California exchange, including Anthem Blue Cross, Kaiser Permanente, Blue Shield and Molina Healthcare. Premiums vary. For example, the annual cost of a mid-level policy is more than \$5,000 a year for a 40-year-old with a \$35,000-a-year annual income. State subsidies reduce the cost. Buying insurance seems easy. I inquired through the Covered California web site and the next day, my phone rang all day with calls from agents trying to sell me a policy and help me get a subsidy.

The second and much larger portion of the Affordable Care Act provided for a major

expansion of Medicaid, the federal-state program giving free or low-cost health care to poor children and adults. Medi-Cal is the California version of Medicaid. It offers free or low-cost health coverage for children and adults with limited income and resources.

Nationally, nearly 75 million are enrolled in Medicaid. In California, Medi-Cal serves 13.1 million of that number.

But most Americans are not insured through a government program. They receive health insurance through employer-sponsored plans, which serve about 156 million people. Some of these are quite good. A generous corporation, trying to build and retain an expert work force, might cover most, if not all, of the cost of premiums, deductibles and copays. Some unions, after long and arduous negotiations, have signed contracts that do the same.

Such benefits don't help low-paid workers, especially those in non-union businesses. The Commonwealth Fund, which monitors health costs, said more than a third of these workers spend 10 percent or more of their income on insurance premiums — or go without.

"Despite the nation's strong economy and low unemployment, what employers and workers pay toward premiums continues to rise more quickly than worker's wages and inflation over time," the Kaiser Family Foundation said. Foundation president and CEO Drew Altman added: "The single biggest issue in health care for most Americans is that their health costs are growing much faster than their wages are. Costs are prohibitive when workers making \$25,000 a year have to shell out \$7,000 a year just for their share of family premiums."

The questions of affordability and rising costs stand in the way of delivering decent health care at reasonable prices.

One possible solution would be to enroll everybody in a program of government provided insurance, Medicare for All, first proposed by Sen. Sanders, who continues to be its strongest advocate. "[S]ome half a million people go bankrupt in this country for medically related reasons," he told the Los Angeles Times editorial board recently. "[Y]ou're struggling financially; you're diagnosed with cancer. ... You make \$50,000 or \$60,000 a year, you run up a bill for \$50,000, \$100,000. How do you pay that bill? I mean, it's insane."

But huge obstacles confront Sanders: winning congressional approval and, no easier, getting elected president.

I ASKED EXPERTS about lessons learned from the Covered California experience. The most important, they agreed, was that it required a strong bipartisan commitment to providing health care, accepted in California but not in Washington, where the Republican blockade has prevented any sort of cross-aisle cooperation. That partisan divide also has encouraged affected industries to hold out.

The story in California is different — and more encouraging. The support of the state's then-Republican governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, working with legislative Democrats, took Obamacare out of the arena of state partisan politics.

I talked with Gerald Kominski, professor of health policy and management and a senior fellow at the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and a professor at Luskin's Department of Public Policy. He explained how the insurance companies moved from hostility to participation in the Covered California operation. He is an expert on the financial impact of health care, including the Affordable Care Act and health care reform.



PHOTO BY ALLKINDZA ©ISTOCK

"California has embraced Obamacare," he said. "I was there at the signing of the authorizing legislation under Arnold Schwarzenegger." The fact that it began under a moderate Republican governor, rather than the conservative anti-Obama regimes of the red states seeking to overturn Obamacare, gave Covered California clout when negotiating with insurance companies. California, he said, "embraced it immediately and under a Republican governor and said we are going to make it work."

"They [Covered California officials] negotiate aggressively with the companies to get the most coverage at the lowest cost," he added. "Covered California is negotiating for 1.5 million lives. When it goes into the marketplace, it has tremendous power. It is not passive. It will ask for initial bids and go back and say, 'We think you can do better.'"

Wesley Yin, associate professor of public policy at Luskin and the Anderson School of Management at UCLA, was acting assistant secretary of economic policy at the Treasury Department and a senior economist in the White House Council of Economic Advisers in the Obama Admin-

istration, where he worked on implementing the Affordable Care Act. His work has helped shape the working consensus in California.

“[Y]OU’RE STRUGGLING FINANCIALLY; YOU’RE DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER. ... YOU MAKE \$50,000 OR \$60,000 A YEAR, YOU RUN UP A BILL FOR \$50,000, \$100,000. HOW DO YOU PAY THAT BILL? I MEAN, IT’S INSANE.”

— Sen. Bernie Sanders, to the Los Angeles Times editorial board

Yin is the co-author of a report by Covered California that looked at ways of making the program more affordable. The report, accepted by Gov. Gavin Newsom, led to two major changes in Covered California. One was popular: increasing the state subsidy to recipients. The other was not as popular: imposing monetary penalties for those who do not buy health insurance.

In general, the penalties are not popular with Democrats, Republicans or independents. Penalties never are. But they have a purpose. They are designed to push people to buy

Covered California policies, and they are integral to the whole package; the larger the pool of policyholders, the lower the rates. The penalties, added

are ... making it affordable. ... People who don't have health insurance now can get health insurance."

Yin said the "salient question is not whether it is Medicare for All or doing it through an exchange. ... There are different ways to achieve these goals. They all require money. The key point is how much are we willing to spend on coverage."

At the bottom of all this is a commitment to progress, irrespective of politics. "I am a pragmatist," Kominski said. "The most feasible thing for a Democratic president to do is expand the ACA but guarantee everyone could participate in some sort of public insurance program. It could be opening up Medicare, Medi-Cal or a public option, a government-sponsored insurance plan that would compete with private companies."

Obamacare is popular and it is growing. There are still big gaps, too many uninsured and underinsured among them. But the message from the Golden State is that Obamacare, once despised, is now embraced, that bipartisanship and real-life experience have turned abstract policy into a valued program. ▶

America

James and Deborah Fallows traveled the country and found evidence of common purpose behind national division

Up Close

HOLLAND, MICHIGAN, HOME OF BETSY DEVOS (AMONG OTHERS), INSTALLED A "SNOW MELT" SYSTEM THAT COMBINED PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INVESTMENT AND HAS PRODUCED DRAMATIC AND LONG-LASTING RESULTS. IT IS FEATURED IN THE FALLOWS' BOOK.

INTERVIEW BY
JIM NEWTON

JAMES FALLOWS WENT TO WASHINGTON to work for President Carter. He stayed to become one of the most influential, admired and emulated journalists of his era. Writing for decades in books and for the Atlantic, Fallows has created a body of work devoted to analyzing real life, mostly in the United States but also in places such as China, Australia, Great Britain and Africa.

His latest book is a collaboration with his wife, Deborah Fallows. It chronicles their journeys across and around the United States since the election of Donald Trump. *Our Towns: A 100,000-Mile Journey Into the Heart of America* describes communities finding their ways forward, defying ideological expectations and discovering common purpose. It is a surprisingly upbeat assessment, one strikingly at odds with the news from Washington, and it suggests some hope for an American future.

Fallows and Blueprint editor-in-chief Jim Newton spoke by Skype in March, Fallows from his office overlooking the Watergate complex, Newton from Pasadena. Their conversation follows:

PHOTO BY CARMEN MEURER / UNSPLASH

Blueprint: How did you set out to do this book? What prompted you to take it on?

James Fallows: There were two impulses that are almost amusing to look back on. My wife and I had been living in China for about four years, where we were based first in Beijing and then Shanghai, and we tried to spend as much time as we could on the road, because there is such a difference between how things look in a city of 25 million people and how they look in a city of 8 million people, or a smaller place out in the hinterlands. So we have a long history of liking to be on the road and seeing what you don't know until you show up.

The other is an increasing awareness of how the national media, just by default, report on a half dozen cities and only schematically on the other 20,000 cities or rural life. So we just wanted to see what in fact people thought was going well and poorly in Sioux Falls or Holland, Mich.

We had no particular hypothesis to try out when we began this. It was more that "I've never been to Sioux Falls, S.D. I wonder what it's like there." Over time, there was sort of an accumulating hypothesis,

“MOST OF THE COUNTRY FEELS AS IF LIFE IS MORE MANAGEABLE, AND SOLUTIONS ARE MORE PRACTICAL, WITHIN THEIR OWN SPHERE OF KNOWLEDGE THAN IN THE REST OF THE COUNTRY.”

which was the contrast between how people were feeling about the parts of the U.S. they experienced directly versus the parts they read about, and the contrast between national-level dystopia ... and the kinds of practicality we saw in very different places around the country.

BP: Did you visit places that you did not end up using in the book, places that didn't seem to be working well?

JF: We visited a lot more places than we wrote about, but it was a matter of depth of interviewing as opposed to tone and what was going on there. For most of the places we wrote about, we had been there for at least two weeks, which is not long enough to have a deep sense of what's going on, but it's a lot more than being there for a day. ... We probably stopped in about 60 to 75 places, and we wrote about 25 of them.

As this went on for over three to four years, we started deliberately looking for places we knew were more troubled — San Bernardino, for example, or Erie, Pa., or West Virginia, or Mississippi.

On the one hand, this was no one's idea of a controlled, scientific survey, with random, blind trials. But we did deliberately go to places ... with worse unemployment rates, with worse racial tensions, with worse recent shocks, and see if they, too, are having some kind of cohesion. Most places we went felt as if they were moving forward, as opposed to not.

BP: I was really struck, and I'm sure many people have been in reading your book, by what seems to be a fundamental optimism that comes through. And I must say, that's not what I usually read about America these days.

JF: First, I'll give you an unlikely data point ... AEI [the American Enterprise Institute], the big conservative think tank, has been running a huge mood-of-the-country survey ... and they found, reassuringly to us as reporters, that people felt really bad about the country ... but most people, if you ask them about the area where they actually live, felt that its direction was positive. This was true across regions, across racial lines, across income groups, etc. And it's from different starting points. The starting point in Charleston is different from the starting point in Palo Alto, but the direction was similar.

We have now seen enough places and heard from enough people, thousands of people, to contend that this is actually true, that most of the country feels as if life is more manageable, and solutions are more practical, within their own sphere of knowledge than in the rest of the country.

BP: It reminds me a little of polls historically in which Congress would poll very badly, but individual members of Congress were fairly well-liked at home.

JF: Yes. I have been tempted over the decades to write off that kind of finding, only because politicians, by definition, are supposed to be likable. We can think of some obvious exceptions.

BP: Well, it's considered a starting point, but not always ...

JF: But people's sense of their own communities depends on whether they feel some tangible improvement.

Now, the national economy, through this whole time, has been recovering from national shocks. But we've been to enough different places at enough different points along the scale with enough things happening to them to think that this actually is an underappreciated trend of the times, of people being able to work for improvement locally more than nationally.

BP: And you experienced this in communities that are ideologically very far apart, Greenville, S.C., and Burlington, Vt., to name two that may be at the extremes. Did you find differences in terms of the search for local

solutions based on the underlying ideologies of these communities?

JF: Somewhat. ... Almost everywhere we went, faith communities were important parts of social cohesion. They were important as gathering places. They were crucially important for settling immigrants and refugees. They often were involved in addressing homelessness and opioids.

The main reason we didn't write that much about them ... is that in many places they've become aligned with national politics, which is something that we were trying to avoid. In the Deep South, for example, they were a more obvious presence than in, say, Vermont.

So in places that are more conservative in national politics, we did see a more obvious role for faith organizations, but the more general trend was that we did see similar institutions playing similar roles despite alignment on national politics. Libraries, for example, are really a happening thing all over the place. And community colleges also are a happening thing. YMCAs or Y's are becoming big. Public-private partnerships we saw very distinctly, and strong mayors' offices.

BP: I'm glad you mentioned public-private partnerships. I've spent my whole professional life hearing about these partnerships, and I must admit that I've sort of tuned it out. What did you find out there that may surprise people like me who've gotten tired of this slogan and idea?

JF: I'm speaking to you from Washington, and I first came here back in the '70s to work for Jimmy Carter. I've spent about half of my time since then in Washington and about half in other places. The Washington part of my formation has created great skepticism about public-private partnerships because it was sort of a code word for payola, the sweetheart deal.

That's what we think of in D.C., and it was really surprising to me ... to see how: 1) sincere and not eye-rolling people at the local level were about this; and 2) what a tangible thing it was.

[Take, for example] Holland, Mich., home base of Betsy DeVos, which is a very strong manufacturing community. It's a big auto industry supplier, and today it's majority Latino. DeVos' father, Edgar Prince, was a very successful private businessperson, and he worked with the city government of Holland to fund their so-called "snow-melt" system [essentially, an underground heating system that keeps Holland streets free of snow and ice during the winter]. ... It made this huge, transformative difference, and it was a genuine public-private partnership. He put up the original money if the city would pay the operational cost year by year. They've done that for very low cost by bleeding waste heat from their power plant. ...

From a logical point of view, you can see that there's a whole array of problems, from educational reinvention to sustainability to almost any challenge you can think of, where the assets and the

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JAMES AND DEBORAH FALLOWS POSE BEFORE THE "GRAFFITI WALL" IN SIOUX FALLS, SOUTH DAKOTA.

expertise and the organizational ability of private companies could, in theory, be matched with the authority and the legitimacy and the reach of public governments to do something that's better than either could do on their own.

BP: How does boosterism play into this, and how is it something more than just vanity or something disreputable?

JF: On the one hand, let us stipulate that we are from the country that coined the term Babbity and where Mark Twain wrote about the boosters he was lampooning. Side note: Everything that's worth dealing with in life is contradictory, and this is one of those things in the U.S., where there's always been a strong strain in life of the booster, the fraud, the Music Man, the phony, the huckster. It tells you something that there are so many terms in American English for this.

BP: It's like the Eskimos having 100 words for snow.

JF: Yes, that tells us something. There is something that we properly are wary of. On the other hand, there is something we ended up calling "civic patriotism," which I would define in two particular ways: One is a sense of responsibility for the world beyond your front door, that where you live is not just where you live ... but you have some organic connection to what it looks like, how other people are doing there, whether it's improving or not. The other is a willingness to think longer term, to begin projects that you personally might not see the benefits from, that even your children might not see the benefits from. ...

And there's one other element of civic patriotism. We recognize at the national level that there is such a thing as a national myth in the good and bad connotations of "myth." The American myth of equal opportunity is largely myth in that it doesn't happen, but it's useful mythos, too, in giving people something that we should aspire to.

The American Dream is both a falsity and an ideal. This has its local ramifications, too. The California Dream is a real thing, I say as a son of San Bernardino County. The American Dream is, too.

BP: Let me ask you about newspapers. You have a lot of discussion about the role that local journalism plays in some of these communities, and yet that's obviously changing — probably changing somewhat even since the time you visited some of these places. How do the radical changes in the media environment affect life in these communities?

JF: This is a genuine problem, crisis, emergency — whatever synonym we like for something we have to deal with. ... The reason it's a problem is that just as communities need a civic story and they need civic patriots, they also need some way to be connected with information. That's what newspapers have historically done. ...

While the big shift over the last generation is, of course, the rise of the Internet, vacuuming up the classified ad market and other previously stable advertising markets for the printed press in general, the really disastrous accelerant right now is the shift in ownership, the private equity/venture capital model, which, by definition, brings these papers into a very speeded-up, vicious cycle. They've shrunk to [increase] their profit margin, their shrinkage makes them less and less valuable, they shrink further, and it's just a disaster.

The countervailing wave now is to find alternative ownership models. Historically, the times when serious news has been a viable business are rarities. Post-World War II was an exception. Some of the newspaper wars at the turn of the century were an exception. But generally, serious news has required some other host body to support it.

When I was a kid in Redlands, the L.A. Times was like a thousand pages thick. It was the only way that you could reach that whole market. You couldn't get a New York Times or a Wall Street Journal.

BP: I remember Shelby Coffey, its editor, once saying that there were more words in a Sunday Los Angeles Times than in the New Testament.

JF: It is true. When I was a kid, we got the L.A. Times, the San Bernardino Sun, the Redland Daily Facts. All these were viable papers. So you've got this technological shift, but the accelerant is this ownership shift.

There has to be some experimentation, just as 120 years ago you had different business models to support universities and museums and arts companies and ballets. That's why we know the names of Rockefeller and Carnegie and Ford and Mellon and Frick. They were applying the fortunes of that era to shore up things that did not have a normal business space. Local journalism may be partnering with local universities, it may be nonprofit models ...

BP: In the absence of those new models, what is the cost that communities pay if journalism suffers?

JF: The cost is that it's harder to do things that are good, and it's easier to let things happen that are bad. Whether you're trying to get a new school

going, or integrate a new ethnic group that's arrived, or invest in a new park, or have a downtown renovation project — everything that makes these towns more attractive in the long run requires some initial disruption or dislocation, and local press has been a way to deal with that, to make that possible.

About making it easier for bad things to happen, there's the obvious level of just corruption, or special deals, or people who are left behind, or crime, or addiction, or whatever.

So the cost is: All the things that are encouraging in local life are less likely to happen, the things that are discouraging are more likely.

BP: You write a lot about the Gilded Age, and draw a number of comparisons from our current time to that period in our history. What would you imagine being the lessons of this period that would help us as we move out of this Gilded Age?

JF: One of my many embarrassing secrets is that the only thing I read anymore is either fiction from the original Golden Age or nonfiction about it. On the fiction front, Theodore Dreiser could be writing about America of this moment — *Sister Carrie* and *American Tragedy*, *The Titan* and *The Financier*, they all could have been ripped from the headlines, as we say.

And I've been reading just [recently], a book I read in college long ago: *Looking Backward*, by Edward Bellamy. This was the second best-selling book of the 1800s in the U.S. ... The first was *Ben-Hur*.

It was written in the late 1880s. It's about a guy who falls into a trance in 1887 and wakes up in the imagined year 2000, when all of the world's problems have been solved. It's this fantasy of how they got through all the things that were horrible. It's an interesting thought experiment.

If you look at the original Gilded Age, almost every problem we're having now has a counterpart there — rapid new fortunes and rapid loss of traditional means of livelihood, political corruption and political mistrust, etc.

Looking back, we know there was a nascent good side. All around the country, [there were] these initially disconnected local reform movements — California and its Good Government movement, Jane Addams and her civic involvement movement in Chicago, the women's rights movement, down through 50 other reform movements that came up during that time. The positive version of the comparison is to say: 1) Could we recognize that something similar might be going on now? 2) Can we learn about ways in which their efforts were pooled a century ago to lead to an Age of Reforms? And 3) Is it possible to do it without two world wars and a depression?

You could call that cherry-picking. Obviously, history doesn't ever exactly repeat, but there are enough similarities to be of use as an instructive model. ►

CLOSING NOTE:

THE LIMITS AND PROSPECTS OF LIFE’S LAB



THE SOCIAL SCIENCES CAN BE A MESSY BUSINESS. What works in theory or on paper may not unfold as expected. Well-intentioned experts ask Americans to wash their hands and stay home from work if they feel ill, only to provoke a run on paper towels and bottled water.

At the same time, policy that is entirely ad hoc can be frustratingly slow to respond to field testing. Ask the students of the Los Angeles Unified School District who have been told to be patient while the district evaluates charter schools or classroom size. Being forced to wait for years for answers makes innovation irrelevant for a student and her family.

That makes the interaction of research and real life especially crucial in developing sound ideas for making society better. This issue of Blueprint identifies some of the complexity, frustration and potential when researchers and policymakers come together.

Researchers at UCLA are confronting homelessness by trying to rescue those in danger of losing their housing. The researchers are working with government officials in Los Angeles and elsewhere to test the hypothesis that data can help keep a family sheltered. Educators are rolling out community schools and studying them as they go, testing “improvement science” as it probes progress for equity and other measures of teaching success. Housing experts in academia and their allies in the Legislature butted against the limits of politics this year and last when they tried to win approval of a bill that would have usurped some local control on behalf of housing and environmental priorities. And Donald Shoup, a UCLA legend, has pioneered new ways of addressing one of modern society’s most ubiquitous stresses: parking.

This can be frustrating. Shoup calls parking the “most emotional issue in transportation,” and no one who has searched for a spot to leave a car in Westwood at lunchtime would disagree. But there are hopeful signs, both at the high altitude of policy formation and in the daily lives of those who live with the results.

Backed by leaders in both parties, California is extending health-care protections to individuals and families who only recently were vulnerable to sudden illness. State Sen. Robert Hertzberg, a veteran of Southern California politics, is patiently and successfully tackling other problems that hamstringing this state and region — issues such as voter initiatives, legislative redistricting and state budgeting. His formula: He starts by carefully framing the problem and only then moves to the limits of politics.

And at the other end of the conversation, James Fallows, a renowned journalist and author, has recently completed a long national tour, reaching out to residents of small and medium-sized towns and cities to investigate what works in their lives and what doesn’t. To a surprising and encouraging degree, he and his wife and co-author, Deborah Fallows, discovered communities making progress, luring new businesses, thinking constructively about schools, and building river walks and parks and meeting places. The communities are conservative — Greenville, S.C., to name one — and liberal — Burlington, Vt., the home of Bernie Sanders. Community leaders cover the political spectrum as well. And yet, reports of national division notwithstanding, they are solving problems on the ground.

The laboratory of life isn’t simple or germ-free. It is subject to all the failings of human nature. But it is where life happens, and it’s where ideas go to be tested, sometimes failing miserably, other times yielding the possibility of hope.

— *Jim Newton*



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Special thanks to Lisa Horowitz, the chief copy editor for Blueprint, whose sharp eye makes this magazine what it is. — *Jim Newton*

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SOMETHING TO SAY?

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