

**Remarks by
The Honorable Greg Nickels, Mayor, Seattle, Washington**

**at the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program's
Summit for American Prosperity
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I want to thank Strobe Talbot and Brookings for the invitation to speak with you today, and Jim Johnson for the kind introduction. I also want to thank Bruce Katz and his team for all the incredible work they've done.

The Blueprint for American Prosperity comes at a pivotal time in American history. Not only will we have a new president next year, but the Congress will be transformed as well.

It is a time to re-think past assumptions and find a better way for the federal, state and metro areas to serve our citizens.

The premise of the Blueprint Project, that we are a nation composed of vibrant, innovative urban areas is unassailable. The Blueprint calls for rethinking the map. Instead of 50 states – a concept born in the 18th century – we should organize ourselves as a network of metros that provides the vast majority of jobs, ideas and innovations.

When you look at the numbers, our strength becomes clear. We are the foundation, pillars and roof of our national economy – the nation's top 100 metro areas generate 75 percent of gross domestic product.

It is also clear that these same metros are confronting our country's most vexing challenges – challenges that must be met by new ways of working together across all levels of government.

I speak to you today as mayor of a metropolitan area that has the fourth highest per capita GDP of any urban region in the world, ahead of London, Paris and Dublin.

Today, many of our local businesses such as Starbucks and Amazon.com have become international icons.

In fact, ten Fortune 500 companies call the Seattle-metro area home, including Costco, Weyerhaeuser, Nordstrom and Paccar. Venture capital spending per capita in our area is 340 percent of the national average. The number of research and development workers is also many times the national average.

Seattle's story illustrates the extraordinary contribution of our metro areas, and what's needed to build on our economic gains, expand the middle class, and meet our environmental responsibilities.

For while our success comes from a history of forward-looking thinking, we have also benefited from many natural blessings and a big dose of luck.

Our rivers not only provide pristine drinking water, but also clean, renewable energy. Our municipal utility, Seattle City Light, was the first in the nation to become carbon-neutral, thanks largely to hydro-power.

But it was a strategic decision to make conservation our primary resource as we anticipate future population growth and greater energy demands. Today, we're using less power than we did in 1990, even though we've added more than 50,000 people.

In Seattle, we were lucky when a young, flight-obsessed entrepreneur named William Boeing founded Pacific Aero-Products on Seattle's Lake Union. His company, of course, later became Boeing, and Boeing's growth in our area brought thousands of workers to Seattle.

That helped another William, William Gates, to land a job at a Seattle law firm after earning a degree from the University of Washington. His son, Bill, also stuck around and built his business, Microsoft. You know the rest of that story.

And what of the good folks at Starbucks who figured out how to charge \$3 for a fifty-cent cup of coffee. Theirs may be the most creative act of all.

A strong metropolitan economy requires a fair tax structure, but also good schools, vibrant neighborhoods, safe parks and a lively cultural scene. That's the role of cities. But metro areas can thrive when the federal government takes a deliberate, strategic approach.

When I came back to DC recently for Brookings, I spoke to a group of journalists about the Blueprint. One of them, a columnist for one the major newsweeklies asked: "**Seattle is doing well. Why in the world would you want the federal government to get involved and screw it up?**" He had a point. But rather than giving up, isn't it time we demanded greater expectations for our nation's leaders?

The United States needs to understand: What's good for cities is clearly good for the nation.

In the 1970s, Washington State's great senator Warren Magnuson made sure the University of Washington was one of the top recipients of federal research funds. He sponsored a bill creating the National Institute of Health and secured funding to create the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center.

Today, Seattle is the medical hub of the northwest United States, researching cures and saving countless lives every year. National Science Foundation and National Institute of Health funding to our universities is 300 percent of the national average. That's no accident. It was a conscious choice.

Some say that what metro regions really want out of Washington, DC, is a blank check, but that's not true. It's not about more money, but making the best use of our federal dollars to create a shared strategy for building future economic success.

It's about making deliberate, conscious choices to chart our future. We want a genuine partnership and the flexibility to make the right decisions, a partnership that allows us to make headway on our challenges, and Seattle certainly has its share.

In fact, when you move away from curing cancer, developing software and building airplanes, you see an urban region that struggles with the same issues as metros across the country. And we can't go it alone.

We need our federal and state leaders to address the pressing needs we face in transportation, climate change, economic growth and education.

We need to be deliberate and bold. In the global economy, we can no longer rely on luck. There is simply too much at stake, and no room for error, particularly when it comes to global warming.

We are changing from a culture of conspicuous consumption to a culture of conspicuous conservation. We live under one sky, and we must act as one – government and business, rural people and city people – to fulfill our basic responsibility of giving our children a healthy planet.

Out of necessity, metro areas have taken the lead on tackling climate pollution. In February 2005, I challenged my fellow mayors to join me in adopting the Kyoto Protocol, which calls for reducing greenhouse gases by seven percent of 1990 levels by 2012.

My initial goal was 141 cities, the number of countries that signed onto Kyoto. Today, more than 850 cities have signed onto the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Initiative, and it's become a truly national movement with 80 million Americans taking part.

Congress and the White House cannot ignore this groundswell. Strong federal leadership on global warming will happen because it must happen. Denial or half-hearted efforts are not acceptable alternatives.

Despite impressive economic prosperity, we are seeing widening income gaps in our metro areas, and poverty levels are unacceptable.

What's more, middle class professionals such as teachers, bank clerks, and firefighters are having a tough time finding affordable housing close to their jobs.

In Seattle, the demand for workforce housing is relentless, despite the fact that Seattle residents have approved three, seven-year local housing levies that provide almost 10,000 below-market rate units.

Our region is also committed to do its best to end homelessness, but with a tight real estate market, we need national leadership and solutions such as expanding the earned income tax credit to help our middle and low-income working people and services to those most in need.

Although Seattle is famous for its mountain views and flying salmon at Pike Place Market, we're also known for something else: traffic.

The Urban Land Institute just named us the top city for unfunded critical infrastructure – not exactly a coveted award.

On our waterfront, we have a crumbling highway that will likely collapse during an earthquake. The roadway is called the Alaskan Way Viaduct, and, as its name suggests, it carries people and freight throughout our region.

Federal transportation funding has traditionally focused on preserving and creating more lanes for cars. This model leaves us very few options as we rethink this freeway along our waterfront. We need a policy that moves people – whether by bike, bus or carpool.

An example of how metros and the federal government should be able to work together can be found in the 14-miles of light rail taking shape from downtown Seattle to SeaTac Airport.

The regional provider of rail and bus service in our area is called Sound Transit, and next year, as its chairman, I'll have the great pleasure to cut the ribbon and open the line.

This will provide more than a badly-needed alternative to the interstate. It will transform the neighborhoods and communities along the route, pumping new life into areas that for years have struggled with landlord neglect and limited economic activity.

The transformative power of light rail is already visible in our city, and it is something the next Congress and president must understand is vital to all our urban areas.

I personally have worked for 20 years to see this come to reality. As other metros can attest, we discovered the process for awarding federal transportation projects can be difficult and unpredictable.

We can and must improve this relationship. We simply cannot wait years to invest in the future of our metro regions.

Secondly, federal transportation policy must reflect the obvious climate benefit of linking mass transit and regional development.

We need to encourage density, so the biggest commute decision in the morning is which pair of shoes to wear on the walk to work or transit.

Past federal housing and transportation policies transformed American cities, and not always for the better. We need to break the outdated pattern of highway and sprawl and respond to the needs of the 120 million new Americans expected to live here by 2050.

To that end, I applaud the Brookings' proposal that Congress enact a new, comprehensive "Sustainability Investment Program" that would encourage regions to implement bold, integrated solutions in transit, affordable housing and land-use policy.

But of all the challenges facing our metro regions, perhaps none is as important as the need to give our kids the education they deserve.

Sadly, we have so far failed those whose future we have the power to shape.

Although the Seattle region attracts top business and science talent, recent statistics show that Seattle Public Schools have almost a 40 percent drop out rate and only 17 percent of Seattle high school students are taking college prep classes.

This is totally unacceptable for our community and the country. We are wasting too much potential in our metro area schools, and we will not bridge the income and housing gap without a coordinated city, state and federal effort to ensure the great promise of public education.

The Blueprint for American Prosperity understands that the country needs strong metro regions, and the metro regions need the federal government's attention and partnership.

We need to consider new ways of organizing our relationships. Traditionally, it's been a hierarchy, with the federal government at the top of the pyramid, followed by the states and then the metros. This must change.

Cities in the urban regions need to be a powerful voice in a three-way partnership, and we need a new generation of federal and state policies that reflect this reality.

We understand that this shift will not just take place in Washington, DC. Urban regions have work to do themselves.

Seattle is the biggest city in the Greater Seattle region, which includes 80 smaller municipalities, each with its own way of seeing the world. We need to step away from our narrow interests and achieve broad agreement among our cities and towns.

If we do this, if we work together with our state and federal leaders for the common good, we shall ensure our urban regions remain a hotbed of creative entrepreneurship and make long strides towards our goals of economic opportunity and environmental protection.

In November, the American people will turn the next page of history. Whoever wins the presidential and congressional contests will come into office with our goodwill and partnership.

The nation's metro regions stand ready to usher in a new era of American prosperity. We have the blueprint. Let us now show the innovation, commitment and energy to make it a reality for all our citizens.