



A CONSIDERED OPINION

Christine Todd Whitman

The Metropolitan Challenge

When I think of metropolitanism, I am reminded of something *National Geographic* magazine wrote about New Jersey. "Once isolated villages have expanded so rapidly that outsiders cannot tell where one ends and the other begins." That sentence was written in 1933, when the state's population was half what it is today.

No matter where you are from, this *National Geographic* description probably comes very close to describing the way suburban sprawl is eating up open space, creating mind-boggling traffic jams, bestowing on us endless strip malls and housing developments, and consuming an ever-increasing share of our resources.

But sprawl—and the ensuing competition for resources between cities and their suburbs—is not inevitable. In states across the country, leaders are homing in on metropolitan solutions that complement the work of mayors, community groups, and civic, religious, and corporate leaders.

Metropolitan solutions can take many forms and come from many levels of government. States are the key to many metropolitan efforts. In New Jersey, we are working on four related areas: land use planning, open space preservation, transportation planning, and urban revitalization.

States set the rules of the game for land use decisions, which are, fundamentally, decisions to sprawl or to build and live differently. In New Jersey, those rules are embodied in our State Plan, which gives priority to development applications that draw on infrastructure already in place. We've given towns a huge incentive: if they commit themselves to channeling development where it makes sense, where there are services that can support that development, the state will give them upfront approval on development applications. I have asked the state property tax commission to make a guidebook to determine the true costs and benefits of a developer's proposal. In this way, we can empower town leaders and citizens to consider the true costs and benefits of proposed development, so that they do not bankrupt themselves making deals for new developments that need expensive, upfront infrastructure investments.

States can also lead the way in protecting farms and open areas. Eleven governors (including myself) emphasized the preservation of open space in their 1998 state

of the state speeches. During my first four years as governor of New Jersey, we preserved 115,000 acres. My goal is to add 300,000 more acres of open space and farmland before I leave office in 2002. Our ultimate goal will be to preserve one million acres in the coming decade. I have proposed a new, stable source of state funding to make sure we continue to preserve land beyond my tenure. Several states have put forth bond issues or discussed raising taxes so that they can preserve open space—making, in a way, a down-payment on the quality of life.

A metropolitan agenda must also address transportation. In New Jersey, we have a bold state transportation plan that will expand public transportation, repair highways and bridges, make roads and rails safer, relieve traffic jams, and improve ports. We will pay particular attention to how to better connect our cities with each other and with our suburban areas, so urban residents can more easily gain access to the jobs and opportunities we are creating across the state.

Finally, we must turn our attention to keeping people in the cities and attracting new families and businesses to our urban centers. People have told me that they want good schools, decent places to live, and strong, supportive neighborhoods. To that end, we have established rigorous new academic standards for every public school, increased affordable housing, and begun to encourage urban churches and other faith-based groups to get more involved in such community development efforts as childcare, job training, and housing. We have made significant investments in working directly with neighborhood residents to shape their own revitalization. And new legislation makes it more economically feasible for businesses to turn abandoned industrial sites into productive enterprises.

Smart land use decisions and preservation of open space, better transportation plans and strong cities—these are the elements of a sustainable society, a society in which we protect the resources we have today so they are there tomorrow. Metropolitanism is, ultimately, a way toward this kind of sustainability. The metropolitan agenda can and must become our human agenda. ■

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