HKS Inside the Statehouse

The Dukakis Summer Fellowship was established by Marilyn and Calvin Gross to honor the career of Governor Michael Dukakis and expose Harvard Kennedy School students to leadership roles in state government. Fellows serve in the executive offices of governors across the country working on a variety of policy challenges. Here is a sampling of their stories, drawn from Summer 2017 and 2018 Fellows, in their own words.

HARVARD Kennedy School
JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

Office of CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Contents

Interview with Governor Michael Dukakis: Shifting Racial Attitudes, Grassroots Organizing, and Public Service

by James Pagano

Governor Dukakis spoke with me about what drew him to politics, how racial attitudes in Massachusetts have changed over time, his own advice for policy students interested in state government, and his aspirations for a more united Democratic Party. Michael Dukakis served three terms as Governor of Massachusetts and was the 1988 Democratic nominee for President. This interview was recorded on August 16, 2017.

ON SEEKING PUBLIC OFFICE

› Pagano: You began your political career as an Elected Town Meeting Member. How and why did you decide to pursue that office?

›› Governor: People of color couldn't live in the town of Brookline. In point of fact, people of color couldn't live on this side of the railroad tracks in Boston.

Anti-Semitism was rife. We have a grandson who is going to be coming to Tufts in a few weeks. His grandmother, Kitty, was explaining to him when she was his age she couldn't step foot in the Longwood Cricket Club because she was Jewish! That was the world we grew up in. I was bothered by this.

So, I got involved and interested, went to Swarthmore, got quite active politically down there. I was drafted right out of Swarthmore. Then I came back from the military, went to Harvard Law School, and began getting active politically in the town. One of the easiest ways to do it was to run for Town Meeting. You run from a precinct, approximately 3,000 voters, or 1,500 households. So I printed up a few cards and I went out, rang every doorbell in the precinct, stood in front of the polling place for 13 hours, and got elected.

› I know you've also had a couple setbacks in your career. For example, you lost the primary after your first term as Governor. How do you collect yourself and decide what's next?

›› [Laughing] It's not fun.

I thought at that point my political career was over. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to go over to the Kennedy School and start teaching, and it was one of the best things that ever happened to me.

Really, [I] had no intention of running again except that [the new Governor] King ran a pretty sleazy administration and there were corruption problems. It was only as a result of that, that I decided I'd run against him a second time.

This time, this was one of the most intensive contests we ever had in this state. I think 300,000 more Democrats voted then had ever voted in a primary. This time, we were out there, and I beat him. I got the Governorship back and was able to serve two terms after that.

ON THE VALUE OF STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

› So much of your career has been focused on the state and local levels. Why do you think…

›› Why state and local? Well, if you really want to have an impact in a pretty direct way on people's lives and communities, you'll have a lot more at the state and local level than you will nationally.

[Take] this whole business of welfare to work. The prevailing view at the time among too many people, including academics, was that you couldn't do anything, that there are just folks who will be on the dole their whole lives. It's just a lot of nonsense. We were putting 15,000 welfare mothers to work in that state in good jobs, with training. Most of them never saw welfare again.

It was those kinds of experiences: regional economic development; turning the T from a joke into a modern, functioning public transportation system; women on welfare who got training, went to work, and became great success stories...There was a lot of interest in this [welfare-to-work]. They [Congress] never would have been attracted to it had we not had success stories to talk about at the state and local level.

› What advice would you give a student who wants to start a career in state government?

›› I think a lot of it depends on personality and temperament. There are some folks that probably aren't made for elective office or don't choose to pursue it but are terrific public servants. I mean, [as Governor] I was looking for talented people all the time and, I think, it's fair to say we had one of the most talented groups of people working in state government.

One other thing you've got to be very concerned with your own personal life. When Kitty and I were first married in 1963, we decided on two really basic rules. One was dinner at home at 6 o'clock at night, no exceptions. The other was no politics on Sunday with three exceptions: St. Patrick's Day, Greek Independence Day, and combined Jewish Philanthropy Super Sunday, and on those days, I took off Saturday.

ON BOSTON'S CHANGING RACIAL ATTITUDES

› You've spoken about the racism and anti-Semitism once common in Boston. In light of events in Charlottesville, how have the City of Boston and Commonwealth of Massachusetts evolved to become a place that is more welcoming and diverse?

›› Well, we've come miles and it's a wonderful thing to see and to have been a part of. To have the city of Boston today respond as it has with a mayor who is unequivocally committed to important values and says so, is very gratifying.

It's obviously disappointing to see that we still have folks in the country, in fact we may have some in Massachusetts, that have views about people and race and religion that seem to me to be just totally unacceptable. But, it's a great feeling to be in a state where the vast majority of folks here, both in and out of politics, are just appalled by this kind of stuff and are willing to say so. I hope more will.

› What do you think changed in Boston that is still changing in other places?

›› Well, it took a lot of work and was not uncontroversial. We had a Fair Housing Committee in the Town of Brookline in the 1960s and early 1970s who had to go out and challenge landlords who were clearly not renting to people of color. The state, to its credit, created a state commission against discrimination that had pretty formidable enforcement power, without which we couldn't have done this.

I think the fact that so many of us come out of the immigrant experience in this state is also very important. There aren't too many of us who are more than a generation or two away from immigration. The fact that our universities attract highly talented immigrant folks makes a huge difference as well. These days, I don't think there is anybody in the state who doesn't appreciate the fact that we're a product of immigration, we have gained enormously from that, and that continues.

LOOKING FORWARD ON NATIONAL POLITICS

› What advice do you have for the Democratic Party going into 2018 and 2020?

›› Well I'm concerned about it. I'm concerned about it because the last thing in the world we need is a party that's arguing internally.

I have a lot of respect for Sanders and what he did, but making single-payer healthcare a litmus test for Democratic candidates in my opinion is crazy. What we ought to be expecting our candidates to say is "I am for universal healthcare." There are lots of ways of getting there.

Income inequality is serious, it's got to be dealt with, there are ways to do it, but regional economic development is equally important. A much more impressive and extensive job training system is very important. We've got 6 million jobs going begging in this country because we haven't got people with the skills to fill them. These are good jobs at good wages and decent benefits.

As we get ready for 2018 and 2020, the last thing in the world we need is internal battles over whether or not you're for single-payer, or for multi-payer, or whatever. The important thing is a commitment to making sure that every American has decent, affordable healthcare. That's the kind of unifying factor.

The other thing is this grassroots stuff. Buying into this red-blue narrative is a terrible mistake. I carried West Virginia by 12-points. When did they become red? Well, they become red if you ignore them. We start [races] by writing off half the country, which is just dumb. This [Democratic Party] has got to be a 50-state party—every single state.

› Would you venture to guess who the Democratic Party will nominate in 2020?

›› No idea. It's much too early. Believe me, there will be lots of good candidates.

I just hope they understand that if you're going to win the presidency, you've got to appeal to a very broad cross-section of the American people. The last thing in the world we need is eternal battles over who's the most pure.

We have work to do, and [it's] better working together and reaching out, reaching out, reaching out. I hope we can do that.

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James Pagano MPP 2018 is an HKS Government Performance Fellow for the State of Illinois. He conducted this interview with Michael Dukakis while a student at HKS and lead managing editor for the Kennedy School Review.

Reducing Statewide Traffic Fatalities: A Multi-Agency Challenge in an Automobile-Dependent State

by Erin St. Peter | Arizona, Governor Doug Ducey

To those not interested in transportation policy, Vision Zero, FARS Data, and Wrong-Way Driving Detection Systems might not sound like the most fascinating entry into state government. However, diving into fatal crash data and joining the Operations Team in the Arizona Governor's Office was an incredible way to gain insight into state government projects that span multiple agencies and explore the ways in which these agencies use or could use data to better structure programs and policies.

The Arizona Governor's Office, under the leadership of Governor Doug Ducey, is committed to improving government and government services for Arizonans through strong business practices that include internal process management, performance metrics, user-centered design, and cross-agency collaboration.

As part of my summer project, I was fortunate to be assigned to a high-priority multi-agency "breakthrough" project tasked with reducing the number of traffic fatalities on Arizona roads. This project involved agency directors and leadership from the Department of Transportation, Public Safety, Department of Health Services, Highway Safety, and the Arizona Department of Liquor Licenses and Control.

While the potential gains from cross-agency approaches to issues like traffic fatalities were high, the operational challenges associated with carrying out this project were similarly substantial. Absent a single agency lead, achieving data consensus and designing cost-effective, data-substantiated interventions was not an easy task. Not only was there incredible variation in the countermeasures selected by each agency (ranging from optimization of emergency medical services response time to strategic placement of speed indicator signs), but even pinpointing the root causes of fatal crashes proved challenging given conflicting media narratives and public opinion.

My position this summer often took on the role of a rare neutral party in the breakthrough project process, generating "out-of-the-box" behavioral economics ideas, re-establishing and maintaining the team data narrative, and helping to steer collaboration toward interventions with the most favorable cost/benefit ratios.

Some of my work included conducting an initial assessment into the cost of traffic fatalities to the state as well as recommendations for incentivizing public transit usage and increasing the amount of time troopers are able to spend actively patrolling state highways.

While on some days my contributions to this breakthrough initiative felt like just another exercise in data analysis and project management, the ability to do this work for the Operations Team and the Executive Office provided me with incredible exposure to and insights gained from working alongside extremely talented directors and agency staff from so many levels and areas of state government.

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Erin St. Peter is a second-year Master in Public Policy candidate. Before Harvard Kennedy School, she worked for a Native American nonprofit Community Development Financial Institution, seeking ways to finance on-reservation properties where banks were often unwilling to lend. She is passionate about public finance, data science, financial inclusion, and state and local government.

The Key to Reducing Carbon Emissions: Revolutionizing Mobility

by Amy Zhou | California, Governor Jerry Brown

Even non-Californians took notice of what Governor Jerry Brown has been up to this summer.

Following through on his public denouncement of President Trump's stance on climate change, Brown traveled to China for a high-profile meeting with Xi Jinping and signed an extension of his landmark cap-and-trade program to 2030 into law. But California's focus on industrial emitters misses a large and important shift in individual behavior that is contributing to rising emissions in the state: people are driving more.

Transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in California, accounting for nearly 50 percent of CA's total—most of which comes from passenger vehicles. Our transportation emissions are tied directly to our mobility—whether by public bus, BART, or Uber—and it is no surprise that the number of vehicle-miles traveled has gone up, increasing faster than population growth in the state. Gone are the days of waiting idly for a 45-minute cross-town subway when an UberX is at your fingertips.

Yet at the confluence of mobility and technology, an opportunity—or a curse—exists: autonomous vehicles. Having actively regulated the industry since 2012, California now serves as the testing grounds for a growing list of 37 manufacturers, spanning from traditional car companies like Ford and Volkswagen to disrupters like Apple and Tesla. While we have yet to see them picking up our groceries and running our errands, the prevalence of these vehicles is rising fast: at least 20 companies plan to release driverless cars by 2021.

While autonomous cars have the potential to serve the public interest, they can also hinder it by changing the labor market, increasing carbon emissions, and reducing equity and access.

Projections forecast two and threefold increases in vehicle-miles traveled as the cost and convenience of autonomy morphs the economics of transportation. E-commerce is growing at over 14 percent per year, resulting in department store closures and retail bankruptcies, and without intervention, at least 341,000 formal jobs in California requiring human drivers will be lost to driverless technology. At the state level, policies to mitigate job losses, emissions increases, and congestion will become necessary to protect the public value of mobility.

Safety monitoring and testing laws exist in some states. Limited strides have been made to establish zero-emission requirements or mileage taxes, but so far none have succeeded. The challenge is that without regulation, innovations for some do not trickle down to all. Ride-hailing companies are so lightly regulated it is difficult to quantify the gap in access to low-income neighborhoods. Companies like Uber and Lyft are driven by profit, not social value, and it is sadly unsurprising that both platforms have been found to worsen racial and gender-based discrimination.

Furthermore, ride-hailing is cannibalizing public transit ridership, forcing increases in fares that put the burden on low-income and minority populations. DC's Metro ridership is down 9 percent from 2015 to 2016, and in New York City, growth in travel was absorbed by ride services, worsening congestion and emissions. Transportation as a public good must be restructured in a future where privately-operated driverless cars may dominate over subway trains.

So, what can state governments do better? I spent my summer in Sacramento, CA as a Dukakis Fellow at the Governor's Office of Planning and Research, diving into how policy can steer mobility towards a better future. Working alongside urban planners, environmental policy experts, and lawyers, I analyzed the potential long-term impacts of autonomous vehicles on the state's goals to preserve equity, livability, and sustainability.

My work in the Governor's Office culminated in five recommendations to address upcoming challenges in keeping transportation equitable and sustainable.

I. Increase Zero-Emission Incentives

For the state to achieve its aggressive zero-emission and greenhouse gas reduction goals, incentives must be increased and mandated for autonomous vehicles. Modify the Clean Vehicle Rebate Project to include shared-use, fleet vehicles meeting a minimum average vehicle occupancy level and phase in a requirement for autonomous vehicles to be zero-emission.

II. Enact A State-Wide Road Charge for AVs

CalSTA recently completed a Road Charge Pilot Program which demonstrated the efficacy of a mileage-based road charge to replace revenue from the gas tax. As autonomous vehicles come online, a road charge should be implemented and applied while politically feasible. Doing so will raise the costs of autonomous driving and curb projected increases in vehicle-miles traveled, and such a policy can be designed to increase with weight class, placing a greater charge on vehicles that incur higher damages to road infrastructure and emissions.

III. Define "Zero-Occupancy Vehicles" and Establish a Mileage Tax

Zero-occupancy vehicles, or "ghost cars," will become commonplace with driverless cars in the absence of regulation. Industries like food delivery, online retail, and trucking will benefit from greatly lowered transportation costs coupled with greater demand. To control the increase in emissions from ghost cars, California must define zero-occupancy vehicles in its vehicle code and enable pricing mechanisms to encourage efficient routing. Require fleet operators to monitor and report the mileage on "ghost cars," establish a premium on zero-occupancy mileage, and phase in higher charges as gas tax revenues decline.

IV. Adopt the "Vision Zero" Agenda Statewide

The "Vision Zero" approach is a traffic safety initiative that strives to completely reduce traffic fatalities and serious injuries. This framework of improving traffic safety has yet to be coupled with the safety promises that driverless technology brings. Governor Brown should seek to adopt "Vision Zero" state-wide and endorse the reduction of traffic fatalities with involvement in autonomous technology.

V. Require Vehicle Occupancy Data from Fleet-Operated Autonomous Vehicles and Establish a Regulatory Body for Oversight

Accountability and transparency are imperative in ensuring that the driverless fleet industry minimizes social harm. Therefore, fleet-operated vehicles must be required to record and regularly disclose average vehicle occupancy and service provision information. The state should designate a regulatory body, such as the state's public utility company, to collect this data and monitor against price discrimination, service discrimination, and other forms of antitrust violations.

As the demand for mobility increases and autonomy becomes more prevalent, states should focus on developing policies to address new innovations in transportation. California can lead the way by establishing measured oversight, incentivizing sustainable behavior, and ensuring that this potentially life-saving technology can reach not some, but all Californians.

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Amy Zhou MPP 2018 is a delivery lead at Delivery Associates. She previously worked as a management consultant in both the public and private sectors and is interested in addressing how governments adapt to technology innovation. Amy is from Baltimore, Maryland and has a BS in Mechanical Engineering.

Marijuana: A Case Study in Bipartisanship

by Jake Viola | Maine, Governor Paul LePage

Paul LePage is America's most conservative governor, and a reliable headline. For ten weeks this summer, he was also my boss.

After years of talking the bipartisan talk, I was ready to walk the bipartisan walk as Maine's inaugural Dukakis Fellow. Beyond building a resume that joins Michael Dukakis and Paul LePage in the same sentence, I wanted to see whether Democrats and Republicans are capable of working together. My chance arrived when I became the state's unofficial marijuana czar.

Following a successful citizens' initiative last fall, Maine joined seven other states and the District of Columbia in legalizing marijuana for recreational use. Mainers aged 21 and older can now possess up to 2.5 ounces. They're also able to grow their own plants and gift products to other adults.

Before commercial sales can occur—as early as next year—Maine's executive agencies responsible for regulating the new market must complete the rulemaking process. Rulemaking clarifies laws passed by the legislature (or voters, in this case).

To develop the right rulemaking strategy for Maine, I first looked to other states that have implemented marijuana policies, and to the industry partners that helped them.

The task felt like playing with a Rubik's Cube. There are many sides to marijuana policy—e.g., tax rates, enforcement, advertising, testing, licensing, tracking—and bringing them into alignment can be exceedingly difficult. Solving a problem in one domain can often create three others elsewhere.

A Washington State official put the challenge into perspective. She reminded me that we still struggle with alcohol policy even though prohibition ended more than 80 years ago. We would be foolish to assume marijuana will be any easier.

Still, finding the right answer is a smaller challenge than convincing others why it's right. While politics didn't influence my research on the issue, understanding my audience—a governor hostile to the idea of marijuana in Maine—did affect how I framed my recommendations.

When the day came to brief Governor LePage, my recommendations relied on three principles: simplicity, efficiency, and responsibility. I hoped these themes would resonate with the staunch conservative.

After the governor's senior advisor turned the meeting over to me, I hesitated long enough to appreciate the situation I was in. In the grandeur of the cabinet room, my oversized leather chair adjacent to the governor's, I had the attention of Maine's top political leader and the opportunity to affect policy in the state I love.

It was, without a doubt, the greatest privilege of my life—and one of the unlikeliest. Ten weeks prior, I entered the governor's office clueless on marijuana policy and teased for my social media support of Hillary Clinton. Now, I had developed expertise and gained trust.

Throughout an hour-long conversation, we focused on two shared priorities: the public health consequences of legalizing a Schedule I drug, and the need to integrate the existing medical marijuana program into the new recreational marketplace.

Specifically, I advised LePage to collect baseline data now to be able to evaluate marijuana's public health impact on our population, especially our children, after implementation. As marijuana laws have been relaxed nationally, heavy consumption has increased from 9 out of 100 monthly users 25 years ago to 40 out of 100 today. Roughly half of these heavy users report symptoms of cannabis use disorder.

I also recommended that Maine streamline the medical and recreational markets. Eight dispensaries and nearly 3,000 licensed caregivers serve the state's approximately 37,000 medical marijuana patients. Maintaining two separate systems with different tax rates and enforcement bodies would result in bureaucratic redundancies. Even more concerning, it would incentivize diversion to the gray market, meaning marijuana would be grown legally for one market, but sold illegally in another.

At the same time that I was working with LePage and his commissioners on rulemaking, a 17-member legislative Marijuana Legalization Implementation (MLI) committee was meeting to rewrite portions of the law.

In a sea of partisanship, waves broke both ways on marijuana policy. Some Republicans argued for more regulation, while a few Democrats acted like libertarians. Despite their differences, the members came together to do their jobs—they produced two bills, one dealing with funding and another with testing standards, and the legislature approved them both with overwhelming support.

The future of marijuana in Maine is far from resolved, but I departed Augusta less cynical and more optimistic than when I arrived. Where I expected to find gross caricatures, I encountered good people devoted to making Maine a better place.

Today, too many of us would rather question people's motives than debate their ideas. We've become so estranged from the other party that we see snowflakes and bigots instead of our family and friends. And while we might achieve moral victories through self-segregation, we will fail to solve society's most complex problems.

At the same time, my experience in Augusta taught me the reality of politics. Bipartisanship is harder than it seems—and moderation can sometimes be the wrong way to achieve it. Straddling the center simply to avoid a hard choice is a lazy attempt to please both sides, while standing for nothing.

But if you still believe, after everything we've seen nationally in the past year, that more unites us than divides us, imagine what we could accomplish by elevating our common interest above partisanship. My summer proved that it's possible to cooperate on a shared goal without capitulating on our principles.

We can't force others to work with us, trust us, or see the world from our perspective. But before we try to change others, we should start by challenging ourselves. Here, Governor LePage's creed can inspire us all: "If it is to be, it is up to me."

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Reimagining Transportation

by Michael Silvestri | Massachusetts, Governor Charlie Baker

Agile, iterative, pilot, scrum—these phrases may be common in the world of software development, but one would hardly expect to hear them tossed around the austere marble corridors of state government. Yet they are common parlance in the Massachusetts Governor's Office, where a nimble squad of problem-solvers is using every cutting-edge tool in the toolbox to accomplish their mission: make state government run better.

The Strategic Operations Team, as the squad is called, was first launched in 2015 to help the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) get back on track after a series of debilitating snowstorms. Its project portfolio has since grown to include such far flung projects as transforming the Registry of Motor Vehicles, optimizing state call centers, and improving inter-agency data sharing. Wielding whiteboards, post-it notes, and performance dashboards, the team acts as an internal consulting arm, rapidly diagnosing problems, researching and recommending solutions, mobilizing cross-agency teams, and supporting implementation. The team members' diverse backgrounds—from law and military to consulting and finance—as well as the team's small size—not totaling more than fifteen staff members at a time—enable it to avoid groupthink, champion unconventional ideas, and shift fluidly between multiple priorities. Stationed just steps from Governor Charlie Baker's office and reporting directly to his Chief of Staff, the team has unrivaled flexibility, influence, and empowerment to hunt for transformative solutions to the Commonwealth's most complex operational challenges.

Challenges like purchased transportation.

Every year, Massachusetts spends more than a billion dollars moving citizens around. Millions depend on state-subsidized transportation to access jobs, healthcare, and other critical services. Roughly half of this spending consists of subsidies to commuter rail, subway, and bus lines run by the mbta and fifteen other regional transit authorities (RTAs). The other half is spread across a long tail of less familiar programs. “Dial-a-ride” taxi services bring state-insured patients to medical appointments. Door-to-door paratransit shuttles and accessible vehicles transport adults with physical, cognitive, or behavioral impairments. And secured cars carry inmates to court hearings, medical visits, and clean-up projects around the state. In total, the state subsidizes nearly half a billion distinct passenger trips per year.

The problem is that these transportation services continue to be purchased on a program-by-program basis, using a variety of procurement models, and with wide variation in quality, transparency, and cost. Some programs have been labeled “budget busters” with “outmoded and underperforming” business models. Other programs have made headlines after their leaders were found to be involved in theft, kickback schemes, and embezzlement.

I joined the Strategic Operations Team this summer as a Dukakis Fellow just as the team was being asked the question—how could we reimagine purchased transportation?

The list of potential solutions was long. Perhaps the Commonwealth could negotiate better rates from vendors by pooling procurement across programs, or achieve greater transparency by shifting towards performance-based contracts and asking vendors to share data. The state could reexamine its mix of contracted transportation services, leased vehicles, and fleet ownership. More disruptive solutions might include partnering with innovative new ride-sharing vendors to help cut costs while boosting quality, or providing services virtually to eliminate certain trips altogether without sacrificing outcomes. Our team was undertaking a data-driven review of purchased transportation more ambitious and comprehensive than had ever previously been attempted.

I soon discovered why.

A variety of obstacles make transportation a sticky issue in Massachusetts. The diversity of user needs confounds a one-size-fits-all solution. Ride-sharing models may be appropriate for paratransit users but not for immunocompromised patients. Taxis may be appropriate for adults seeking routine medical care but not for inmate work crews or young children. Even where commonalities exist across programs, institutional siloes prevent state agencies from sharing best practices and coordinating procurement. The result is a proliferation of vendor contracts. This obfuscates data collection, which in turn makes it difficult for agencies to track the metrics needed to improve transportation performance. Some agencies address this by owning and operating vehicles themselves, but in-house fleets require large capital expenditures. Paying intermediary organizations like RTAs to broker with individual transportation vendors has become a middle ground for many agencies, but it means transferring some control over rates and routes to independent authorities. Adding to this backdrop are financial and political incentives that further conspire to make each program inefficient. For some programs, reducing transportation costs means forfeiting vital federal reimbursement. Halting program budget cuts can help legislators win favor among their constituencies, even if the transportation services in their regions could be delivered more efficiently. And politically, it’s far easier to expand transportation services than to take them away.

Nonetheless, our deep-dive into the Commonwealth’s purchased transportation surfaced several bright spots, which hint at what the future could look like, both in Massachusetts and in other states. The Department of Corrections is scaling up telemedicine and video conferencing technology to reduce inmate transportation while simultaneously mitigating security risks. These same virtual service delivery technologies could be deployed throughout the Department of Health and Human Services to avert some of the nearly 4 million non-emergency medical trips provided each year.

The MBTA is piloting an innovative partnership with transportation network companies (TNCs) like Uber and Lyft to provide the ride customers with lower-cost, higher-quality paratransit services, in a model that could also be used in other programs and across other regions. And local startups like Circulation are developing digital platforms that aggregate vendors and coordinate lower-cost, convenient, reliable non-emergency medical transportation. The state could explore whether using digital platforms might yield lower trip costs, better health outcomes, and greater transparency than traditional broker models.

Finally, MassHealth (Medicaid for Massachusetts) has leveraged behavioral insights to redesign the form it uses to collect information on patients' transportation needs, helping improve data accuracy and prevent unnecessary trips. Agencies beyond MassHealth could employ subtle interventions to help "nudge" providers and consumers towards more efficient transportation consumption.

The Strategic Operations Team has already begun to facilitate a Cross-Secretariat Operations Council (coined the "XOC") to share these types of recommendations, raise aspirations, and support agency chiefs in transforming purchased transportation across the Commonwealth.

Which points to the biggest lesson of all from our exploration: ultimately, the main barrier to reimagining purchased transportation is not the complexity of the problem or the scarcity of solutions. The greatest challenge is one of leadership and culture. Making government run better—whether improving call centers, sharing data, or optimizing transportation services—demands leaders who challenge the status quo, see the broader system beyond their own turf, and empower those with innovative ideas. And it demands an organizational culture built on relentless improvement, data-driven problem-solving, systems thinking, and creative risk-taking. These ingredients affirm the need for offices like the Strategic Operations Team, which embodies both of these qualities and infuses them wherever it works. It was a tremendous privilege to serve on the team as a Dukakis Fellow this summer. As for purchased transportation in Massachusetts, we may have miles to go before we reach our final destination, but we're on the right road. The Strategic Operations Team and XOC serve as promising models for other Governor's Offices to consider as they seek to make government more effective and efficient.

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Conservation is a Winning Strategy

by Chuck Arrsauyaq Herman | Montana, Governor Steve Bullock

Montana is home to the world's first national park and also home to a toxic man-made lake, a mile-long and 1,800 feet deep, created by a now defunct copper mine. The state is well-acquainted with the traditional clash between resource-extraction and conservation. But that may be changing.

I spent the summer as a Dukakis Fellow in Montana Governor Steve Bullock's office, laying the groundwork for an Office of Outdoor Recreation. Montana, among other state and local governments, has recognized that conservation and economic development do not have to clash. Rather, conservation can be a strategy for economic development.

Beyond the benefits of combatting climate change and protecting wildlife, investing in a thriving outdoors attracts businesses, a skilled workforce, and political support.

The large and growing outdoor recreation industry is drawn to communities dedicated to conservation. The outdoor recreation industry employs 7.6 million Americans and spurs almost $900 billion in annual consumer spending. This industry is dependent on protection of public lands, such as national parks, and investment in outdoor infrastructure, such as trail systems. They have recently begun flexing their political muscles. Outdoor Retailer, the largest outdoor trade show, injected $45 million annually into Salt Lake City's economy. After 20 years, they are moving to Denver because of the Utah Governor's failure to protect the Bears Ears National Monument. Patagonia, REI, and North Face—the titans of the outdoor industry—led the charge.

Further, the outdoor lifestyle attracts talent in an array of high-paid sectors. Denver and Seattle are booming tech-cities with reputations for outdoor lifestyles. Denver has the lowest unemployment rate of any U.S. city with over a million people and the attraction of the outdoor lifestyle deserves recognition in facilitating this success.

For rural cities and towns, the combination of the quality-of-life improvements and lower cost of living have proved fundamental to transitioning from commodity-driven economies. Combining conservation with investments in infrastructure—particularly airports and internet—is a winning strategy. Check out Bozeman, Montana, the fastest growing city in America, for proof of this.

This is not just a strategy for cities in the West: cities such as Roanoke, VA, and Chattanooga, TN, have leveraged their natural surroundings. Chattanooga, once known as the "dirtiest place in America," reversed that narrative by adding 22-miles of trails along its river and Roanoke has rebranded itself in relation to the Blue Ridge mountains. Both serve as examples of industrial cities transitioning into the new economy.

Beyond attracting business and talent, conservation is an issue that a broad swath of the electorate agrees on. Protection of public lands and the environment are already a potent political force in the West. Governor Bullock, a Democrat, won reelection in 2016 by four points in a state Donald Trump won by twenty. Key to Bullock's victory was a focus on the importance of public lands and the potential of the outdoor recreation economy. In Montana, Trump supporting hunters and hippie mountain-bikers agree that the environment must be protected.

State and local governments, along with conservation organizations and businesses, should be aggressive in pursuing conservation as an economic driver. In the short-term, this will look like further investments in trail systems and environmental restoration. Taking this action now will encourage investment by the outdoor recreation industry, attract talent, and ingrain political backing for conservation in a diverse constituency.

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Apprenticeships in a Shifting Economy

by Andrew Sugrue | Nevada, Governor Brian Sandoval

More than most states, Nevada suffered greatly during the recent recession. Unemployment peaked at 14 percent in 2010, housing prices had fallen 60 percent by 2011, and as of last year, GDP per capita remained at 20 percent below its pre-recession high.

The state's economy relies heavily on gaming, tourism, entertainment, hospitality, and construction—sectors driven primarily by strong consumer spending. Middle-class America did not celebrate the Great Recession by going to Vegas.

While people of all education levels in the U.S. lost their jobs during the initial crash, the subsequent recovery has mostly benefitted those who have attended college. Today, Nevadan officials seek to turn the state's economy around by diversifying into high-growth industries such as advanced manufacturing and technology, while giving a boost to workers without college degrees.

Central to the state's strategy are improved connections between firms, workers, and educational institutions. And Nevada, among other U.S. states, has decided to pursue this goal with a decidedly traditional solution: apprenticeships.

Apprenticeship—often described as "earn while you learn"—is a training arrangement between educational institutions, employers, and often, the government. Apprentices, under the direction of an employer, are usually trained (and paid) for at least one year of on-the-job learning and associated classroom instruction, leading to an industry-recognized credential. Programs are regulated by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship, or by federally recognized State Apprenticeship Agencies.

Though similar to a paid internship in format, apprenticeship may sound like an antiquated idea. In the U.S., the registered apprenticeship system was introduced in the New Deal era to protect the welfare of apprentices in the construction industry. Since then, apprenticeships have been linked with unionized blue-collar trades such as manufacturing, utilities, and construction, fields in which the vast majority of apprentices work today.

However, these programs have enjoyed renewed attention in the U.S. due to the increased growth in demand for skilled labor. Businesses, including those in expanding industries, want to train and retain employees who are proficient in company-specific technical knowledge, processes, and culture.

Apprenticeship expands the skilled labor pool by creating employment opportunities for those without college degrees. The federal government has encouraged apprenticeship through new grants under the Obama Administration and an Executive Order from the Trump Administration.

While these apprenticeship programs have been touted as national solutions, their success can hinge on local economic conditions and the active support of state governments. As governors compete with each other to foster job creation and attract talent, many have renewed emphasis on apprenticeship programs to provide their state with a skills advantage.

In June, Nevada's GOP Governor Brian Sandoval signed Senate Bill 516 to establish an Office of Workforce Innovation (OWINN). OWINN's mission to produce a "skilled, diverse, and aligned workforce" includes oversight of Nevada's apprenticeship programs.

While elevating apprenticeship and other workforce initiatives within the state government will strengthen Nevada's economy, many obstacles to an efficient apprenticeship scheme remain. The influx of new industries into Nevada has created competition between traditional trades and arriviste industries, competition which creates bitter conflict about where to direct state resources for workforce development. Nevada has yet to approve an apprenticeship program outside of traditional building-related occupations.

Fortunately, other states' apprenticeship programs provide valuable lessons. South Carolina stands out as an example to follow. In 2007, the state government established Apprenticeship Carolina to provide pro bono consulting services to employers interested in starting apprenticeship programs.

South Carolina also offers tax credits to businesses for each registered apprentice. The Palmetto State has recorded impressive results—over the past decade the number of apprenticeship programs has risen from 90 to 876 and the number of apprentices has increased from 777 to over 18,000.

Apprenticeship can have a real, positive impact for its participants. A 2012 study of ten U.S. states found that participation in a Registered Apprenticeship program was associated with substantially higher earnings. The study also found that the social benefits of Registered Apprenticeship (added productivity of workers and reduced use of government programs) exceeded the social costs (government administration of programs and cost of community colleges providing the relevant instruction). And according to recent statistics, 91 percent of apprentices find employment after program completion, starting with an average salary in excess of $60,000.

However, the programs are not without drawbacks. States have fiscal constraints and must be selective in their expenditures on workforce development—especially when primary and secondary education may compete for state resources. States must also induce prospective apprentices to forgo a formal degree program and commit to technical occupations in which they will likely remain, especially challenging when younger generations prefer job mobility.

Apprenticeships also often present uncertain costs to employers. While states can provide tax credits or tuition support to induce employers to hire and train additional workers, convincing firms of the value of apprenticeship programs is not always easy. With program lengths varying from one to four years, and costs from $25,000 to $250,000 per apprentice, companies stand to benefit from greater standardization and transparency of Registered Apprenticeship requirements.

Most importantly, though, new apprenticeship programs would only be worthwhile if the selected occupations can survive the headwinds of automation and globalization that continue to buffet traditional labor markets. While labor forecasting can be difficult, state governments are well-situated to adapt apprenticeship programs to the evolving structure of the local economy.

"Registered Apprenticeships provide individuals an avenue to upgrade their skills while also meeting the needs of employers. We are working to align Registered Apprenticeships in Nevada with economic development to ensure Nevadans are being prepared for the jobs being created," says owinn's Executive Director Manny Lamarre.

Apprenticeship will never be a catch-all solution for state governments to transform the supply of skilled labor, but it can be a valuable tool for companies and governments to enhance talent, raise wages, and create stable employment for many Americans.

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Grants Help Students Get to the Finish Line

by Will Lindsey | North Carolina, Governor Roy Cooper

My experience with Governor Roy Cooper's policy team in North Carolina illuminated the complexities of state government and the executive office.

After 10 weeks of hard work, our team's energy culminated in a state-wide program, the Finish Line Grants. Finish Line Grants provide emergency funding to community college students who have completed 75 percent of their degree or program and who face one-time financial hardships. As far as we can tell, it's one of the first statewide programs of this nature. It was rewarding to see a tangible outcome emerge from an immensely rewarding summer.

Governor Cooper consistently touts his CEO mission statement for the State of North Carolina: "I want North Carolinians to be better educated, healthier, and have more money in their pockets so that they can live more abundant, purposeful lives." This focus has manifested in a desire to bolster the workforce of North Carolina and ensure that citizens can get good jobs. The Dukakis Fellowship was designed for a student to help support the policy team on workforce development, and this is ultimately where I spent my time by way of the Finish Line Grant Program.

When I first arrived in the office, we were amid the legislative budget process. Much like the federal process, Governor Cooper had released his own budget weeks before outlining his proposed funding allocation and programs. North Carolina has consistently made national headlines due to seemingly unprecedented contention between Governor Cooper and the conservative North Carolina legislature. To that end, the governor's budget and proposed programs were not funded.

In thinking about the balance between policy and politics, there are countless examples of good policy not funded or not feasible due to political environments. For Governor Cooper, many polices were not funded. Fortunately, innovative policymakers and executives often find a way to push forward. For our team, the Finish Line Grants represented a very tangible way to improve the lives of community college students in North Carolina. To push the program forward, we were able to leverage federal funding from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), specifically the discretionary governor set-aside.

After several days of working through the budget and thinking about how to push forward with the legislative proposals, we turned our attention to the implementation of the Finish Line Grant Program. My supervisor, Governor Cooper's special advisor on workforce development, and I, along with the Community College System Office and Division of Workforce Solutions, created a coalition to think about the best way to implement this program.

Over the course of my summer, I worked closely with the governor's policy team, the Community College System Office, the Division of Workforce Solutions, and numerous community colleges to design a partnership application to enroll local workforce boards and community colleges into the program. I worked closely with my supervisor and the governor's communications team to develop talking points and marketing materials for the program. Further, I was included in a strategy meeting with Governor Cooper to discuss the roll out of the program and his opening speech on the grants. Finally, I travelled to workforce career centers to understand how citizens on the ground were helping to find jobs for North Carolinians. Workforce development and education is very much a group effort in North Carolina.

To date, several community college and workforce development board partnerships have received Finish Line Funding—students will be able to start receiving grants this year. Governor Cooper has travelled across the state to promote the program. Leaders in government and industry are excited about what this could mean for both education and workforce development in our state. The Finish Line Grant program has momentum and marks an important step in what workforce and education can look like in the future.

While I played a small role, I was excited to be given broad responsibility and some discretion in how we rolled out this program. I can see some of the goals our team had manifested every day. As a native of North Carolina, I am proud to know there are dedicated public servants who are working to ensure that we are creating the best state for its citizens.

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Resource Rich and Saving for the Future

by Bryan Cortes | North Dakota, Governor Doug Burgum

It was only my first day on the job and North Dakota's Chief Administrative Officer had already put me on Governor Burgum's schedule. I immediately realized I could make a significant contribution to the state through the unfettered access to "Team ND" I was given. I was charged with delivering recommendations to improve the balance sheet management of the state.

My summer project involved an analysis of the state's balance sheet performance and the development of a dashboard to understand the state's assets and liabilities. The main focus was the performance of the "Legacy Fund"—a constitutionally mandated oil severance tax investment fund—and an assessment of the state-owned surface lands and mineral rights under the management of the state's Department of Trust Lands. The project leveraged my finance background and my curiosity in investment management while utilizing the skills I had developed during my first year at Harvard Kennedy School. My objective was to provide recommendations to the governor's policy team for their 2019–2021 biennium budget proposal.

Over the summer, I discovered that you must understand North Dakota's relationship with farming and energy production to understand how its government functions. Despite the state's population size and rural profile, the abundance of shale oil in the Bakken Formation resulted in a significant economic boom over the last decade and placed the state as the second largest producer of oil and gas in the United States. North Dakota recognized the importance of creating a mechanism to ensure that the financial windfall of shale oil remained well after the oil was gone. In 2009, the Legislative Assembly passed House Concurrent Resolution No. 3054, which placed the question of creating the Legacy Fund on the 2010 general election ballot. North Dakota voters approved the measure, which created an investment fund from severance taxes on oil and gas production.

The fund now captures 30 percent of total revenue from taxes on oil and gas production, and all income and dividend interest can be transferred into the state's general fund. Additionally, the state legislature can appropriate up to 15 percent of the fund's principal with a two-thirds majority vote of both chambers. Initially, the fund had a lock-out period that allowed the fund's principal to grow for seven years without any transfers to the general fund.

The upcoming biennium is the first time, since the fund's inception, the state can tap into the principal and earnings of the Legacy Fund. The expiration of the lock-out period was one of the reasons I was asked to focus on the Legacy Fund. Naturally, voices across the partisan and ideological spectrum in the state support different visions of how the state should utilize the fund. However, there is a high emphasis from the governor's office to make a policy decision based on the data available and best practices of other severance tax funds across the country.

Utilizing the resources of the Harvard and MIT communities at large and my Dukakis Fellowship network, I prepared a research library that provided a comparison of severance tax funds across the United States and summarized appropriation policies across different states, outlined investment strategies and fund performance, and provided a guide to the governor's policy team as they prepared to develop their Legacy Fund proposals for the State's 2019–2021 biennial budget.

Driven by the data and my research, I prepared a policy memorandum to brief the governor and lieutenant governor that summarized three key recommendations for the Legacy Fund:

1. **Focus on intergenerational equity:** This means ensuring that the Legacy Fund has the resources to serve the citizens of North Dakota in perpetuity.

2. **Protect the fund's endowment:** Avoid tapping immediately into the constitutionally-allowed 15 percent of principal to allow the fund to grow into a more sustainable revenue-generating vehicle.

3. **Target the fund's earnings for economic development:** Appropriate the interest income and earnings transferred into the state's General Fund to support targeted investment in infrastructure and workforce to diversify the state's economy.

The highlight of my summer was my final briefing with the governor, lieutenant governor, and his senior staff where I had the opportunity to present the findings of my research and expand on my recommendations.

The level of engagement from the governor with my presentation validated my Dukakis experience and added value to my own skillset. It also allowed me to challenge my own assumptions about state government and understand the dynamics that underpin relationships at the state capitol in Bismarck, North Dakota.

Finally, my summer allowed me to work alongside North Dakotans deeply committed to their state and constituencies. Working with individuals with different policy perspectives really pushed me to question and further understand my own. I will be a better leader and policymaker thanks to my summer in North Dakota. I'm grateful for that.

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Closing the Jobs Gap from Behind Prison Walls

by Laura White | Pennsylvania, Governor Tom Wolf

Workforce development had been a frequent news topic in the months preceding my summer at the Governor's Office in Pennsylvania—from announcements about an executive order on apprenticeships, to predictions about the automation of large swaths of the workforce. Yet I rarely saw in the media the one place where I would find workforce development programs in action: state prisons.

This summer, I investigated policies to target Pennsylvania's jobs gap as a Dukakis Fellow in the Office of Governor Tom Wolf. Employers in the state are looking to hire workers, and about 5 percent of Pennsylvanians—roughly 640,000 people—are looking for jobs. Yet the skills demanded by employers often do not match those of potential workers—hence the term "jobs gap." This immediate challenge for Pennsylvania's economy is only expected to grow. In 2020, a projected 60 percent of jobs in Pennsylvania will require some type of postsecondary credential. Only about 40 percent of Pennsylvanians have these credentials now. Though historically Pennsylvania had many well-paid jobs in manufacturing that did not require higher education, the state's economy today increasingly centers on middle- and high-skilled jobs. Pennsylvania's workers have felt the strains of this shift, as numerous sub-groups have suffered declines in average wages since the 1980s. The median Pennsylvania worker has only seen real wages increase 4.8 percent since 1979.

During my time working on policy recommendations related to closing this gap, I interviewed employees across state agencies and local NGOs about this issue and their efforts to address it, from increasing summer learning for kids to improving graduation rates from state universities. I spoke with them both at their offices and on field visits to programs for future job seekers.

On one field visit, I traveled to a state prison to learn about its education and training programs. The warehouse job-training program exemplified numerous career learning best practices. Participants trained in a warehouse within the prison that used the same forklifts and other technologies that future employees will need to operate. Thanks to a 2015 U.S. Department of Education grant, about 20 inmates also participated in job training tied to in-demand occupations in Pennsylvania, and would be connected with job placement services after they were released. This type of program could help prisoners better obtain jobs after the transition back into society. Yet this is still only a small pilot program, and these types of programs are rarely promoted in the broader public.

Proponents of prison education argue that these programs are cost effective and improve public safety by reducing recidivism. A 2013 RAND meta-analysis of other studies found that a $1 investment in prison education reduces incarceration costs by $4 to $5 during the first three years post-release. Additionally, inmates who had participated in educational programs in prison were 43 percent less likely to return to prison. Pennsylvania's Secretary of Corrections John Wetzel entered office in 2011 aiming to reduce Pennsylvania's prison population, and has emphasized the connection between prison education and improved transitions back to communities. Despite recognition that education in prison is effective throughout much of the corrections community, state spending on education in prisons decreased sharply across the country after the economic crisis.

In addition to reducing the likelihood of recidivism, prison education is another important piece of the jobs gap puzzle. Pennsylvania cannot successfully close its jobs gap by focusing only on new high school graduates in the next 5 to 10 years. While many people within Pennsylvania's agencies understand the importance of education inside prisons, I rarely heard policymakers discuss this issue publicly. Leaders who support funding for prison education risk accusations of taking dollars that could be educating kids to educate convicts. This criticism is shortsighted. State and national leaders should step in to explain how prison education fits in to the state's goals, and how both participants and broader communities will benefit.

Providing inmates with access to training and education before their release should be part of the jobs gap reduction strategy. There are currently about 50,000 inmates in state correctional facilities in Pennsylvania, meaning Pennsylvania has the sixth largest prison population in the country. Ninety percent of offenders in state prison will return home. Today in Philadelphia, an estimated 1 in 6 people have been incarcerated at some point in their lives. Preparing inmates to earn job opportunities after their release is a more integral part of community development than many Pennsylvanians realize.

Now is an especially pivotal time in the conversation regarding criminal justice. Over the last year, Senators Rand Paul and Kamala Harris worked together to reduce incarceration, while Attorney General Sessions directed prosecutors in May to push for harsher sentences. The public debate has often focused on the arrest and sentencing process. There is still a need for the public to better understand how programs behind the walls can benefit communities. Governor Cuomo recently took a step in this direction in New York in August when he allocated $7 million in grants for colleges to offer courses to prisoners. More governors should follow his lead. Policymakers should publicly recognize and fund prison education as a tool to increase public safety, reduce long-run budget outlays, and better develop a workforce that will support growth and prosperity.

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Climate Change is Personal

by Mike Miesen | Rhode Island, Governor Gina Raimondo

Rhode Island's coasts are vulnerable to sea level rise, and the state as a whole will be affected by stronger and more frequent weather events. Major industries like tourism, will be at risk. Hotter summers and snowier winters disproportionately affect vulnerable Rhode Islanders, like the elderly and people with disabilities.

To mitigate climate change's worst effects for Rhode Islanders, under the leadership of Governor Gina Raimondo, the state has taken major steps towards reducing its greenhouse gas emissions in the electricity production sector. As part of Governor Raimondo's "1,000 by '20" strategic plan to generate 1,000 megawatts of clean energy, the state developed the country's first offshore windfarm. In cooperation with other states in the region, Rhode Island participates in a cap-and-trade program for greenhouse gas emissions in the electricity generating sector. Proceeds from the cap-and-trade auctions are used to help state agencies reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

However, Rhode Island has done comparatively little to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the transportation sector, which accounts for 40 percent of total emissions in the state. While the state has made progress by establishing a number of programs meant to increase the use of green transportation—including initiatives aimed at increasing state and consumer adoption of zero-emissions vehicles—the current programs will not be enough to meet the state's goal of a 45 percent decline in emissions relative to 1990 levels by 2035.

As a member of Governor Raimondo's policy team at the Rhode Island State House in Providence for the summer, my role was to develop a comprehensive view of what state agencies were already doing in the green transportation space; what was keeping them from doing more; and what other states were doing that could be replicated in Rhode Island. Then, with a current-state and future-state synthesis developed, I was tasked with developing a path to get from point A to point B.

In many cases, state agencies were already collaborating effectively in the green transportation space. This was clearest with the group that shepherded a process to allocate funds from the national Volkswagen settlement. In a span of months, leaders across multiple agencies worked together to brainstorm ideas, hold public meetings, and eventually settle on a pilot project to purchase and install three zero-emissions vehicle buses to add to the transit authority's fleet. Their collaboration was a case study in effective governance.

Unfortunately, one project group can't scale to the scope of handling all green transportation work across Rhode Island. Interviews and analyses made clear that a green transportation initiative large enough to help the state meet its emissions goals would require centralized coordination and leadership. It needed the Office of the Governor.

In my report-out to the governor's staff, I recommended that the governor establish a Council on Green and Connected Transportation chaired by a deputy chief of staff. The council, which would include members from all relevant state agencies, would be composed of two sub-committees: one focused on increasing the number of zero-emissions vehicles on the roads, the other planning for connected, autonomous vehicles. Each sub-committee would be accountable for a number of workstreams, with specific goals to work towards.

I also recommended that the governor lead efforts to establish a regional cap-and-invest program on transportation fuels for Rhode Island and neighboring member states of the Transportation and Climate Initiative. This initiative would raise substantial funds for green transportation initiatives across the region, and would help reduce greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels used in the transportation sector.

A greener transportation sector would be cheaper and cleaner for Rhode Islanders. It would spur economic investment and create jobs in the Ocean State. It would establish Rhode Island as a national leader in renewable energy and progressive cap-and-invest policies.

Rhode Island is a small state that can make a big impact on climate change policy. I am very grateful to the Office of the Governor, the State of Rhode Island, and the Dukakis Fellowship for giving me the opportunity to play a small role in the effort.

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Designing Opioid Strategies

by Maggie Salinger | Rhode Island, Governor Gina Raimondo

The morning seemed like any other in the Rhode Island State House until my team received a chilling email. It was a note from a local father, whom I'll call John, still reeling from the loss of his son. Days before his son died of an opioid overdose, John had dragged him to a nearby treatment center. Although John desperately sought help, his son was not interested. As a result, the two of them were turned away. John felt he must reach out to the Governor's Office to prevent other families from experiencing a similar tragedy. There was no clear directive in his plea, but we all shared enough of his pain to know what John was suggesting: legislation that would allow involuntary commitment for opioid use disorder. It might have saved his son's life.

At the time, I was a student in medicine and public policy serving in Governor Raimondo's office as a Dukakis Fellow. My work centered on opioids, the most pressing public health problem of our time. Each year, the epidemic takes more loved ones from us than car accidents do. It brings a child with neonatal abstinence syndrome into the world every 25 minutes. It spans all sectors of society and touches all corners of our communities.

Rhode Island has been among the hardest hit states. With a population barely over 1 million, we were still recording six lethal overdoses per week. This made my colleagues and me all the more motivated to develop solutions to the crisis. Our aim was to address every facet of addiction from prevention to recovery. As a part of our strategy, we had considered policies in line with John's urge for involuntary commitment.

Involuntary commitment has been a mainstay of psychiatric care since the field's inception, but the practice never ceased to be controversial. It is an intervention that places patients into treatment against their will, with or without court orders for varying lengths of time, depending on the circumstance. While the process and duration of involuntary treatment may differ by setting, the ethical concern of restricting personal liberty is central in all its contexts.

From a medical perspective, the principles that guide opioid-related policies are beneficence and non-maleficence. State governments share this perspective but call it "parens patriae." Together, these principles direct us to "do no harm" and "do what is best for the individual." States have the additional authority to exercise something called "police power," which allows them to restrict individual rights to protect the interests of the broader population.

Determining how to apply this ethical framework can be a challenge. In cases of florid psychosis where patients appear dangerous to self or others, we rely on involuntary commitment without reservation. We do so because we believe that initiation of inpatient treatment, even if it is involuntary, will serve to restore patient autonomy while also protecting society from harm.

In cases of substance use disorder, we fall short of such clarity. The clinical presentation of addiction does not typically demonstrate dangerousness or grossly impaired reality testing in the way psychosis, mania, or suicidality does. For that reason, patients with substance use disorders are rarely admitted to treatment against their wills, even in states where it is technically legal to do so.

When John's anguished message arrived, the Rhode Island legislature had just rejected an involuntary commitment law for opioid use disorder. Despite the state's leadership status in addressing the epidemic, this was an occasion where we had decided to examine the effects of other states' programs before adopting our own.

I was the one who had outlined a list of pros and cons for the bill when it was under review by our office. I was also the one who was asked to draft a reply to John.

Finding the right response to his email was not easy. It struck me that, a month earlier, in the exact moment I had been preparing that legislative memo about involuntary commitment, there were probably families like John's who were leaving treatment centers with an overwhelming sense of defeat and fear.

I stared at my computer in silence, hands frozen on the keyboard. Thoughts of my childhood neighbor, "Mark," whirled through my mind. Mark had gained access to opioids when his father was receiving home-based palliative care. Soon after his father died of cancer, Mark died too, of a drug overdose.

I knew that each individual's story is unique, but I also knew that more than 85% of misused opioids are originally acquired by way of licensed providers. Perhaps, like Mark, John's son had become addicted through diverted medications—prescriptions that are shared, stolen, or sold. Or perhaps he had received a prescription of his own, possibly at too high a dose, for too long a duration, or with too many underlying risk factors. I could not know for certain; the details of John's note were sparse.

All I really knew was that, regardless of how the story had begun, I hated how it ended. The thought of this family's suffering made me shudder. And it stirred my recurring anxiety about whether our stance on involuntary commitment for opioid use disorder placed us on the wrong side of history.

For several decades, we have been moving away from a draconian era of institutionalization when nearly all psychiatric admissions were involuntary and indefinite. The shift was propelled by several factors, ranging from financial to political, ideological, and scientific in nature. One of these factors was the discovery of anti-psychotic medications, which showed it was possible to treat debilitating psychiatric diseases. I was inspired by this pharmacological influence in our shifting views because it has helped reduce the stigma of mental illness and has improved people's health. Furthermore, it portends additional biomedical advances on the horizon.

The horizon I envision is characterized not only by progress in addiction research, but also by adjustments in our fulcrum for balancing autonomy and safety. It may someday become routine practice to regard patients' prior values and enjoyment of stability as evidence that they would want treatment for severe addiction, even if their disease leads them to state otherwise. Perhaps we will even clarify and systematize this idea by asking all patients who receive opioid prescriptions to complete psychiatric advance directives that outline care preferences should they later become addicted.

For people like John, the horizon was not close enough. His email granted me exposure to the ramifications of our legislative and administrative actions. The story filled me with humility, but also gratitude. I felt grateful because I was part of a team so dedicated to this cause—a team that, under no circumstances, would lean on a crutch of complexity to shirk responsibility.

Rhode Island is tirelessly carving new paths while also evaluating its tracks. I was proud to be working in a state that was ahead of the curve, not only in opioid policy development, but also in research. For instance, Dr. Josiah "Jody" Rich was studying the impact of offering prison inmates access to all variants of Medication Assisted Treatment, a program that is the first of its kind in the nation. The state also agreed to support my own research proposals that would examine the benefits of behavioral science interventions in preventing opioid misuse.

Even with robust policy research, the ethical implications of our positions will never be painted in black and white. And John's email was one of many reminders that our difficult policy decisions bear the gravity of life or death consequences.

Because of this moral weight, and because of the alarming trends of the crisis, people would sometimes ask if I were frustrated with my job. I would tell them that, while I am saddened by our losses to this disease, I could imagine nothing more gratifying than fighting the opioid epidemic. We are mapping out territories that were previously uncharted while weaving together spheres of society that were artificially separate. Through collaboration, evaluation, and determination, I believe we will save lives.

That is why, in photos from my Dukakis Fellowship, I am seen holding the Governor's Opioid Executive Order with a beaming grin. I am smiling because this document, which outlines our policy plan, is the most important project I have ever worked on. And I am smiling because, at its signing, I could see that so many around me share the Governor's devotion to action. Behind my smile, though, are thoughts of John and others who are hurting. For you, for all of us, we will keep fighting.

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