



# **With or Without U.S. Support, Global Cities Will Keep Fighting Climate Change**

Global cities includes many U.S. cities as well, which are poised to rebel against official federal policies against global warming. These would include Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York. □ TN Editor

Do you live in that “shining city on a hill” or a place of “American carnage?”

I think it’s important because perception can be reality. And, it certainly can affect public policy as well as laws, regulations, plans and investments.

The former vision was presented by Ronald Reagan in his 1981 presidential inaugural address, and reiterated after his re-election when it was “Morning in America.” The latter was heard this past week in an inaugural speech that presidential historians termed “dystopic” and “radical.”

Public reaction varied widely, with supporters confirming their vote, and

opponents realizing their worst fears. We all know the truth lies somewhere in between, but how do we move forward and create the change we seek?

In an era where major policies are announced in 140 characters and public input is driven more by social media than by public meetings, we find ourselves at a challenging crossroads on how to make our cities better. Or, to build on a current phrase, “great again.”

Complicating this further is the current fad (at least I hope it is) of presenting “alternative facts,” or as George Orwell termed it in his seminal book “1984,” “newspeak.” I don’t know how you build a consensus, which is so critical to the future of a democracy, when you can’t find agreement on known, measurable information.

In an age of “America First,” what does this mean for cities across the nation and around the world?

In the coming months, we’ll find out more regarding U.S. federal policies on cities. While many people expect a change in direction with the new administration, it remains unclear whether and how national policies will affect cities.

Last year, I participated in several expert group meetings on national urban policies organized by UN-Habitat and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Our report helped inform the New Urban Agenda, which was adopted by nations around the world last October at Habitat III.

What struck me as most curious was the number of nations around the world, including major democracies, with national urban policies. Covering issues as critical as transportation, housing, parks and jobs, these national policies provide a vision for the future as well as guidance for plans, programs, regulations and investments. They are based on verifiable data and the places where future growth will be encouraged.

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