

# Successful cities have basic principles, practices in common

November 7, 2013

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I just finished reading a recently published report prepared by the Praxis Strategy Group and Joel Kotkin entitled *Enterprising Cities – A Force for American Prosperity*. The report was a study of seven successful American cities – Dayton, Ohio; Irving, Texas; Memphis, Tennessee; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Salt Lake City, Utah; San Antonio, Texas; and Sioux Falls, South Dakota – that outlined why each one had attained economic growth during a period of time where most cities in America are in some kind of decline.

While each city had its own programs and methods for accomplishing its successes, there were basic policies and practices that each one had done that were in common.

None of them came as a surprise to me, nor would they to any other conservative, but there is some satisfaction in seeing it come as a result of the study.

As the report put it, “A growing body of research...buttresses the assertion that pragmatic leaders at the city level can take on the issues that Washington will not, or cannot, solve.

Among those policies and practices were:

“Allow business to grow and thrive.”

“Free business from excessive taxes, unnecessary regulations, and onerous local government processes.”

“Focus government on the critical tasks that are the foundation of economic opportunity, such as infrastructure and protective services.”

“Help educate, cultivate, and equip the next generation of young entrepreneurs and the workforce of the future.”

The report also stated why other cities were failing. Massive debt and pension obligations were the major causes. There have already been eight major cities that have declared bankruptcy, including Detroit and San Bernardino.

On top of it all, state and federal governments have been passing new regulations, then quietly passing on the obligation for implementing them to cities who can ill afford them.

The report affirmed the notion that city governments that have invested heavily in infrastructure are the ones that have seen the greatest economic growth, beginning with the example of ancient Rome. Quoting Frontinus, a Roman Historian, “The Greeks boasted of the ‘useless’ art, and Egypt’s legacy lay in ‘idle pyramids,’ but what were these compared to the fourteen aqueducts bringing water to Rome?”

It explained that while early investment in roads, canals and infrastructure boosted the economy of American cities, and later investments in airports did the same, cities began to suffer with the rise of liberalism, which “offered favors to everyone”. The favors manifested itself in the rise of public unions and subsequent high pay and pension benefits, leaving many cities top heavy under a heavy debt of future liabilities.

On the other hand, cities can and have managed to escape this fate. As the report states, “What may prove most critical would be the development of a greater understanding among business leaders about the positive ways government can impact economic growth, and among the public, including the unions, about the importance of growing the private sector. Many of the cities with the best job growth have balanced budgets and stable economies.”

While warning that infrastructure spending in terms of convention centers and sports stadiums has been shown to bear little economic fruit, it explains what does have a big impact. “Far more productive is spending on those tasks that cities and their taxpayers have long funded: basic infrastructure and education. Perhaps nothing affects business and ordinary citizens more than transportation.” (The report made no mention of light rail.)

Conspicuously absent from the report was the impact the Obamacare will have on our cities.

The outcome of the upheaval to the personal, corporate and government levels that it is causing is still anyone’s guess, and the hope is that it is going to collapse and disappear (which is not likely).

Also absent was any mention of what role churches can play in the success of our cities. While there was much discourse about public-private involvement and cooperation, there was no mention about the one institution that can provide the ingredient that could make anyone or anything successful – integrity. Without moral underpinnings, how solid can the foundation of any city endeavor be?

More on the report next week.

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