

legislative house. After term limits, the average increased to 127 out of 151 possible contests.

Term limits were supposed to draw in a large new group of candidates to vie for public office and create “a more democratic, open, and active electoral environment populated by citizen legislators.” So far, the authors conclude, that claim has proven “almost entirely false.”

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Money for Metros

THE SOURCE: “Miracle Mets” by Bruce Katz, Mark Muro, and Jennifer Bradley, in *Democracy*, Spring 2009.

HERE’S SOME ADVICE FOR Washington: To get the most out of each stimulus dollar, focus on the country’s top metropolitan areas and forget about the states.

The 100 largest metro areas are the engines of the U.S. economy, write Bruce Katz, Mark Muro, and Jennifer Bradley, of the Brookings Institution’s Metropolitan Policy Program. Though these urban centers occupy just 12 percent of the nation’s land area, they generate two-thirds of its jobs and three-quarters of its gross domestic product. California has the eighth-largest economy in the world, but most of the activity is concentrated in just four metro areas. Together, the economies of Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, and San Jose are larger than India’s.

The federal government sends the bulk of infrastructure funds to states, whose departments of transportation tend to favor build-

ing new roads across wide expanses of rural land. If that money were invested instead in urban areas, its effects would be far greater, the authors say. In dense locations, more people benefit from improved infrastructure.

But Washington is ill equipped to coordinate the multiple levels of government in metro areas, many of which extend into multiple municipalities and even states. As a result, programs dealing with housing and schooling or transportation and energy “remain largely divorced from one another, precluding integrated problem-solving.”

Nearly 70 years ago, the historian Arthur Schlesinger Sr. wrote: “These urban provinces, new to the American scene . . . face grave difficulties in meeting the essential needs of the aggregate population. . . . It is clear that new and unanticipated strains are being placed on the federal system framed by the Fathers for a simple agricultural economy.” It’s long past time, the authors say, for a new approach.

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

\$43 Million for What?

THE SOURCE: “Superfund Follies, Part II” by Daniel K. Benjamin, in *PERC Reports*, March 2009.

THE U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL Protection Agency’s Superfund program was created to clean up the nation’s worst toxic waste sites and draw renters and buyers to once contaminated areas. Twenty-nine years

and \$35 billion later, Clemson University economist Daniel K. Benjamin writes, the program has produced an average economic benefit per site “likely quite close to zero.”

The law was passed after the Love Canal disaster captured headlines across the country. Chemicals buried in an abandoned canal in upstate New York had begun oozing into basements, turning trees and vegetation black, and pooling on lawns and on a local school grounds. Hundreds of families were evacuated, and the site was eventually cleaned up at a cost of millions of dollars.

Earlier studies of a small number of Superfund cleanups have found substantial benefits. But Superfund sites are hard to compare to average housing tracts because they are often located in poor rural areas. Economists Michael Greenstone of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Justin Gallagher of the University of California, Berkeley, investigated what happened to housing prices, rental rates, population movements, and overall demographics in roughly 400 areas cleaned up under the Superfund law compared with 290 similar sites that narrowly missed being included because of a lack of money. They noted that there may be health and aesthetic benefits that were not captured in their data, but the bottom line was clear: Superfund expenditures made no difference in rents, sales, or desirability of adjacent housing, either immediately or even 20 years after the cleanup.

Benjamin says it’s possible that the hazards at the sites were overestimated by the EPA, or that the toxic