



# U.S. MAYOR

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## CITIES OF OPPORTUNITY TASK FORCE LAUNCHED IN NEW YORK CITY



*New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and more than 30 mayors address the media on the grounds of Gracie Mansion.*

### Income Inequality, Early Childhood Education, Broadband Focus of “Commitment to Action”

*By Ed Somers and Elena Temple-Webb*

Local innovations, supported by state and federal policy changes, are required to reduce the widening wage gap and income inequality in America’s cities. This was the conclusion of the first meeting of The U.S. Conference of Mayors Cities of Opportunity Task Force, held in New York City August 10-11.

Under the leadership of Conference of Mayors President Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson, Task Force Chair New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, and Task Force Vice Chair Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh, more than 30 mayors from cities of all sizes and regions of the country gathered in Gracie Mansion – de Blasio’s official residence – for extensive discussions on immediate actions that can be taken to strengthen the middle class.

To help frame the meeting, the Conference of Mayors and IHS Global Insight released a new report that found that jobs gained during the economic recovery from the Great Recession pay an average of 23 percent less than the jobs lost during the recession. The report also shows that the gap between low- and higher-income households is growing and will continue into the foreseeable future. In 2012, the latest year for which figures

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# Crafting Innovative Anti-discrimination Policies Using Human Rights

By Eugene Mayor Kitty Piercy

In March, Salt Lake City Mayor Ralph Becker joined a delegation of high-level U.S. officials at the U.N. in Geneva to share how mayors help the United States make human rights – including equality, non-discrimination and opportunity – a reality. Becker’s participation in the delegation is indicative of a larger trend: increased recognition that human rights offer a tool to craft innovative policies.

Last November, as some of America’s largest cities went to the polls to elect new mayors, a spotlight was shone on the promise of local governance for promoting social change. What proved important for New Yorkers and Bostonians, among others, was the extent to which their mayoral hopefuls would tackle issues like income inequality, access to affordable housing, fostering safety in communities of color, and improving immigrant inclusion. In determining when and how to address these issues, human rights provide a tool that can lead to real progress.

My city, Eugene (OR), has found support in the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), to which the United States is a party. CERD offers a broader definition of discrimination than the U.S. Constitution and some federal and state laws. It goes beyond intentional discrimination to emphasize the importance of addressing policies with a disparate impact. Utilizing a human rights framework that incorporates the CERD definition of discrimination, Eugene has undertaken multiple efforts to improve service delivery, work toward more equitable outcomes, and address those policies that, regardless of their intent, have a disparate impact on minorities and other disadvantaged groups.

Eugene has 20 years experience

operationalizing human rights, working through the city-sponsored Human Rights Commission. Similar to other human rights commissions throughout the country, the Eugene Human Rights Commission collaborates with community advocacy organizations. Generations of local government staff have pushed Eugene to address deeper and deeper levels of inequity. This culminated in Eugene’s 2009 creation of a five-year Diversity and Equity Strategic Plan (DESP). Relying heavily on human rights principles, the DESP has addressed equity issues across all six city departments and specified concrete, measurable outcomes to be achieved in each year. The development and implementation of the plan required buy-in and significant support from elected officials and executive leadership within the city. While strong leadership from the top was essential, the work of the DESP filters down to every worker within the city, requiring a grass-roots implementation to make ideals of equity an organizational reality.

Eugene is neither the first nor the only city to promote equality through the lens of human rights. Over 15 years ago, San Francisco embraced the international human rights principles from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to alleviate gender inequity in city budget, employment and services. San Francisco passed an ordinance establishing the key principles of CEDAW – including equality of opportunity for women and girls and freedom from gender-based discrimination – and establishing a process to identify and alleviate gender inequity. The ordinance called on the city to address discrimination in specific areas, including economic development, healthcare and violence against women. The ordinance was amended in 2002 to contain



**Eugene Mayor Kitty Piercy**

a definition of racial discrimination that mirrored the definition enunciated in CERD, based on the belief that this better addresses patterns of inequality and gender discrimination may be interconnected with discrimination on other grounds.

At its annual meeting this June, The U.S. Conference of Mayors adopted policy urging cities across the United States to participate in the Cities for CEDAW initiative, and pass local resolutions or ordinances reflecting the principles of CEDAW. Cities for CEDAW was launched at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women this March.

In 2011, Madison passed a resolution recognizing housing as a human right and prioritized efforts to meet basic housing needs in the city. The resolution notes Madison’s obligations to eliminate policies that discriminate based on race and commits to assess the affordability and accessibility of housing and calls for a responsive housing strategy to

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# Calendar of Events

(Updated 08/13/14)

## 2014

### August 28-29

**USCM Food Policy Task Force Meeting**, Louisville. Contact: Crystal Swann [cswann@usmayors.org](mailto:cswann@usmayors.org) / 202-861-6707. Registration Open

### September 27-29

**USCM Fall Leadership Meeting, Sacramento** (USCM Executive Committee, Advisory Board, and Chairs Only). Contact: Carol Edwards [cedwards@usmayors.org](mailto:cedwards@usmayors.org) / 202-293-7330; Sponsorship: Geri Powell [gpowell@usmayors.org](mailto:gpowell@usmayors.org) / 202-861-6774. Registration Open

### USCM Community Policing Meeting at Clinton Presidential Center, and USCM Ports/Exports and Imports Meeting, Little Rock

- Community Policing: Oct 8-9
  - Ports/Exports and Imports: Oct 10
- Contact: Carol Edwards [cedwards@usmayors.org](mailto:cedwards@usmayors.org) / 202-293-7330; Sponsorship: Geri Powell [gpowell@usmayors.org](mailto:gpowell@usmayors.org) / 202-861-6774. Registration Available Soon

### October 15-17

**Municipal Waste Management Association (MWMA) Fall Summit**, San Diego. Contact: Jubi Headley [jheadley@usmayors.org](mailto:jheadley@usmayors.org) / 202-861-6798. Registration Open

## 2015



### January 21-23

**83rd Conference of Mayors Winter Meeting**, Washington (DC). Contact: Carol Edwards [cedwards@usmayors.org](mailto:cedwards@usmayors.org) / 202-293-7330; Sponsorship: Geri Powell [gpowell@usmayors.org](mailto:gpowell@usmayors.org) / 202-861-6774. Registration Opens Fall 2014

### June 19-22

**83rd Annual Conference of Mayors**, San Francisco. Contact: Carol Edwards [cedwards@usmayors.org](mailto:cedwards@usmayors.org) / 202-293-7330; Sponsorship: Geri Powell [gpowell@usmayors.org](mailto:gpowell@usmayors.org) / 202-861-6774. Registration Opens Spring 2015

For updates or changes, check our web site at [usmayors.org](http://usmayors.org)

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meet community needs. The surrounding county, Dane County, has used a similar resolution as a springboard to create a Homeless Issues Committee, comprised of county supervisors, city Alders, the chief of police and community members, including homeless persons and services providers to specifically address criminalization of homeless populations. The human rights framework, which promotes dignity and well being for all, is a basis of these efforts. These initiatives also relate to growing city and state efforts to create "Homeless Bills of Rights."

Throughout our nation's history, local governments have served as incubators of innovation and change – addressing climate change and fostering sustainable economic development. In the arena of human rights, too, local governments must play a leading role. Cities would do well to promote policies that use human rights to counter discrimination, exchanging best practices and illustrating the utility of

a human rights-based approach through action. This means work at the institutional level to dismantle structures that lead to inequitable outcomes and proactively coping with historical circumstances that have led to disparities. Ongoing work in Eugene and countless other cities closely aligns with the Conference of Mayors Cities Against Racism and Discrimination initiative, in particular the 10-Point Plan of Action, which has been adopted by 120 mayors so far.

This month, the U.S. is being reviewed for compliance with the CERD, and Birmingham Mayor William Bell is scheduled to be present. This review offers another opportunity for mayors to showcase our proactive and innovative efforts to tackle discrimination and inequality on the world stage. It also offers a time for us to collectively reflect on how we can strengthen local policy through human rights.

*Editor's Note: Piercy was one of the first mayors to join the U.S. Coalition of Cities against Racism and Discrimination and sign onto the Conference of Mayors 10-Point Plan of Action.*

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