

# Bond Case Briefs

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## What America Might Look Like If These 6 Issues Are Neglected.

*America's challenges will get worse without the support and commitment of the next administration to city issues*

For over a year, the nation – and the world – has been wrapped up in the contest for the highest office in the land. We've seen 17 Republican presidential hopefuls whittled down to a businessman billionaire. We've seen a political revolution stopped short by a former Secretary of State and First Lady. We've seen mean tweets and rowdy stump speeches, #NeverTrump and a Speaker's endorsement, and a lot about those damn emails.

It's been a wild ride for sure. But let's be frank: it's time to get serious. At the National League of Cities (NLC), our goal is to empower local leaders to do what they do best: create environments that support families and businesses, and strengthen local economies. Cities and towns need a strong partner in the next administration. The candidates must engage in dialogue reflective of how government actually works. We need less talking points, and more policy, or the problems being ignored in 2016 will look easy by the year 2020. Here's what's at stake if we don't:

### **1. Infrastructure Will Continue to Decline, Hurting American Competitiveness**

The future of American infrastructure looks grim. The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) [gave the U.S. a D+](#) for overall infrastructure in 2013. From energy to hazardous waste, the U.S. is just points away from a failing grade in numerous categories. One in nine bridges is structurally deficient; 45 percent of American households have no access to public transportation; an estimated [240,000 water main breaks](#) happen each year – just to name a few challenges.

Today, 80 percent of Americans live in cities, a number which is projected to increase in the next decade. Surging population growth will put stress on already strained infrastructure, causing more damage and hastening decay, even by 2020. While municipal governments are responsible to their constituents, they are not empowered to raise the revenue necessary to invest in long-term solutions. Cities need a strong partner in the next administration to keep infrastructure from falling into further disrepair.

### **2. Affordable Housing Will Be Increasingly Hard to Find**

The market for affordable housing in the U.S. is rapidly shrinking. According to the Joint Center for Housing Studies, the [number of new renters](#) will outpace the number of new homeowners significantly over the next 15 years, raising rental property values and reducing the amount of overall affordable housing. This comes at a time when funding cuts have limited federal and local government investments in the construction of new affordable housing.

Meanwhile, as metro-areas continue to grow, moderate to low-income homes will be forced to find new housing accommodations or contribute more of their salary to rent. In 2013, [over half of families](#) with low to moderate-incomes spent over 30 percent of their income on rent, leaving less

money for essentials like groceries and healthcare, not to mention savings accounts, retirement funds or other wealth-building systems. The next administration must work with cities to ensure safe, affordable and accessible housing remains a core element of the American Dream.

### **3. Natural Disasters Will Become More Challenging to Manage**

Climate change affects cities differently across the U.S., but as average temperatures and sea levels rise, environmental and natural challenges will become more frequent and more devastating. Recently, Hurricane Sandy [left between \\$10 and \\$15 billion in damages](#) to infrastructure and private property. Cities located in the Gulf and along the Atlantic face threats to basic amenities like clean water and energy, a sector [the U.S. Department of Energy](#) reported will be particularly vulnerable to future storm damage.

In a different part of the country, the National Climate Change Assessment found that changes in rainfall and high temperatures will affect the lives and economies of [56 million people](#) in the South and Southwest. Drought has decimated water supplies and changing weather patterns will make it difficult to predict precipitation, increasing competition for resources amongst cities. To prevent further loss, cities need significant investment in climate-resilient architecture and construction.

### **4. Local Economies Will Lack Skilled Workers to Drive Economic Growth**

There are two different storylines playing out in cities: economic conditions are improving for some, but stagnating or worsening for others. While addressing rising inequality may require multiple policy solutions, what we do know is the changing nature of the economy, from advances in technology to shifts in the global market, underscore the need for proactive and effective workforce development.

[According to city leaders](#), new businesses and business expansions are the most widespread positive drivers of local economic health. However, labor force challenges threaten to stymie this business growth and the economic benefits that would follow. City leaders report that the misalignment between available workforce skills and the skills employers' need is the most widespread concern facing local economies. This concern will only grow if we fail to tackle the challenge.

### **5. The Opioid Epidemic Will Devastate More Families**

Drug overdose is the leading cause of accidental death in the U.S., with 47,055 lethal drug overdoses in 2014. Opioid addiction is driving this epidemic, with 18,893 overdose deaths related to prescription pain relievers, and 10,574 overdose deaths related to heroin in 2014 ([CDC 2015 Report](#)). From 1999 to 2008, overdose death rates, sales, and substance use disorder treatment admissions related to prescription pain relievers increased in parallel. The overdose death rate in 2008 was nearly four times the 1999 rate; sales of prescription pain relievers in 2010 were four times those in 1999; and the substance use disorder treatment admission rate in 2009 was six times the 1999 rate.

By 2020, if we don't stem the tide, these troubling trends will continue. In the U.S., we have reduced the number of smokers, the number of teen pregnancies, and the number of new HIV/AIDS infections over time. The lessons from these public health challenges can be applied to the present opioid drug epidemic. To make real progress in the fight against opioid addiction, all levels of government must work together in partnership.

### **6. More Lives Will Be Lost to Gun Violence**

The U.S. has the highest homicide-by-firearm rate of any developed country. In 2015 alone there were 52,606 gun-related incidents resulting in 13,344 deaths. While Congress fails to address this epidemic, communities suffer the violent consequences. In 2020, we can expect wide-spread gun violence to be a persistent tragedy of life in America if don't take action.

To reduce gun violence, legislation that regulates the possession of firearms is essential. NLC supports universal background checks on purchasers of guns, banning the sale of firearms to those on the terror watch list, and a 30-day waiting period for the purchase and transfer of all firearms. Within the past four years, we have witnessed tragedies in Newtown, CT, Aurora, CO, and Orlando, FL. There is no evidence that continued inaction from the federal government will end the violence. If the status quo is maintained, we will see continued loss of life in our communities.

The challenges cities face in the next four years are immense, but not insurmountable—and they can't be solved by one level of government. In the next president, we need not only a leader, but a listener and collaborator. Whether Trump or Clinton, the future of our nation depends on what happens in cities.

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## **National League of Cities**

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