

# Cincinnati's Resurgence

An Interview with The Honorable John Cranley, Mayor of Cincinnati

**EDITORS' NOTE** John Cranley is the 69th and current mayor of Cincinnati, Ohio. Under his leadership, Cincinnati continues to make huge strides towards equality for all. Cincinnati has been recognized as one of the nation's most immigrant-friendly cities, ranking 18th, and for the fifth year in a row received a perfect score on the Municipal Equality Index by the Human Rights Campaign. Mayor Cranley created the City's first Office of Economic Inclusion & Minority Contracting, aimed at increasing



The Hon. John Cranley

the number of minority firms awarded city contracts. In its first year of operation, the department increased spending with minority-owned businesses from \$4 million dollars to \$11 million dollars. Mayor Cranley's top priorities include jobs, safety, inclusion, reducing poverty, improving neighborhoods and protecting the environment. Since taking office in late 2013, he has helped bring more than 6,100 new jobs to Cincinnati; added officers to the street which has led to lower crime; added firefighters which effectively ended "brounouts" in the Fire Department; resolved the city's pension crisis; approved a multiyear plan to repave and repair deteriorating roads; implemented a major anti-poverty program, the Hand Up Initiative; and is leading an effort to invest in solar energy to reduce the city's carbon footprint. Citywide emissions are down 18 percent, and the city is close to breaking ground on a 25-megawatt solar project to reduce Cincinnati's carbon footprint. Recently, the city was awarded an American Cities Climate Challenge grant. In 2002, Mayor Cranley co-founded the Ohio Innocence Project, an organization that has exonerated and freed 28 wrongfully convicted people through the use of DNA technology. He has also worked as a real estate developer and attorney. Mayor Cranley earned degrees from John Carroll University, Harvard Law School and Harvard Divinity School.

**Do you feel that the transformation of Cincinnati and its strength from both a business and a work/life balance perspective is well understood today?**

The perception is moving in a positive direction. A couple of years ago I was talking to David Taylor, the CEO of Procter and Gamble. He told me that he was at a retreat with major Fortune 500 CEOs and a number of them discussed how Cincinnati had really gotten its vibe back, and that they were really impressed by the changes in the

city. There have been a number of stories in the national media ranking Cincinnati as the second-best place in America to do business and a great place to raise your family.

So, I think it is all trending in the right direction.

**What have been the keys to Cincinnati's economic revitalization?**

Throughout the 18 years I've spent in both the public and private sectors, we have grappled with improving race relations in the city, and police-community relations in particular. They are not perfect, but we have made real progress and I think that was a predicate to our economic revitalization.

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In addition, our public/private partnership is a model for the country. We have a nonprofit development corporation called 3CDC, which stands for Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation, which is funded by our Fortune 500 companies and other stakeholders. It was well-funded and bought up a lot of land in the worst of the recession with private dollars. We then provided public dollars on a variety of projects, although our public dollars have been leveraged 10 to one by private dollars. This has literally led to billions of dollars of reinvestment in our urban core, and that has dramatically changed the perception of our city. It enticed companies that might have moved elsewhere to be excited about Cincinnati and their opportunities for recruiting talent to this area.

There is a real virtuous circle of positivity that has come from those public/private partnerships. There are many other things that have also been done, but those are the two big moves that I think have had the biggest impact.

**Will you discuss the Hand Up Initiative created to address poverty issues?**

The idea of expanding opportunity to those for whom it might have been limited before is the moral challenge of my life in public service. It is very important to judge whether our growth is good for everyone or only for those who already have a lot. The Hand Up Initiative is part of trying to make the expansion of opportunity a reality through a mix of job readiness and job training programs. We have had good success and are ramping up that effort now with a broader public/private partnership that expands on this idea with a child poverty focus.

**Will you highlight your efforts in Cincinnati to protect the environment?**

A real alarm went off for me when President Trump pulled out of the Paris Climate Accord, which I strongly disagreed with, but it did remind me that there is still a lot that we can do at the local level.

Twenty years ago, the fully amortized cost of solar was about 26 cents a kilowatt/hour and it is about six cents a kilowatt/hour today. So, the city of Cincinnati is replacing the energy sources that are more expensive than solar with a 25-megawatt solar project. Even with the best results, it will take time to generate returns on this. However, by the time we get done replacing that batch of energy, the next wave of solar will be even cheaper and we can add more solar energy into our energy portfolio.

**How does the gridlock in Washinton, D.C. impact the ability to drive change?**

Washington is a real problem and it has only gotten worse under this current administration. The impact that this is having on people's lives are what we deal with at the local level. We can't afford to fix major highway systems and bridges like the Brent Spence Bridge in Cincinnati without help from the federal government. The federal government takes 35 percent of higher income wages, where we only take two percent. They are dealing with a lot more money on a per capita basis for federal initiatives, yet people are most concerned about the police, fire protection, garbage collection, road paving, and parks and recreation that we provide locally.

If Washington took the time to better understand how they affect everyday lives, maybe it would be less dysfunctional. ●