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## Richard Florida imagines a new urban future



Richard Florida envisions designing smarter, stronger cities that offer more opportunities for all. (Image by Jaime Hogge, courtesy of Creative Class Group)



BY ANNETTE JOHN-HALL, WHY

For over 30 years, urbanist and author Richard Florida has observed the life of cities, and has come up with solutions on how to make them work. In his new book, *The New Urban Crisis*, Florida argues that cities will have to turn to themselves to help themselves and to make them more inclusive for all.

Florida teaches and directs the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, but he knows Pennsylvania well. He taught at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh during the height of the economic decline in the 1980's. He also worked with former Pennsylvania governors Tom Ridge and Ed Rendell on economic development.

Keystone Crossroads reporter Annette John-Hall recently caught up with Florida at the Prince Theater in Philadelphia, where he spoke to the Arts and Business Council about what the future looks like for cities.

He was asked, among other things, how older cities can revitalize themselves:

AJH: In Pennsylvania, where there are so many Rust Belt cities — where it's landlocked, where not much tax revenue is generated — what can we do about those cities?

RF: There are pillars of success in this state, in the Philadelphia area, and now Pittsburgh, which is the comeback city of the United States with self-driving cars and all of that. But we're going to have to create a way to get over not just income inequality but geographic inequality. The small areas of winners that have knowledge institutions, that have great universities, are attracting investment and talent. But then there's the much bigger area of losers. We have to develop local strategies to work with communities to tell them how to build their economies. But we have to do it in a way that's inclusive.

AJH: What would that look like in cities like Scranton and Harrisburg?

RF: Boy, Scranton has a spectacular location. It's close to Philadelphia and it's close to New York. Better transit, higher speed rail and you can even imagine a high-speed rail that would link Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Philadelphia, and New York. What that does is it connects these places to areas of opportunity.

AJH: You mentioned in your talk creating mayor's schools. What's the idea behind that?

RF: I want to launch a mayor's school at the University of Toronto. (Former New York City Mayor) Mike Bloomberg has funded a similar effort at Harvard's Kennedy School.

When I say mayor's school, it's not just a school for mayors. There's a medical school for doctors, there's a business school for business executives, there's all sorts of programs. But we don't have the kind of big-scale efforts for mayors and urban leaders.

AJH: You talked about having to re-write your book, *The New Urban Crisis*, after President Donald Trump was elected. How do you think the new administration will impact cities and what can cities do to handle it?

RF: I have trouble even uttering the words President Trump, and I feel bad because I'm pretty independent minded. I think the sad thing that happened is this populist backlash, the anger and the divide among Americans. We have to heal that working locally. Even though most people don't like the federal government most people are quite prideful and quite loyal to their local communities and care deeply — urban, suburban, rural, and exurban. So I think we actually build a bipartisan coalition of mayor, urban leaders, and national politicians to accomplish that.

AJH: Richard Florida, thank you so much.

RF: It's great being with you and great to be back in the great city of Philadelphia.

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