Fierce battles will be fought to stem the federal government's retreat on climate policy. Meanwhile, states like California are mobilizing to pursue their own policies. But not everyone lives in a progressive state, and even progressive state governments can't do everything. We need to consider other channels to make progress, especially in states that aren't ready to address climate change. This is the first in a series about positive steps being taken through these other channels. Today's post focuses n the role of cities.

One reason to start with cities is that they provide an opportunity for lots of people to get involved in climate efforts. For most people, their municipality is the most accessible level of government. In my own relatively small circle of acquaintances, I know a former village mayor (from a rural midwestern town of 1500), a school board member, a county supervisor in a conservative county, and a park commissioner in a small city. And in all but the largest cities, it's not hard to contact a council member, help a municipal political campaign or speak out at a public meeting.

In fact, cities big and small have been very active in the climate arena. At the top level, the C40 initiative is a global network of cities, which not only serves as a forum for its members to exchange information but also has a presence at international climate meetings. Beyond the prominent cities involved in that effort, there are many others taking action.Maybe this idea is in the air: yesterday, Mayor Bloomberg's book on the same theme came out. (That's perhaps the only point of resemblance between me and the billionaire mayor.)

Even in red states, large cities tend to be more progressive than the state as a whole.For instance, I began writing this post in the Dallas airport, next to a sign that touts DFW as the first carbon-neutral airport. Dallas is encouraging a high-speed train project connecting it with Houston. Up the road in San Antonio, the electric utility is supporting rooftop solar, microturbines, and sale of energy demand services, and the city government is engaged in a plug-in hybrid program. In Georgia, the mayor of Atlanta boasts that the city "leads the nation in square footage of commercial building space committed to energy efficiency through the Better Buildings Challenge," and points to use of "electric vehicles in the city's fleet and installed solar panels on municipal facilities."

I posted late last year about the efforts of South Florida cities, often with Republican majorities, to address climate change. For obvious reasons, they view climate change as a threat to their welfare, given that they are so close to sea level. For

instance, the only question asked about climate change at any of the debates was asked by the Republican mayor of Miami, who's very worried about the future of his city. So are other Republican mayors in the region.

Here's another example:

> Jim Brainard is a Republican mayor in a Republican city in a Republican state. But that hasn't stopped him from taking aggressive steps in recent years to combat climate change and become more energy efficient.
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> During his tenure, Carmel, Ind., has shifted its fleet to hybrid and biofuel vehicles, replaced streetlights with LED bulbs, installed hundreds of miles of bike paths and spent millions of dollars planting trees to absorb carbon dioxide and provide shade.

Support for activities by cities comes from a number of directions. The Rockefeller Foundation has a resilient cities initiative that includes El Paso, Louisville, Nashville, and Pittsburg, as well as liberal bastions like Seattle. C40's network of U.S. cities includes Houston, Philadelphia, and New Orleans.

Efforts by cities may run into resistance at the state level. The increasing significance of these conflicts points to the importance of the often-overlooked field of state and local government law, which gets much less attention than the relationship between states and the federal government. This is an area where the legal academy could make a real contribution, by, among other things, clarifying boundaries of municipal authority. Federal law may seem more glamorous, but key legal battles also take place at the state and local level.

What a city, even a big one, can do is less than what a state can do, which is less than what a country can do, which is less than what the world can do. But every time we cut a single ton of CO_2, that's one less ton that will be in the atmosphere heating the earth for decades or centuries to come. And it's also a small step toward greater global cooperation. So if you're not sure what you can do about Trump's assault on the environment, take a look at what your own city or town is doing about climate change — then call up your city council representative and talk to them about doing more.