

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 10, 2005

Mr. John Stossel
ABC News 20/20
77 West 66th Street
New York, NY 10023

Dear Mr. Stossel:

We are pleased that your 20/20 news program that aired Friday, January 28 addressed urban sprawl. Across America, there is a growing consensus on the problems and costs of unsustainable development and growth. In fact, the U.S. Senate has recognized this problem and in January 1999, we established the bipartisan, multi-regional Senate Smart Growth Task Force. About one-quarter of the U.S. Senate are currently members of this Task Force. The overall goal of the Task Force is to determine and promote ways the federal government can assist states and localities address their own growth management issues. These problems are real: communities are suffering from traffic congestion, impaired air quality, loss of farmland, deterioration of inner cities and older suburbs, concentration of poverty, lack of affordable housing and degradation of our environment.

Addressing these problems through sensible development and planning is a win-win for all communities: urban, suburban, and rural alike. Re-using existing infrastructure lessens development pressures on outlying suburban and rural communities. Reinvesting in metropolitan areas is not anti-anything, but rather is common sense.

Instead of limiting choices and increasing housing costs, as your program argued, smart growth in fact expands housing choices for all people, including lower income populations. In contrast to conventional suburban development that typically offers only one housing product, smart growth offers a variety of housing options including apartments, condominiums and townhouses, housing for seniors, and yes, even single family homes with private yards. Smart growth developments mix housing with shops and restaurants, creating more lively, inviting town centers and neighborhoods. New research has found that creating more attractive places to live also encourages economic development. Smart growth thus is good for the economy, the environment, and for people.

Smart growth promotes redevelopment of existing, often under-utilized spaces where infrastructure has already been built. This not only strengthens communities, but it also saves money -- both private and public expenditures. A recent study found that sprawl increases public service costs by 10 percent, increases housing costs by 8 percent, and increases road building by 10 percent. Overall, suburban sprawl development costs are about 60 percent more than denser urban development.

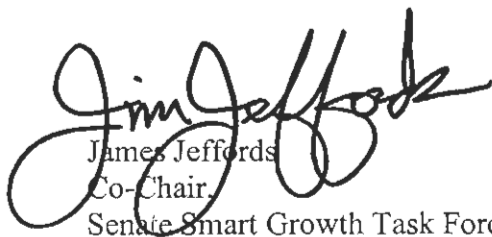
Promoting smart growth can also protect valuable open space and farmlands. Between 1992 and 1997, more than 11 million acres of land were converted to developed uses, an area about the size of the states of Vermont and New Hampshire combined. Of this area, more than 6 million acres of productive agricultural land was paved over with new development.

More importantly, health and safety risks can be avoided by smart growth. Urban sprawl contributes to traffic congestion, which increases air pollution, harming people's health, especially more vulnerable populations such as the elderly and children. In addition, sprawl has also been cited as one of the reasons for the terrible flooding in California. As new sprawling development paves over open spaces, run-off problems contribute to water pollution and also increase the likelihood of flooding.

The U.S. Senate's Smart Growth Task Force looks forward to continuing to support federal policies and budgetary decisions that encourage development that makes efficient use of available housing, transportation, and infrastructure resources. Doing this will expand choices, strengthen communities, revitalize inner cities, preserve farmland, and increase affordable housing, while reducing private and public expenditures.

Thank you for considering these remarks. We hope you will share these views with your television audience.

Sincerely,



James Jeffords
Co-Chair,
Senate Smart Growth Task Force



Carl Levin
Co-Chair,
Senate Smart Growth Task Force