

Poll Finds Support for Regional Cooperation in the Chicago Megacity

A recent story in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* described the limitations of seeing meteors in the night sky if you're in a place with a lot of background light. The story added, "In images of Earth at night from space, hardly a single dark pixel exists between Gary, Ind., and Milwaukee."

The tri-state region may look like one city from space, but at ground level it is divided into hundreds of political units that often do not work cooperatively with each other. Yet important interconnections do exist in the region that some call the Chicago megacity, and important questions about the best way to build the future of the region are receiving serious attention.

Marquette Law School is playing a valuable role as a crossroads for considering those questions. In 2012, the Law School hosted a conference, "Milwaukee's Future in the Chicago Megacity," following the release of a report from the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which assessed strengths, weaknesses, and challenges facing the tri-state region. The overall theme of the report was that more cooperation on economic development issues would enhance growth in what has been a slow-growing region.

In July 2015, the Law School followed up with an extensive Marquette Law School Poll assessing public opinion in the 21 counties of Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin that form the megacity. A conference, "Public Attitudes in the Chicago Megacity: Who are we, and what are the possibilities?," cosponsored by the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, described and offered perspective on the poll results. The poll, the first of its kind, found that substantial majorities in each of the three states want to see political leaders make it a priority to act in the best interest of the region, and not just in the interests of their immediate area.

Moving into specific policy areas, Charles Franklin, professor of law and public policy and director of the Marquette Law School Poll, said that the poll showed strong support for regional approaches to licensing of professionals in many occupations and to planning transportation work. But there was less support for placing regional above local concerns when it comes to attracting businesses or promoting tourism. Franklin said one important finding was that sentiment on a large number of questions didn't vary much from one state to



Karen Freeman-Wilson, mayor of Gary, Indiana, joined Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett and Racine Mayor John Dickert in a panel discussion during a July 2015 conference at Marquette Law School.

another. Important differences, he said, fell along partisan and economic lines, rather than geographic lines.

In one of two panel discussions at the conference following Franklin's discussion with Mike Gousha, distinguished fellow in law and public policy, Karen Freeman-Wilson, mayor of Gary, expressed skepticism about the level of support for regional cooperation shown in poll results.

"I thought people were being a little aspirational in their [poll] answers," she said to David Haynes of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, who moderated a conference panel. She characterized the expressions of support for regional development as "wholly inconsistent with what I have experienced as mayor." For example, she said that, both among residents of Gary and in other parts of northwestern Indiana, she had found resistance to thinking about what was good for the region, rather than just for an individual community, when it came to improving passenger rail service.

The *Chicago Tribune* ran an editorial after the conference, calling for greater regional cooperation among "the many government officials and business recruiters along the shore of Lake Michigan," at both the state and local levels. "Because," it said, echoing a comment made by Jeff Joerres, then-CEO of Milwaukee-based ManpowerGroup, at the 2012 conference, "we have a target on our backs from many foreign countries. And they have a faster way of moving." ■