



## **Studies in the News**

California Research Bureau, California State Library

**Issue 14-104**

**January 29, 2014**

Contents this week:

### **CULTURE & DEMOGRAPHY**

Racial discourse in the mainstream media: an analysis

### **ECONOMY**

Bitcoin: overview of an unregulated online monetary system

### **EDUCATION**

How school lunch debit cards relate to childhood obesity

### **EMPLOYMENT**

Gender pay gap varies by generation

30% of top violators of wage and safety laws are federal contractors

### **ENERGY**

How different states are determining net energy savings

### **ENVIRONMENT**

Benefits of urban living outweighed by suburban impacts

### **GENERAL GOVERNMENT**

Fiscal outlook for states improves

### **HEALTH**

State laws could help curb the obesity epidemic

Net gain in life expectancy through tobacco control

### **HOUSING**

Multifamily housing construction on the rise

### **TOOLS OF THE TRADE**

Energy infrastructure with real-time storm information

### **TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE**

State highway system, high-speed rail dominate infrastructure plan

## CULTURE & DEMOGRAPHY

***Moving the Race Conversation Forward Part 1: How the Media Covers Racism, and Other Barriers to Productive Racial Discourse.*** The Center for Racial Justice Innovation. Jan. 2014. 35 p.

[http://act.colorlines.com/acton/attachment/1069/f-0114/1/-/-/-/Racial\\_Discourse\\_Part\\_1.PDF](http://act.colorlines.com/acton/attachment/1069/f-0114/1/-/-/-/Racial_Discourse_Part_1.PDF)

***Moving the Race Conversation Forward Part 2: Racial Discourse Change in Practice.*** The Center for Racial Justice Innovation. Jan. 2014. 39 p.

[http://act.colorlines.com/acton/attachment/1069/f-0115/1/-/-/-/Racial\\_Discourse\\_Part\\_2.PDF](http://act.colorlines.com/acton/attachment/1069/f-0115/1/-/-/-/Racial_Discourse_Part_2.PDF)

Developing a systemic approach to analyzing racism, these reports offer a content analysis of mainstream media and identify harmful racial practices that impede change and understanding. “The news media, particularly local newspapers, could play a more productive role toward advancing racial justice in this country by focusing more of their coverage on ‘systemically aware’ content, and exploring the policies and practices that lead to racial disparities.” The authors conclude with recommendations that focus on systems rather than individual-level racism. Further, they feel conversation about disparities and sexuality, gender, and class should include race.

## ECONOMY

***Bitcoin: Questions, Answers, and Analysis of Legal Issues.*** By Craig K. Elwell, et al. Congressional Research Service. R43339. Dec. 2013. 20 p.

<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43339.pdf>

“The Bitcoin system is private, but with no traditional financial institutions involved in transactions. Unlike earlier digital currencies that had some central controlling person or entity, the Bitcoin network is completely decentralized, with all parts of transactions performed by the users of the system.... [Bitcoin] raises a number of legal and regulatory concerns including its potential for facilitating money laundering, its treatment under federal securities law, and its status in the regulation of foreign exchange trading.”

## EDUCATION

**“School Lunch Debit Card Payment Systems Are Associated With Lower Nutrition and Higher Calories.”** By David R. Just, et al. *Obesity*, vol. 22 no. 1 (Jan. 2014) pp. 24-26.

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/oby.20591/pdf>

“Schools are increasingly using ‘cashless’ debit systems for school lunch transactions.... Aside from parental admonishment, there are practically no limits on a child’s choices. This is a particular concern for children whose choices may contribute to poor health outcomes, most notably, overweight and obesity.” Data was collected from a nationally-represented sample of 285 public schools within 94 school districts. The authors found that students who used debit-only payment systems purchased less healthy foods that contained more calories, compared to students who used payment systems with a cash option.

## EMPLOYMENT

***On Pay Gap, Millennial Women Near Parity – For Now: Despite Gains Many See Roadblocks Ahead.*** Pew Research Center. Dec. 2013. 82 p.

[http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2013/12/gender-and-work\\_final.pdf](http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2013/12/gender-and-work_final.pdf)

“While the public sees greater workplace equality between men and women now than it did 20 to 30 years ago, most believe more change is needed. Among Millennial women, 75% say this country needs

to continue making changes to achieve gender equality in the workplace, compared with 57% of Millennial men. Even so, relatively few young women (15%) say they have been discriminated against at work because of their gender.”

***Acting Responsibly? Federal Contractors Frequently Put Workers’ Lives and Livelihoods at Risk.*** Majority Committee Staff Report. U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. Dec. 11, 2013. 59 p.

<http://www.harkin.senate.gov/documents/pdf/52a876b0e4d63.pdf>

“In recent years, the federal government has increasingly used the contracting process to procure employee-based service work such as cleaning, security, and construction. However, a new analysis shows that taxpayer dollars are routinely being paid to companies that are putting the livelihoods and the lives of workers at risk.... Almost half of the total initial penalty dollars assessed for OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] violations were against companies holding federal contracts in 2012.... Overall, the 49 federal contractors responsible for large violations of federal labor laws were cited for 1,776 separate violations of these laws and paid \$196 million in penalties and assessments. In fiscal year 2012, these same companies were awarded \$81 billion in taxpayer dollars.”

## ENERGY

***Examining the Net Savings Issue: A National Survey of State Policies and Practices in the Evaluation of Ratepayer-Funded Energy Efficiency Programs.*** By Martin Kushler, et al. American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. Jan. 15, 2014. 94 p.

<http://aceee.org/research-report/u1401> (Free registration required)

“Determining the net savings impacts of a program is one of the most prominent and longstanding challenges in the utility energy efficiency field. ACEEE conducted a national review of state approaches to the net savings issue in order to help policymakers, regulators, utilities, and other interested parties better understand this issue and how their peers are addressing it. We surveyed all 50 states and the District of Columbia, reviewed recent industry literature, and conducted interviews with national energy efficiency program evaluation experts.” The report finds “a great deal of diversity in how states are approaching this issue,” ranging from reporting gross savings to more complex approaches to measuring net savings. The report concludes with policy recommendations.

## ENVIRONMENT

***“Spatial Distribution of U.S. Household Carbon Footprints Reveals Suburbanization Undermines Greenhouse Gas Benefits of Urban Population Density.”*** By Christopher Jones, et al. *Environmental Science & Technology*. Dec. 13, 2013.

Report. 8 p.: <http://pubs.acs.org/doi/full/10.1021/es4034364> (Free registration required)

Interactive Map: <http://coolclimate.berkeley.edu/maps>

“[P]opulation-dense cities contribute less greenhouse-gas emissions per person than other areas of the country, but these cities’ extensive suburbs essentially wipe out the climate benefits. Dominated by emissions from cars, trucks and other forms of transportation, suburbs account for about 50% of all household emissions—largely carbon dioxide—in the United States.” An interactive map shows per capita greenhouse gas emissions by zip code. Emission sources are also broken out by whether the production is related to transportation, housing, food, goods, or services.

## GENERAL GOVERNMENT

***The Fiscal Survey of States.* By Michael Streepy, et al. National Association of State Budget Officers. Dec. 2013. 92 p.**

[http://www.nasbo.org/sites/default/files/NASBO%20Fall%202013%20Fiscal%20Survey%20of%20States\\_0.pdf](http://www.nasbo.org/sites/default/files/NASBO%20Fall%202013%20Fiscal%20Survey%20of%20States_0.pdf)

The fiscal outlook for most states is brighter in 2014. As the economy has improved, revenues have increased. Forty-three states have higher general fund spending levels in fiscal 2014 than in 2013. However, state spending in all 50 states combined was lower in 2013 than the fiscal 2008 pre-recession peak, so state economic improvements are generally moderate.

## HEALTH

***Fighting Obesity in the United States with State Legislation.* By Stephanie S. Chan. RAND. Nov. 12, 2013. 215 p.**

[http://www.rand.org/pubs/rgs\\_dissertations/RGSD324.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/rgs_dissertations/RGSD324.html)

“Obesity is a problem of epidemic proportions in the U.S. There is a role for government involvement to reduce and prevent this public health problem of obesity.... The study's aims are to: (1) describe the landscape of obesity prevention legislation, including how legislation compares to research-based policy recommendations; (2) examine the association between obesity prevention legislation and obesity prevalence and other weight outcomes; (3) identify the process of how obesity prevention legislation are formulated and implemented, including factors that facilitate or hinder the process; and (4) suggest strategies to improve role of state legislation in preventing obesity.”

***How Will More Obesity and Less Smoking Affect Life Expectancy?* By Samuel H. Preston, et al. Center for Retirement Research at Boston College. Jan. 2014. 7 p.**

[http://crr.bc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/IB\\_14-2.pdf](http://crr.bc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/IB_14-2.pdf)

“Estimates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggest that, in 2000, 15% of U.S. deaths were caused by obesity and 18% by smoking. But obesity is on the rise while smoking is on the decline. The question is whether the benefits from less smoking will outweigh the harm from rising obesity.” This brief projects how changes in smoking and obesity will affect life expectancy in the coming decades. “[O]verall, the benefits of reduced smoking will trump the damage from increased obesity. However, the results differ by gender, with men showing a solid net gain, while women see only a small improvement.”

## HOUSING

***The Demographic Shift from Single-Family to Multifamily Housing.* By Jordan Rappaport. Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City. Dec. 19, 2013. 30 p.**

<http://www.kansascityfed.org/publicat/econrev/pdf/13q4Rappaport.pdf>

This report “examines forces underlying the housing recovery to determine when sustained construction growth will resume. The analysis suggests that very strong multifamily construction growth is likely to resume by early 2014 and that moderately strong single-family construction growth is likely to resume by early 2015. The longer term outlook is especially positive for multifamily construction, reflecting the aging of the baby boomers and an associated shift in demand from single-family to multifamily housing. By the end of the decade, multifamily construction is likely to peak at a level nearly two-thirds higher than its highest annual level during the 1990s and 2000s.”

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

### ***Energy Infrastructure with Real-time Storm Information***

<http://www.eia.gov/special/disruptions/>

The resource provides a map of power plants, petroleum refineries, and natural gas processing plants along with information on current storms and energy disruptions. The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) “tracks and reports on selected significant storms that impact or could potentially impact energy infrastructure.” Real-time storm tracking and information on past events are available.

## TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

### ***California’s Five Year Infrastructure Plan 2014. California Department of Finance. Jan. 2014. 96 p.***

[http://www.dof.ca.gov/documents/2014-Infrastructure-Plan\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.dof.ca.gov/documents/2014-Infrastructure-Plan_WEB.pdf)

“The vast majority of the funding proposed in this Plan is dedicated to the state’s transportation system—over 94%. This reflects the sheer size of the state’s transportation system and the state’s commitment to a new high-speed rail system. There are also significant investments proposed for addressing health and safety issues at various state institutions, including prisons, state hospitals, and the state special schools for the blind and deaf.... This Plan proposes \$56.7 billion in spending over the next five years. Of this amount, \$308.5 million is from the General Fund, \$12.1 billion is from various special funds, \$6.1 billion is from bond funds, \$32.3 billion is from federal funds, and \$5.9 billion is from other funds.”

### ***About Studies in the News***

*Studies in the News* (SITN) is a service provided by the California Research Bureau (CRB), a division of the California State Library. CRB provides independent, nonpartisan research and analysis for the Governor, Legislature and State Constitutional Officers.

SITN lists of current studies related to public policy issues are e-mailed weekly. Archived issues are available at <http://www.library.ca.gov/sitn/crb/>.

To add or remove your name from the SITN distribution list, or to update your e-mail address, please contact us at [crb@library.ca.gov](mailto:crb@library.ca.gov), or (916) 319-2691.

SITN is available as an RSS feed at <http://www.library.ca.gov/sitn/crb/>.