Lawmakers have caught a bit of Buzz Lightyear’s enthusiasm when it comes to buildings and energy efficiency. But instead of going beyond infinity, like Buzz, they want builders to go “beyond code”—that is, beyond traditional energy code requirements for buildings. The policies they’re considering incorporate established green-building rating systems: the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, known as LEED; the Green Building Initiative’s Green Globes; the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Energy Star; or net-zero energy requirements.

It takes a lot of energy to power buildings. Residential, government and commercial structures accounted for 39 percent of U.S. energy consumption in 2017, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

This power doesn’t come cheap. The electricity required to light commercial buildings amounts to more than $35 billion a year, the U.S. Department of Energy estimates. That’s before adding the costs of maintaining comfortable temperatures, heating water or powering appliances, computers and office equipment. Lowering building energy use not only decreases operating costs, but also reduces air emissions and strain on the electric grid.

Lawmakers address building energy use through state commercial and residential building energy codes, which have been adopted in most states and the District of Columbia. By updating or strengthening their codes, states can help building owners and renters realize the economic and comfort benefits of increased efficiency.

Beyond-code policies include those that mandate adherence to LEED or other standards and those that set net-zero energy building requirements—the concept that a building produces as much energy as it uses, or more, by combining a high degree of efficiency with on-site renewable energy generation.

California’s Long-Term Energy Efficiency Strategic Plan, for example, set a goal for all new residential and commercial construction to meet net-zero standards by 2020 and 2030, respectively. A handful of cities also have established net-zero targets, including Santa Monica, Calif., which approved an ordinance in 2017 requiring all new single-family construction to be rated net-zero.

To encourage going beyond code, states have created incentives or financing initiatives for high-efficiency buildings. Arizona, for example, enacted legislation in 2016 that amended tax incentives for data centers to include certain newly constructed facilities that meet Energy Star, Green Globes, LEED or comparable standards. In 2014, Maryland legislation established an energy-efficient home construction loan program and fund to build low-energy and net-zero homes.

Some states have set “lead by example” policies, creating efficiency and green-building requirements for government-owned facilities or state-funded projects. In Hawaii, 2015 legislation set a collective goal for the University of Hawaii system to be rated net-zero by 2035, and 2017 legislation created a revolving loan fund to help meet that goal. Rhode Island lawmakers enacted companion bills in 2017. One expanded the state’s Green Building Act to include public real property; the other updated standards, including LEED for building projects, LEED for Neighborhood Development and the Green Building Council’s Sustainable Sites.

In the last two years, at least a dozen state legislatures enacted bills on high-efficiency buildings, and in this session at least eight states have introduced legislation related to green and net-zero buildings. As they strive for greater efficiency and more vibrant economies, states may continue going beyond code to achieve their energy conservation goals.

— Megan Cleveland
Health Centers Filling the Gaps

The federal Bipartisan Budget Act showed continued support for community health centers, which served around 27 million patients in 2016, more than ever before. The law increases health centers’ discretionary grant funding, bringing the total funding for the centers to $5.4 billion. The money helps to expand the availability of primary care at health centers across the country.

That’s good news for the millions of patients who use these nonprofit, community-directed facilities for most of their medical needs. Also known as federally qualified health centers or, simply, health centers, they operate in more than 10,400 underserved rural and urban communities across the U.S., serving all who come through the doors, regardless of their insurance or financial status. The centers offer a full range of primary and preventive medical services, along with translation, health education and transportation assistance, when needed.

As their use grows, more are adding supplemental services, such as dentistry, behavioral health care, pharmacies and substance abuse treatment. Studies indicate these centers increase access to care and improve patients’ health. For example, health center patients have fewer low-birthweight babies and higher control rates of diabetes and blood pressure than the national averages.

But they couldn’t survive without additional funding. Since only 17 percent of health center patients carry private insurance, centers rely on federal grants to cover their costs. In addition, some health centers also receive state grants to maintain various services. In FY 2017, 33 states provided direct funding to health centers, several tapping into tobacco taxes and tobacco settlement funds.

Health centers employ nearly 213,000 people nationwide who not only offer patients cost-effective care, but also generate economic activity in their local communities, estimated at $45.6 billion in 2014, according to Capital Link, a national nonprofit dedicated to strengthening community-based health care.

—Samantha Scotti

The Patients

Health centers served close to 27 million patients in 2016.

- 1 in 6 Medicaid patients
- 1 in 5 uninsured individuals
- 1 in 3 people living below poverty line
- 1 in 6 rural residents

Source: National Association of Community Health Centers, 2017

The Cost Factor

The insurance status of health center patients in 2016

- 49% Medicaid or CHIP recipients
- 23% Uninsured
- 17% Privately insured
- 9% Medicare recipients
- 2% Other

Source: National Association of Community Health Centers

Internet Deregulation

The Restoring Internet Freedom Order, which the Federal Communications Commission issued early this year, became effective June 11. It repeals net neutrality rules established in 2015 that prevented internet service providers from blocking, slowing down or speeding up the delivery of content, or favoring one website or app over another. Supporters say the new FCC order was needed to replace those “unnecessary” and “heavy-handed” regulations with strong consumer protections, increased transparency and common-sense regulations that will pave the way for better, faster, cheaper internet access.

Many doubt those claims, fearing that repealing net neutrality rules will give major telecommunications companies unprecedented control over how we use the internet. As of June 1, legislators in 30 states had introduced more than 65 bills or resolutions in support of maintaining net neutrality principles. Oregon, Vermont and Washington passed legislation. Governors in Hawaii, Montana, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont have signed executive orders requiring companies wishing to contract with the state to confirm they will follow net neutrality requirements. In addition, the mayors of at least 120 cities also have pledged to require entities contracting with them to adhere to net neutrality rules.

The rule change also gives primary jurisdiction over internet service providers’ practices to the Federal Trade Commission and pre-empts actions states take to reinstate net neutrality restrictions. Attorneys general from 22 states have filed a protective petition for review against the FCC in the U.S. Court of Appeals seeking a determination that the order violates federal law and is “arbitrary” and “capricious.”

—Danielle Dean
Defense Spending and the States

The U.S. government spends defense dollars in every state through purchases of military equipment, wages for service members and civilians, pension payments, health care services and grants to states. But the size and mix of those investments vary substantially by state, so changes in defense spending will affect each state differently. The effects also depend on which programs and operations are increased or cut.

This analysis of defense spending in the states goes beyond contracts and salaries to include retirement payments, nonretirement benefits and grants.

In fiscal year 2015—the most recent year for which complete data are available—federal defense spending totaled $485 billion in the states and the District of Columbia, or $1,510 per person. The amount spent by state per capita ranged from $386 in Michigan to $7,132 in Virginia. The District of Columbia received the highest amount of spending per capita at $10,413.

—Anne Stauffer

**The Big Five**

Defense spending falls into these categories.

- **Contracts for purchases of goods and services**, such as military equipment, information technology, and operations and maintenance programs, accounted for 56 percent of all spending in the states. This was the largest category in 35 states and the District of Columbia, and it made up at least 70 percent of federal defense dollars in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri and Pennsylvania.

- **Salaries and wages** for active-duty military, civilian, reserve and National Guard personnel accounted for 28 percent of total spending. California, Texas and Virginia received nearly one-third of these funds, reflecting the high numbers of federal defense employees in these states. For 13 states, this category was the largest.

- **Retirement benefits**, which are payments to individuals for military pensions, accounted for 12 percent of spending in the states. More than one-third of the total went to California, Florida, Texas and Virginia.

- **Nonretirement benefits**, which are payments for health care provided through the military’s Tricare Management Program, accounted for 3 percent of spending. More than one-fifth of these funds went to Florida and Texas.

- **Grants**, which include funding to state and local governments for programs such as National Guard activities, medical research and development, and basic and applied scientific research, accounted for 1 percent of spending. More than one-fifth of these funds went to California and Maryland.

— Anne Stauffer, Justin Theal and Laura Pontari, The Pew Charitable Trusts

Anne Stauffer is a project director, Justin Theal is a senior associate and Laura Pontari is an associate with The Pew Charitable Trusts’ fiscal federalism initiative. Pew published this article on April 9, 2018.
One Size Legislature Fits All?

When lawmakers consider changing the sizes of their chambers, the debate typically centers on three major themes: representation, efficiency and cost. This year, at least three state legislatures debated downsizing.

Pennsylvania, with the second largest number of lawmakers in the country, is considering a bill to shrink the General Assembly from 253 members to 189 members—50 senators to 38, 203 representatives to 151. Representative Jerry Knowles (R), who introduced the bill, told public radio that, with fewer members, there “would just be better discussion, better debate.” In a smaller legislature, the responsibility of each member increases and legislators become more visible, supporters argue. It’s also cheaper to shrink. Pennsylvania would save an estimated $15 million a year if Knowles’ bill passes and citizens approve it.

But rural lawmakers worry that if the number of legislators is decreased and the size of districts is increased, it will be more difficult to connect with constituents. The more the members, the fewer the constituents for each. With fewer constituents, opponents to these bills argue, it’s easier to have face-to-face dealings with them.

Kansas, Minnesota and New York also had legislation proposing downsizing this year. New York’s and Minnesota’s legislatures currently are the fourth and fifth largest in the country, respectively; Kansas falls in the middle.

So, what’s the right size?

“Ideally, a legislature should be large enough to represent and reflect the diverse elements of its constituency and small enough to get things done,” the authors of the groundbreaking legislative study “The Sometime Governments” wrote in 1971. Historically, the most significant changes to state legislatures occurred during the 1960s and ’70s. The U.S. Supreme Court ruling Baker v. Carr and other “one man, one vote” redistricting decisions in the early 1960s sparked an interest in state legislatures and their size. In all, 34 states changed the number of legislative seats in one or both chambers during those years. Many others made significant modifications.

Since 1990, five states—Idaho, New York, North Dakota, Rhode Island and Wyoming—have made changes. The total number of state legislators nationwide sits at 7,383—down 398 since 1960. But not all changes have been to eliminate seats. Over the years, Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, New York and Utah have added members.

Size has much more to do with tradition than it does with some objective measure of efficiency. Each legislature represents a microcosm of its state’s people, traditions and political cultures. These factors vary greatly across the country. Opinions about them often differ within a state. Consequently, there may never be consensus on what size is “just right” for a legislature.

—Brenda Erickson
from driving to drinking, it’s been up to state legislatures to set legal age minimums. Currently, the focus is on raising the legal age of marriage. Since 2016, legislators in nearly half the states have been asking, “How old should you be before saying ‘I do’?”

Delaware became the first state to bar anyone younger than 18 from getting married. Before lawmakers passed the bill, all that was needed for minors to wed was a judge’s approval. A few other legislatures have considered absolute bans like Delaware’s. New Jersey passed one, but the governor vetoed it, and Pennsylvania and Vermont have bans pending.

Proponents of raising the minimum age believe more needs to be done to protect some children who, they say, are being pushed into abusive marriages at young ages. Unchained at Last, an advocacy group working to end child marriages, estimates that about 200,000 minors in the United States were married between 2000 and 2015.

Opponents to changing current laws argue that absolute bans are too constraining. Their concerns include blocking young soldiers from marrying and providing military benefits to their families and possibly violating the cultures and religious traditions of some immigrant communities. Some say the change could lead to more single-parent households.

All but two states designate 18 as the age of majority, and most allow those 18 or older to marry without exception. (Alabama’s age of majority is 19; Mississippi’s is 21.) Most states also allow minors to marry if they obtain parental consent or court permission. Other states specify no age minimum in statute and allow young people to marry with conditions.

Lawmakers in Virginia, where girls under 16 were permitted to marry only if they were pregnant, passed legislation that allows any 16- or 17-year-old to marry if granted adult status from a court. Texas passed similar legislation, as did New York, which settled on allowing 17-year-olds to marry with parental consent and the approval of a judge, who must follow specific guidelines to assess whether a minor is marrying by choice.

—Meghan McCann and Sarah Hill

Minimum Marriage Age

The marriage age in most states is 18; however, some states make exceptions for judicial and parental consent or pregnancy. This map reflects the youngest age at which a person may marry in each state and territory within those exceptions.
Building a Principal Pipeline

As schools struggle to improve student achievement, lawmakers are looking for solutions by strengthening the role of the school principal. Research shows that school leadership is second only to teaching in school-related factors that affect students’ learning. Good leaders create the working and learning conditions needed to recruit and retain qualified teachers and build the strong community found in effective schools.

The Wallace Foundation partnered with six large urban school districts in 2011 to create a pipeline of well-prepared principals. The ongoing initiative is built on a cohesive system of training, hiring and supporting future administrators.

Research on what’s working—and what isn’t—is now emerging.

Adopting strong standards for the principal position and improving hiring practices have produced the biggest bang for the buck. Other successful policies include encouraging university and district partnerships to improve principal preparation, creating statewide leadership academies based on best practices, mentoring beginners, creating data systems that allow districts and states to identify where leaders are most needed and offering more pay for serving in struggling schools or areas of shortages.

States are working to put these policies into practice. Since Tennessee won its Race to the Top grant, it has stuck to its goal of improving student achievement and has found success on recent National Assessment of Educational Progress reports, aka the Nation’s Report Card. State education officials credit this in part to a statewide effort to build a strong principal pipeline.

They have created partnerships between universities and school districts and formed the Tennessee Transformational Leadership Council to guide principal preparation, using the 3 percent set-aside available in Title II ESSA funds to support their efforts.

In 2017, the Utah Legislature held two interim Education Committee meetings at which NCSL staff arranged for policymakers to hear from researchers, state and local experts, and educators. Legislators learned of the challenges in their state and what the research says might work in response to them. “School leadership is key to creating a culture of student achievement,” Senator Ann Milner (R), who led the effort, says. “This work has been immensely helpful in identifying and facilitating policy discussion on what best practices will support the individualized needs of states.”

—Michelle Exstrom

Tariff Effect on Soybean Trade

Chinese soybean imports from the United States could drop by as much as 71 percent if China were to impose trade restrictions on U.S. soybeans in response to U.S. tariffs on Chinese products, according to a study for the U.S. Soybean Export Council conducted by Purdue University agricultural economists Wally Tyner and Farzad Taherpour.

China is the world’s largest soybean importer, and 62 percent of all U.S. soybean exports go to China. Using an analysis model developed at Purdue, the researchers projected the impact on soybean production if the Chinese government were to adopt tariffs ranging from 10 to 30 percent. Their analysis shows that if the Chinese were to adopt a 10 percent tariff on U.S. soybeans, U.S. exports to that country could fall by a third. Total U.S. soybean exports could decline by 18 percent, and total U.S. soybean production could drop by 8 percent. If China imposed a 30 percent tariff, total U.S. soybean exports could fall by 40 percent and total U.S. soybean production could decrease by 17 percent.

Tyner said an escalating trade war could hurt both countries.

“The annual loss in U.S. economic well-being would range between $1.7 billion and $3.3 billion,” he said. “Chinese economic well-being also falls if they impose a tariff, in some cases as much or more than for the U.S. The reason is that soybean imports are very important to their domestic economy.”

—Darrin Pack, based on an article from Agricultural Communications, Purdue University College of Agriculture, March 28, 2018

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<th>Top Soybean Growers</th>
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Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2017

Senator Ann Milner
Utah