

State of the States 2021: Pandemic Response and Recovery

Speaker Biographies

Richard C. Auxier is a senior policy associate in the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center. His work focuses on state and local tax policy, budgets, and other finance issues. Before joining Urban, Auxier was on the staff of the DC Tax Revision Commission and helped write the commission's final report on recommendations for improving the District's tax system. He also was a researcher and editor at the Pew Research Center. Auxier attended the University of Maryland for both his undergraduate degree and master's degree in public policy.

Tracy Gordon is an interim vice president and acting director of the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center. Her work is centered on fiscal challenges facing state and local governments, including budget trade-offs, intergovernmental relations, and long-term sustainability. Before joining Urban, Gordon was a senior economist with the White House Council of Economic Advisers. She was also a fellow at the Brookings Institution, assistant professor at the University of Maryland School of Public Policy, and fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California. Gordon was a member of the District of Columbia Infrastructure Task Force and the District of Columbia Tax Revision Commission. She serves on the board of trustees for the American Tax Policy Institute and the California Budget and Policy Center. Gordon holds a PhD in public policy with a concurrent MA in economics from the University of California, Berkeley.

John Hicks is the state budget director for the Commonwealth of Kentucky. He was appointed by Governor Andy Beshear in December 2019. Previously, he was the executive director of the National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO) in Washington, DC. Before leading NASBO, he served in Kentucky state government for 32 years, including 25 years in Kentucky's Office of the State Budget Director; he served as the deputy state budget director in his last 10 years. Hicks graduated from Murray State University in Murray, Kentucky, and received his master's degree in public administration from the University of Kentucky's Martin School of Public Policy and Administration.

Kimberly Murnieks was appointed director of Ohio's Office of Budget and Management by Governor Mike DeWine in 2019. Serving as the chief financial officer under DeWine's leadership, she oversees an office that develops, coordinates, and monitors the individual budgets of state agencies, provides the governor and administration with policy analysis, and reviews all financial transactions made with public funds. Murnieks also serves as a member of the executive committee of the National Association of State Budget Officers, representing the Midwest. From January 2011 through 2018, Murnieks was the chief operating officer for the Ohio Attorney General's Office. Before that, she served in senior staff roles at the Ohio Department of Education from 2000 to 2010, including executive director overseeing the Center for School Options and Finance, chief program officer for the EdChoice Scholarship, policy adviser for the Office of Information Technology, and deputy chief of staff. Her career in public service began as a budget analyst with the Office of Budget and Management in 1996. Murnieks is a summa cum laude graduate of Marietta College with a bachelor's degree in political science. She graduated from the John Glenn College of Public Affairs at the Ohio State University with a master's degree in public administration and specialization in public finance.

Jared Polis, governor of Colorado, is an entrepreneur, education leader, and public servant. Polis started his career as an entrepreneur, having started three companies by his 30s, including ProFlowers. He later cofounded Techstars, a startup accelerator that mentors entrepreneurs from all walks of life, and Patriot Boot Camp, which helps veterans start their own small businesses after returning home from service. His career has also focused on improving public education: He served six years on the Colorado State Board of Education, where he worked to raise teachers' pay and reduce class sizes. He also founded several public charter schools and served as superintendent of one of them, the New America School, which helps immigrants earn their high school diplomas. Most recently, Polis served as the US representative for Colorado's Second Congressional District. During his time in Congress, the Center for Effective Lawmaking ranked Polis as the most effective member of Colorado's House delegation because of his success working across party lines to improve Colorado's schools, protect public lands, and support startups and small businesses.

Kim Rueben is the Sol Price fellow and director of the State and Local Finance Initiative at the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center. Rueben is an expert on state and local public finance and the economics of education. Her work examines issues of state and local public finance and focuses on state budget and tax issues, intergovernmental relations, fiscal institutions, and the economics of education, including federal and state financing of both K-12 and postsecondary education and how such decisions affect different individuals across states. She serves on a council of economic advisers for the controller of the state of California and on a National Academy of Sciences panel on the economic and fiscal consequences of immigration. She was also on the DC Tax Revision Commission in 2013. Rueben received a bachelor's degree in applied math-economics from Brown University, a master's degree in economics from the London School of Economics, and a doctoral degree in economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.