

# I crunched the numbers on the U.S. government. Here's what I learned

By Steve Ballmer

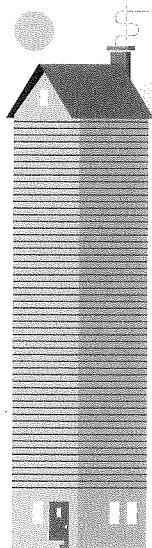
I'M A NUMBERS GUY. THEY'RE HOW I UNDERSTAND THE WORLD—what's good and what's bad, what's working and what isn't. After I stepped down as CEO of Microsoft and began getting more involved in philanthropy and civic advocacy with my wife, Connie, I realized that I had very little sense of the numbers behind the U.S. government. When I went searching for enlightening statistics, I found they were scattered or unavailable or incomprehensible—if I could even locate them.

That's what led to USAFacts: a platform, launched in April, that offers a look at the government by the numbers—about revenue, spending and outcomes—to create a common set of facts that can serve as a foundation for the type of informed debate that is essential to our democracy. So, to start those conversations, here are five areas where the numbers might surprise you—they certainly surprised me.

*Ballmer is the former CEO of Microsoft, the owner of the Los Angeles Clippers and a co-creator of USAFacts with his wife, Connie*

## MOST GOVERNMENT WORKERS AREN'T "BUREAUCRATS"

Government employees are often portrayed as behind-closed-doors bureaucrats. But 9 out of 10 of them are not. They're people involved in direct services, whom we come in contact with daily: they're hospital workers, transportation staff, parks-and-recreation employees. The preponderance of the 23 million public employees—across federal, state and local government—are directly serving the people. **Nearly half work in education.** And roughly 10% are active-duty military or involved in police protection.



## WEALTHY PEOPLE GET MORE HELP PAYING FOR THEIR HOMES

Housing is a way in which people save money. Housing stabilizes people's lives. And, yes, housing is expensive—so much so that one might think the government would provide the most assistance to families that don't have stable housing, which limits their opportunity to pursue the American Dream. And yet, **96% of one of America's largest housing-related subsidies—the mortgage interest deduction—benefits the richest 20% of households** instead of helping our least fortunate afford homes.

## AMERICAN HOUSES ARE BURNING DOWN LESS OFTEN

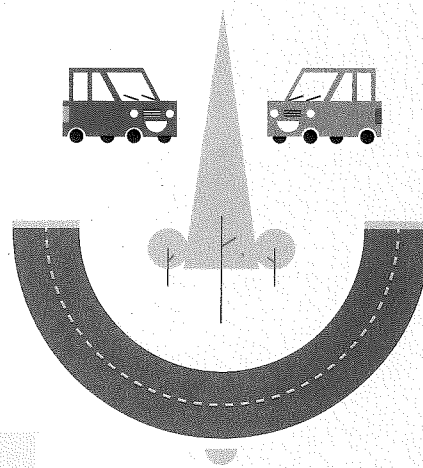
From 1980 to 2014 our population increased by 42%, from 227 million to 321 million. And yet **house fires are down about 50%, from 734,000 to 367,000.** This is driven by some combination of the better way things get built now vs. then and the quality of fire departments. But I had no clue that house fires are way rarer today than when I was growing up.



## OUR ROADS ARE IMPROVING

From what I've read, I assumed that for all we spend on infrastructure, we still have lots of roads, bridges and facilities that are outdated and in disrepair. Yet in 2014, just 3.3% of the nation's interstate highways were in unsatisfactory condition, and the percentage of bridges that are structurally deficient has declined from 24.1% in 1990 to 9.6% in 2015. Though whether the quality is good enough remains a legitimate question.

Also, in 2014, we spent \$228 billion on transportation and transportation safety. Whether the spending number is too high, too low or just right is an essential question. But we should look to the outcomes: **traffic fatalities declined from 51,091 in 1980 to 32,675 in 2014**, even though the number of licensed drivers increased from 145 million to 214 million.



## POVERTY STILL TRAPS FAR TOO MANY KIDS

And black children are hit hardest: **those born into the lowest-income families have a 50% likelihood of staying there for life.** That's too little of a shot at being able to get ahead, and as a nation we can do better.