

## **The 2023 Engineering Ideas Institute – Tackling the Challenges Facing Our World Through Scenario Planning & Collaboration**

### *United Regions*

During the first decades of the new millennium, increased political polarization across the United States led to many of the Federal government's functions all but crumbling. Misinformation and disinformation became impossible to avoid, causing more and more citizens to turn their trust away from doctors, scientists, engineers, and other traditionally trusted experts. Extreme weather events, coupled with the Federal government's inability to pass policy changes that would foster solvency of the program, led to the demise of the National Flood Insurance Program and left housing vulnerable in many coastal and riverine locations. States across the country saw large swings in human migration, with people moving to more stable climates and economies, and away from the states hit hardest by disparities in income, housing, and jobs. Increasing political polarization also contributed to this migration as some people sought out communities that aligned with their view.

With the people no longer able to count on national politicians and the traditional institutions to get things done, a new order began to emerge where states, regions, and metropolitan areas banded together to create a new coalition-style system that could focus on the specific needs of a region. Within certain locales, resources are pooled, and citizens vote on shared priorities, such as water rights, insurance protections, zoning and building codes to address issues affecting constituents. They also enter trade agreements with the other regional Coalitions that have common interests. Other places were left out of this new system and their residents faced increasing hardships. These new mechanisms and forums for civic engagement began to rebuild a shared sense of community and confidence in the ability of diverse groups to work constructively together.

The national election in 2028 saw a majority of new members of Congress coming from the ranks of the most successful members of the Coalition governments. And then, in 2032, despite malicious misinformation campaigns by both domestic and foreign parties, a candidate lovingly nicknamed "The Great Unifier" emerged as winner of the presidential election. Many within the Great Unifier's own party saw this as nothing short of a miracle. While the nation faced plentiful challenges large and small, the Great Unifier declared the only priority of their first 100 days to be putting an end to the ongoing war against facts and truth.

The Great Unifier assembled high ranking members of each regional Coalition, and engineers, scientists, doctors, and technologists across a range of professions. From this field, Cabinet secretaries and undersecretaries were selected. To build trust with citizens across the nation, nonpartisan civilian committees were also appointed to sit within each cabinet department. Working together with experts in A.I., blockchain, non-fungible tokens (NFT's), and other advanced technology, a system for verifying the accuracy and authenticity of all sources of information posted online and shared via other media was created. The Seal of Truth system provided a check on every post to an online forum, and a

confirmation for those reporting the news via television, online newspapers or other forms of media that the information they had collected was verified by a trusted committee.

Following the implementation of the Seal of Truth, the Great Unifier began the work of healing the vast political divide and building on the successes achieved through partnerships among regional coalitions. Residents of all regions, including those who had been left out for decades, began to benefit from actions taken by new leaders creating beneficial policies based on verified data. Success did not happen overnight, but slowly and surely, the public's trust and shared civic commitment began to return to the nation's institutions, and the people who made them function.

