



# The United States Conference of Mayors

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## THE NATION'S MAYORS FOCUS ON POVERTY IN AMERICA AT NATIONAL FORUM IN LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles, CA – In the midst of the nation's financial crisis and the largest proposed bailout in U.S. history, mayors from around the country gathered in Los Angeles to discuss how the current Wall Street debacle impacts local governments as well as individuals and low and middle-income families.

U.S. Conference of Mayors President Miami Mayor Manny Diaz, along with Host Los Angeles Mayor Antonio A. Villaraigosa and USCM CEO Tom Cochran, today held a Mayors' Action Forum on Poverty at the Maxine Waters Employment Preparation Center to craft a bold, new national plan to address the root causes of poverty in America's cities.

Diaz declared, "The current financial climate in America underscores that poverty and economic opportunity are not only local problems, but American problems. And national problems demand national investments. As Washington bails out Wall Street, they must also remember Main Street and invest in education, infrastructure and poverty-reduction measures to ensure that all Americans are self-sufficient."

Mayor Villaraigosa, who chairs the USCM Task Force on Poverty, Work and Opportunity, challenged mayors and elected officials to think differently about poverty and its changing dynamic in America. "Americans must not stand idly by in the face of rising poverty rates and growing homelessness. Now is the time for new solutions and fresh ideas for our most vulnerable citizens, and the next President of the United States must place this issue at the top of the public policy agenda on his first day in office," he said.

Statistics show that 1 in every 6 children in this country lives in poverty, with nearly half living in extreme poverty. In addition, of the more than 140 million Americans employed in 2006, 8.7 million were living in poverty – evidence that even full-time work can fail to lift workers out of poverty.

In response, mayors are proposing a recalculation of how poverty is measured to accurately determine the true nature of poverty in this country. Mayors are also calling for a cabinet-level position to direct and coordinate poverty reduction programs with a special emphasis on early-childhood education and healthcare, as well as tax-code reforms to simplify the process to access benefits and make them available to a wider number of families.

Mayors are also keenly aware of connection between the high school dropout crisis and the cycle of poverty. Nearly 7,000 students drop out of school every day in this country, and more than 12 million students will drop out over the next decade. Thus mayors are calling for significant investment in workforce development programs to give students multiple paths to employment.

This poverty forum was the third in a series of mayoral forums in key cities around the country intended to challenge the next Presidential Administration to invest in America's cities and metropolitan areas -- the economic engines of the nation accounting for 86 percent of the Gross Domestic Product and where over 85% of people in the country live. The first forum was held on Crime in Philadelphia; the second was on Infrastructure in New York City; the remaining forums will be held on Environment in Miami and on the Arts/Tourism in Palm Beach.

Representatives from both the McCain and Obama campaigns have been invited to attend each session. Recommendations from all five forums will be presented to the next President of the United States during the critical first 100 days of the new Administration.

Mayor Diaz, who has referred to the mayors' forums as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Campaign of the Political Season, believes that, "Washington no longer invests in its cities and its people." Diaz has called on Washington to stop being a marginal player in meeting the needs of America's families. "Washington has lost its values – lost its principles – lost its sense of purpose – engaging in endless debate and partisan bickering while people in this country continue to suffer. ... Plain and simple, Washington has abandoned us."

"The next President of the United States must understand that an investment in America's cities, an investment in America's people, is an investment in America's future," Diaz concluded.