

**Mayor Wellington E. Webb  
The National Press Club  
Washington, D.C.  
Tuesday, November 23, 1999**

Today on behalf of the nation's mayors, I am issuing a challenge to the presidential candidates to work closely with us to fundamentally change the relationship between the federal government and America's cities.

My remarks today are predicated on the strong belief, shared by mayors and local government officials throughout the country, that the basic relationship between cities, and the federal government has not substantially changed or matured over the past several decades...this despite the fact that the management of American cities and the capabilities of local government have undergone a massive transformation over the past twenty years.

The perception of mayors and cities is far more positive than it was a generation ago, even a decade ago. Back then, our urban areas were seen as dysfunctional communities plagued by crime, high taxes, and bloated bureaucracies.

Now things are very different. Mayors are being praised as the "New Reformers". Our focus on sound governance and quality of life issues has generated national and international recognition.

The new conventional wisdom is that we're efficient, close to the people, result-oriented, pragmatic problem solvers.

In many cities across this nation, the future, as Fred Siegel has written, is "gazing back at us from an unexpected corner of the past." Cities are, once again, being seen as a place to live, work and shop, as centers of commerce and culture and sports and entertainment.

Therefore, as we stand at the beginning of a new millennium...and a Presidential election that will frame our national leadership as we move into the year 2000...this is absolutely the right time to take stock of what American cities have become...take stock of our successes and capabilities and to fundamentally change the relationship between cities and the federal government.

Cities and mayors are at the cutting edge of dealing with America's problems such as:

- ◆ Guns and violence
- ◆ Helping to provide working families the tools they need such as job training, affordable child care
- ◆ Nurturing economic growth
- ◆ Smart growth

**Guns and Violence**

Despite good times and a vibrant economy – American cities and suburbs face an epidemic of violence and guns *even with a declining crime rate in cities nationwide*. As long as we are not safe in our own neighborhoods...not safe in our places of work...not safe on our streets...not safe in our schools...a strong economy just doesn't mean much.

There has been great work done in this area by mayors across this country and I like to think of the successes I've had in my City of Denver as well.

But failure to pass reasonable federal gun control legislation during the recent congressional session was a major disappointment and one of several contrasts between the beltway crowd and the average American. Initially, it looked as if Congress might pass legislation to eliminate the gun show loophole in the Brady Bill. Some of us also hoped for additional action to limit gun purchases to one a month and to fund research into smart guns. But as the summer wore on and attention turned to the budget, the steam went out of these efforts.

This is an absolute failure of national leadership. And it's a classic example of how sound public policy, to implement a comprehensive and balanced strategy on gun safety, can be squandered by fragmented agendas - the Republicans playing to the NRA, and some of the Democratic leadership who appear only concerned about jeopardizing what they believe are a half dozen swing seats.

I actually think they're reading it wrong. If this is a swing issue, it's on the side of more reasonable controls.

And this isn't just about urban streets. Columbine and most of the other school shootings have occurred in suburban communities and public opinion has dramatically shifted on this issue - even in Colorado, which is viewed a pro-gun state.

A recent survey in Colorado conducted by the University of Colorado at Denver shows that 73% of Coloradans support a total ban on the sale of any assault weapon and 78% support expanding background checks to all sellers of firearms...this includes gun shows and sales by private individuals. 80% support gun licensing and 76% are in favor of gun registration.

This and other surveys nationwide show that the public is at a very different place in their thinking about gun safety than the leadership in Congress.

The federal government has an important role to play. Because we can do in Denver all the things that we've done, but we need the federal government's assistance to prevent the flow of weapons coming from other jurisdictions.

If the proposal for expanding background checks is to achieve its objective, it has to apply to all sales, including transactions on the Internet and through classified ads.

If the current ban on assault weapons is to be effective, it needs to be extended and broadened to include assault weapons already in circulation, like the criminal's weapon of choice, the TEC-9 that was used in Columbine.

Criminals aren't the only people that kill people...innocent law abiding citizens with guns kill people...LET ME SHARE MY OWN EXAMPLE...

I implore the journalists of the National Press Club -- keep the gun issue alive in your newspapers and in your radio and TV news reports. The lives you save, may be your own and the lives of your families.

**Success of American Cities**

The success of American cities has been unmistakable. It is no coincidence that these changes have been driven by a strong and vibrant national economy...a national economy that urban America has itself led to build and sustain...and an economy which is wisely leveraged by American cities to create lasting wealth and benefits for the broadest number of citizens in the history of the United States.

In Denver, we revitalized our downtown by fundamentally changing our allocation of resources to establish a residential population, with sweeping changes in zoning and housing financing and by maintaining our downtown as the hub of the regional transportation system.

With these and other common sense strategies, we've been able to leverage the strong economy to achieve some dramatic results including reducing the vacancy rate in our office buildings from 30% to 7%; reversing a 25-year decline in our population; diversifying our economy; achieving a 24-hour downtown; tripling our general fund balance; upgrading our bond rating to AA+, and reducing violent crime by more than 44%.

My point is that the candidates for President must understand that the American economy is not being driven by the federal government or the 50 states for that matter – a study that was recently completed by Standard and Poors/DRI for the USCM and the National Association of Counties found that 317 “metropolitan economic engines” are comprised of core cities, neighboring suburbs, surrounding counties and the businesses within them which account for approximately four out of every five Americans.

Metro economies quite often exceed entire state economies...in fact, this study showed the economic output of the 10 largest city/county metro areas in the U.S. exceeds the combined output of 31 states. And it is the mayors that are the CEOs of their cities – they are the ones promoting economic development, building arenas, enticing businesses and creating jobs.

And while much progress has been made...the health and welfare of the American people has never been stronger...the “rising tide” of a strong economy has not benefited all Americans.

The challenges cities face at the turn of the century requires that the fundamental relationship between the federal government and our cities must be restructured. Restructured in a manner that produces a true partnership...that will allow for federal resources and expertise to be creatively packaged at the community level...by city officials and delivered to Americans with maximum efficiencies...maximum benefits...and maximum impacts.

And so today, my message is this:

Al, Bill, George W., John and even Steve...the mayors have a plan also...and I encourage you to embrace this plan as part of your campaign agendas and I encourage the public and the media to begin to recognize that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is a century of cities.

**A New Agenda for America**

The agenda I propose is as follows:

**I.) Make federal government more responsive to local priorities and metro economies**

Establish within the White House a Domestic Policy Czar who has sweeping authority over the federal agencies to promote the economic well being of our metro areas and provide regulatory flexibility to local governments to meet critical local needs.

Streamline existing federal funding to provide direct flexible resources to local governments with increased local accountability.

**II.) Help local leaders make America even safer.**

Help us to enforce existing laws so that those committing crimes with guns and those that are acting as straw purchasers for criminals and kids are held accountable and face the risk of serious punishment.

Support comprehensive gun safety measures to help keep guns away from kids, the mentally ill and criminals.

Increase flexible funding to support local police officers and law enforcement technology and equipment and provide incentives so local police agencies don't feel compelled to sell used police weapons back to the public.

Increase efforts to stop drugs from entering this nation and attack illegal drugs being produced within our borders – look to the mayors for assistance.

Assure that every person has access to drug treatment on demand.

Support drug free prisons and drug treatment for prisoners and require that every prisoner pass a drug test prior to release back onto our streets and in our neighborhoods.

**III.) Invest in kids and public schools**

Support world class teachers in world class public schools including physical infrastructure improvements, technology investments, class size reductions, increased school safety and a new focus on teacher training and recruitment.

Support an investment in early childhood education and before- and after-school opportunities.

**IV.) Confront America's affordable housing crisis**

Increase housing programs for the elderly to meet the needs of our aging population.

Support safety and security improvements for all public housing residents and the upgrading of public housing to decent and safe standards.

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Support a partnership with the private sector to invest in technology and skills development to help public housing residents become self sufficient in the modern information-based economy.

Increase flexible block-grant housing and community development investment targeted in blemished neighborhoods to take advantage of untapped domestic markets and leverage private investment.

Dramatically increase the resources for public/private, mixed-income housing programs that discourage the concentration of poverty.

Support a comprehensive program to end hunger and homelessness over the next decade which attacks the problems of mental illness, drug addiction and housing shortages.

### **V.) Promote arts, cultural and sporting Amenities**

Promote the arts as a national and international economic asset and increase support for national and local arts, culture, and humanities institutions.

### **VI.) Direct tax cuts to challenged neighborhoods and working families**

Support a package of tax incentives to assist first-time homebuyers and help leverage private investment in distressed and older areas to create jobs, preserve housing, and create neighborhood businesses.

Ensure that any significant tax cut predominately benefits low and middle income working families.

Respect state and local tax laws and inhibit the ability to collect revenues from electronic commerce.

### **VII.) Help communities grow smarter by recycling America's land and preserving open space and parks**

Take actions to help eradicate the more than 600,000 brownfields sites throughout the nation and restore these properties to productive use and helping to preserve farmland and other open spaces.

Support tax incentives and changes to federal inheritance laws to encourage the preservation of farm and forest land, and similar measures to encourage families to live in existing communities.

### **VIII.) Build a competitive workforce for the global economy**

Build a competitive workforce for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy by providing directly to local governments flexible block grant funding to be used in partnership with the private sector to reduce the skills gap, link workers to regional jobs, address youth unemployment, tap into the central city labor force, and help move people from welfare to work.

Continue the transition from welfare to work by investing in childcare, health care, food support, and transportation assistance and insist that states commit their existing federal resources to these priorities.

**IX.) Modernize our infrastructure while protecting our environment for future generations**

Create a new 21<sup>st</sup> century high-speed rail system for America.

Ensure that taxpayers know how states are expending federal funds in the area of transportation.

Increase investment in new rail projects to modernize and diversify our metropolitan transportation systems to reduce congestion and improve economic productivity.

Expand and invest in the nation's airports and ports, critical assets for our nation's future productivity and growth.

Invest in the nations water and wastewater infrastructure, including tax incentives and other measures to advance private/public partnerships in meeting these capital needs.

Protect our nation's future drinking water supply through the preservation of open spaces and farmland.

**X.) Increase access to affordable health care**

Support a program to ensure that affordable health insurance is available for every child, backed by a stronger federal-local partnership to make families aware that such benefits are available.

Increase prescription drug coverage for senior and low-income citizens through Medicare and Medicaid payment systems.

Assess the adequacy of mental health care currently available from the public sector and private insurance system and work with public and private sector partners to increase the availability of quality, affordable mental health care.

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