



The United States Conference of Mayors

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THE U.S. CONFERENCE OF MAYORS GATHER FOR 77TH ANNUAL MEETING:

Mayors Highlight Economic Challenges in Cities Across the Nation

Providence, RI – Led by Conference President Miami Mayor Manny Diaz and host Mayor David Cicilline, mayors from across the country gathered today for the opening of the 77th Annual Meeting of The U.S. Conference of Mayors, the largest annual gathering of North American mayors.

Funding for cities from the Federal Recovery Act tops the agenda for the mayors, whose communities are bearing the brunt of the economic recession and are forced to make significant cost-cutting measures in response to budget shortfalls.

To illustrate depth of the crisis, mayors released a survey of more than 90 cities that points to the causes of shortfalls, such as reduced property tax revenue due to lowered property values, and significant increases in pension and health benefit costs. In response, mayors are taking cost-cutting steps ranging from hiring freezes, the elimination of positions, layoffs and wage and benefit cuts to deferred maintenance and cuts in services to residents.

At the opening press conference, Conference President Diaz said, "This report points to the difficult decisions that mayors make every day to balance their budgets and while maintaining basic quality of life for residents. We are here today to discuss what is happening in our nation's cities and to come up with solutions that we can pass on to the Administration."

"This report also shows that cities and metro areas comprise 90% of our gross domestic products. Clearly, the nation's prosperity is very much dependent on the health of cities and metro areas."

Mayors are pleased that the stimulus plan includes funding for their Energy Efficiency and Conservation and Block Grant – the largest allocation of funding to cities in the Recovery Act – which will help support efforts for climate protection in cities around the country. Already, 950 have signed onto the Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement which pledges that mayors will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in their cities by 2012.

Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels, who has led the green effort in the mayors' organization said, "The economic crisis provides an opportunity to re-create America," said Mayor Greg Nickels, incoming president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors. "We must tackle global warming, health care, and transportation in new and innovative ways. The nation's mayors stand ready to work with the federal government to ensure that we get the most bang for our investments by creating jobs and building a stronger nation." Nickels will be sworn in as the 67th President of The U.S. Conference of Mayors at the culmination of the meeting.

To further promote the greening of America's cities, mayors announced competitive awards for innovative green jobs programs and for cutting-edge climate protection initiatives. In addition, the Conference released a report that analyzes how transportation dollars under the Recovery Act are spent and whether cities and metropolitan areas are getting their fair share based on their economic output. A second report highlights mayors' efforts to build/maintain sustainable infrastructure.

Other highlights of the meeting include sessions on illegal guns and gun violence, energy independence, education and the 2010 Census. Over the coming days, mayors will debate and vote on national policy recommendations to forward to Congress and the new Administration.

Host Mayor David Cicilline said, "This is a critical time for cities and for Mayors. Not since the great Depression have we faced such significant economic challenges. Given these difficult economic times, it is even more important to develop approaches that will enable us to provide and maintain services for our residents, create jobs and cities and residents are safe. There must be a shared sense of responsibility among all parties for the future health and prosperity of our cities."

Vice President Joe Biden and several members of President Barack Obama's cabinet were previously confirmed to join the mayors' conference, but have since canceled at the request of the International Firefighters Union because of issues between the city of Providence and the local firefighters union. This action by the Obama Administration is unprecedented in the 77-year history of the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

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