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Mayor's message: Providence, a proud "City of Genius"

September 11, 2008 - Rhode Island

In challenging economic times, it's often easy to miss opportunities that lie before us. Cities across America - and especially the Northeast - are coping with rising fuel bills, housing foreclosures and federal cuts outside of our control.

In Providence, we look closely at how we do business and how we can do it better. But we also know balancing a budget is more than simple cuts and prudent management; it's also about seizing opportunities to generate new revenue, and strengthen business, families and neighborhoods.

For older cities such as ours, the same urgency with which we debate budgets must be used to expand our economy and accelerate the growth of good-paying jobs. It means strong, active partnerships among all sectors, and planning for what lies ahead: after all, a healthy economy is in everyone's best interest.

In Providence, we enjoy world-class universities and colleges, hospitals, health care facilities and research centers - a vibrant knowledge-based economy with plenty of room to grow. Aligning those opportunities with a workforce eager for good stable jobs and a national economy in need of triage, moves us, in earnest, today. Currently, under the leadership of the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce and Providence Foundation, we've taken steps to allow that expansion to occur by inventorying our assets and creating a unified agenda to guide us in expanding that economy.

This is proudly a city of genius, with scores of talented researchers, scientists and businessmen. A cursory look at history reveals our ties to nearly a dozen MacArthur Awards, several Nobel Prizes, Academy of Arts & Sciences awards, Guggenheim Fellowships and a TR35-Innovation award. Our mission is to support folks like these in developing and commercializing their discoveries and designs. Through new incubators, 'dormcubators' and high quality 'wet' laboratories; angel investments and engaged stakeholders, we all become part of this 21st Century economy.

Whether it's the RISD graduate making first-class shoes for high-end New York City and European markets, or the Brown-affiliated research doctor creating AIDS vaccines for international use, or the industrial artists creating functional artwork for streetscapes, or the architects whose innovative design has led to a zero-energy kindergarten at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Village, there is genius within Providence and we can tap it.

At the same time, we are working with the US Economic Development Administration to fund a master economic plan for Providence, which will 'crosswalk' all of our studies and provide us with a clear, cogent and concrete action plan to expand jobs and businesses today.

With our proximity to other great cities such as Boston, New York and Washington; our wealth of infrastructure; ample housing stock, and relatively low cost of living, we have the tools to invite expansion - and not just of Providence's economy but of the region as a whole.

I applaud the great commitment of the Chamber and Foundation, and others like them. We cannot stop to do this important work but must change systems as we go along. I believe this will be the

year that vision starts to become a reality.

David Cicilline is the mayor of Providence.

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