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63 YEARS

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Mayor's message: 77th Conference of Mayors

July 08, 2009 - Rhode Island

Last month, I had the enormous honor of welcoming hundreds of this nation's mayors and their staffs and families, and dozens of major business sponsors, to the city of Providence, as we hosted the 77th annual meeting of the United States Conference of Mayors - the largest annual gathering of North American mayors. It was the first-ever annual conference in Providence and the first outside of a major destination city.

This annual gathering of the country's leading chief executives offers a summit for problem-solving and best practices, since we are most often the front line of defense on matters affecting communities and residents. Importantly, it offers cities a chance to showcase all that is great about their community, to encourage future visits, economic development and other partnerships.

At that conference, we analyzed and heard from experts on unemployment and growing our economy, education, transportation, housing and foreclosure, energy and environmental sustainability, homeland security and public safety, and how to make the best use of the Federal Recovery Act funding.

We also enjoyed the moment for Providence to take another bow, as we were awarded our second US Conference of Mayors Livable City Honorable Mention award, for our model Providence After School Alliance (PASA,) and a \$374,000 US Conference of Mayors/Wal-Mart Foundation Green Jobs Training Grant -for jobs for local workers in the new economy.

Led by conference president Miami mayor Manny Diaz and myself, as its host mayor, the conference gave an important shot in the arm to Providence's economy.

Those who were in town, very likely saw many of these visiting mayors and staff walking along our city streets, in our restaurants, and shopping with local merchants. Organized bus and walking trips gave guests a chance to spend time and resources in Federal Hill, downtown, Wayland Sq. and the East Side, Roger Williams Park, along the waterfront and more. With Waterfire, trips to Federal Hill, shopping excursions and boat trips, there was plenty to keep our guests busy outside of the conference center. And while unable to quantify the financial impact of these thousand-plus visitors upon our city, we know it was in the millions.

As important is the long-term impression we made and the serious potential it holds for our economy. Regardless of the disturbances just outside of the Convention Center, the fact is, attendees of the conference couldn't get enough of our neighborliness and great restaurants, historic architecture and terrific shopping. They frequently mentioned to me and my staff just how beautiful our city was, and how incredibly helpful and friendly our residents and merchants were, and that they would be staying on a few days and returning for vacations, college trips and more.

The benefit of putting our best foot forward returns to every one of us, and the credit for being such great hosts is rightfully shared by all.

David Cicilline is the mayor of Providence.

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