

**Inaugural Remarks by Conference President  
Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa  
79th Annual Meeting, U.S Conference of Mayors**

**BALTIMORE, MD (June 20, 2011) - Please put your hands together for Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake and the people of Baltimore!**

**Thank you so much for your warmth and hospitality...**

**For taking us into your town and treating us - and feeding us - like family!**

**Baltimore has given so much to our country and our history.**

**The Star-Spangled Banner.**

**The fiction of Edgar Allen Poe.**

**Not to mention five seasons of The Wire!**

**It's fitting that we come here - to one of America's most historic cities - at this critical moment when so much is at stake for so many of our people.**

**I want to thank Tom Cochran and all the folks at the US Conference of Mayors for...**

**Fighting for the vast majority of Americans who silently depend on our metro economies for their lives and livelihoods...**

**And for reminding us that cities play a role in virtually everything that matters.**

**And of course, thanks to our outgoing president, Mayor Elizabeth Kautz of Burnsville, Minnesota.**

**Whether rescuing community development block grants from the chopping block...**

**Or carrying the urgent message of local leadership on global climate protection...**

**Mayor Kautz led the Conference with a tireless spirit and a no-nonsense attitude.**

**And, thanks to her HARD WORK, we are hitting the ground running in 2,011.**

**So, please, join me in a heart-felt thank you to Mayor - Elizabeth - Kautz!**

**Mayors, there is no greater compliment than the confidence of your colleagues.**

**It's my hope that in the year to come, we can grow even stronger - not just as a collection of mayors, but as a catalyst for change.**

**We need to lead the national conversation about what America must do to put our people back to work.**

**It's fitting we are meeting just a few miles outside of the Beltway - hopefully they can hear us all the way from Baltimore!**

**Because the thinking has got to change inside the Beltway bubble.**

**Our cities are far removed from the partisan paralysis and the philosophical abstractions debated in Washington.**

**Our mayors know better.**

**Our mayors know what a double-digit unemployment rate means - and the real pain our families suffer every single day.**

**As mayors, we can see the wreckage of the Great Recession all around us.**

**We have entire cities swamped by the mortgage crisis, whole neighborhoods left high and dry to blight and rot.**

**In community after community, we've seen families cut adrift when an anchor employer pulls up stakes for \$2-dollar-a-day labor abroad.**

**The stock market is back to twelve thousand - that's good news for some people.**

**But mayors know better.**

**We know what's good for Wall Street isn't necessarily good for Main Street.**

**By and large, throughout this crisis, it's been our nation's mayors responding creatively as first-responders always do:**

**Manning the front lines, making the most difficult choices in the toughest circumstances and working to protect the most vital services our people depend on for their daily lives - from streets to police to safe drinking water.**

**And as mayors, you and I have seen something else. We've seen how even in tragedy... in Tucson, Tuscaloosa and Joplin...**

**The worst calamities can bring out the best in our people.**

**We know what is possible when a community comes together for a common purpose without rancor or party label.**

**If you hire a legislator to talk, you hire a mayor to act. And the American people desperately need us to act now.**

**Mayors, this is our time. This is our time to lead.**

**We have to be willing to speak the truth and speak boldly with one voice.**

**And it starts with this truth: We have our work cut out for us.**

**But it would be wrong to ignore our critics and the obstacles in our way.**

**We've all experienced firsthand the campaign to marginalize our cities.**

**We've seen it typecast on various news outlets.**

**But it's important to keep the debate rooted in some historic perspective.**

**It's an old story... part of an age-old debate that has always existed between the forces of Ruralism and the forces of Pluralism.**

**The "Ruralists" of course, found voice most famously in the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who called cities "the abyss of the human species."**

**It's a view that has always looked upon "city ways" with suspicion, casting our cities as unwelcoming clusters of "other people" who can't possibly be real Americans.**

**But the Pluralists always knew better.**

**They knew it from the start.**

**They knew cities were about the future.**

**They knew it from the first mud walls of the first city ever built, cities always stood as islands of civilization in a vast and unpredictable world.**

**Across the globe, cities rose as centers of trade, as crossroads of culture, as meccas of progress.**

**We owe our wealth to cities.**

**We owe our deepest values to the birth of democracy and civil society that sprung up in cities...**

**Where without the luxury of space, people learned to coexist...**

**Where they gave up the go-it-alone survival mentality in favor of a belief in a greater human enterprise.**

**In the 21st Century - our cities stand as our best hope for the future.**

**As our metro economies go, so goes America.**

**Our cities are not just the engine - they're the engine and the axles and the chassis and the door handles of the nation's economy!**

**Our metro areas generate some 90 percent of our gross domestic product.**

**Next year, they'll account for 94 percent of new jobs.**

**If Los Angeles were a country, we would be the 18th largest economy in the world - bigger than Taiwan or Saudi Arabia.**

**Philadelphia's economy is larger than Argentina.  
Houston's is bigger than Venezuela.**

**It's time to come together. It's time to say the era of the city versus the suburb is over.**

**We can no longer afford to see our competition at our city limits.**

**Not when our nation's economic future depends so clearly on the growth of vibrant economic and cultural zones strong enough to compete across the globe with Shanghai and London.**

**We know it's no longer Chicago. It's Chicagoland.**

**LA isn't so much a city as a regional powerhouse, connected by the nation's busiest seaport, spanning a media market of 18 million people.**

**And across the country, our mayors get it. Seattle and King County aren't competing.**

**They're marketing jointly to create jobs - and they've teamed up with their neighbors in Canada to win the battle of the Pacific Rim.**

**I'll tell you where we need to start.**

**We've got to break the old Washington mindset with its fixation on funding states at the expense of our metro economies.**

**We have to force the question. Where - would - we - be without our cities?**

**As Tom Cochran likes to say: If you take New Orleans out of Louisiana, what have you got? You've got East Dakota!**

**In 2008, our top ten metro areas approached the combined economic output of the People's Republic of China.**

**Put another way, New York, Los Angeles and Chicago's economic output are each greater than that of 44 other individual states, roughly equivalent to the economy of France.**

**Yet we keep shortchanging our cities.**

**It's simple.**

**If we fail to keep our metro economies competitive, the national economy cannot and will not thrive.**

**We need to take our message to the American people.**

**The last thing our recovery needs is another punch - in - the - gut.**

**Today we released the 2,011 jobs forecast for the nation's 363 metro economies.**

**While we can see encouraging evidence of a dawning recovery...**

**With 88 percent of our metros projected to experience some job growth in 2,011...**

**We know the recovery has been uneven at best.**

**Nearly a third of our cities will continue to languish through December with double-digit joblessness.**

**What's worse, for almost 50 metropolitan areas this will be a lost decade.**

**Manufacturing centers like Detroit and Toledo aren't expected to fully recover jobs until 2,020 and beyond.**

**This recovery is going to be a long haul, and we need all the help we can get from Washington.**

**So, Mayors, we can't afford to be timid.**

**We need to tell the Congress loud and clear - at least observe any good doctor's Hippocratic Oath: Do no harm.**

**With anemic job projections, the last thing we should do is anything that will slow a speedy recovery.**

**First and foremost, this means never never play politics with the full faith and credit of the United States of America!**

**It's time to stop the games.**

**It's time for Congress to get on with the serious business of legislating short and long-term solutions to our jobs crisis.**

**Our cities continue to live with the threat that we could lose \$4 billion in this Congress if they cut the CDBG program.**

**When they cut CDBG, they are balancing the budget on the backs of working people - the very families struggling hardest to stay afloat.**

**In too many of our cities, job growth is being choked by traffic and saddled by a sagging infrastructure.**

**We have bus and rail systems at capacity.**

**Our aging roads and bridges are undermining our ability to meet the nation's future economic output.**

**We need to say now is the time to put millions of people to work by making long overdue investments in our future infrastructure needs.**

**With China investing in transportation at over three times our current rate - and even footing the bill to build out railways across Europe - we need to pick up the shovels and pick up the pace.**

**We need to tell Congress to press the button on America Fast Forward...**

**A bipartisan financing plan that can create nearly a million jobs...**

**And put people to work today by allowing local governments to creatively leverage local dollars for roads and rail.**

**And we need to make the broader case.**

**With our economic heart faintly beating in our cities, tomorrow's infrastructure investments must be more metropolitan-focused, more forward-looking, and more environmentally sustainable.**

**It's time to prioritize spending on our pressing metropolitan transportation infrastructure needs.**

**We need to demand investments that connect people to jobs.**

**We don't need another Bridge to Nowhere, that connects the ducks to the geese.**

**We have to stand up for our unemployed workers!**

**We have to be willing to say, with historic joblessness, it makes no sense whatsoever for the House to repeal workforce training programs.**

**Mayors need to stand for the millions who will see their unemployment checks disappear at the end of the year with no prospects in sight.**

**We need to stand for a new world order in federal spending.  
It's time to bring our investments back home.**

**We can't be building roads and bridges in Baghdad and Kandahar, and not Baltimore and Kansas City!**

**We can't keep squeezing non-discretionary, non-defense spending and make the investments we need as a nation to compete.**

**Not when we when we spend \$2.1 million on defense every single minute.**

**Not after nearly \$1.2 trillion spent and over 6,000 lives lost in Iraq and Afghanistan.**

**In 1971, the US Conference of Mayors proudly went on record calling for a withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam.**

**It's time for mayors to once again speak up and join the call for an end to the war in Afghanistan.**

**We support our men and women in uniform.  
These brave soldiers have served our country proudly.  
Now we must honor them by addressing our pressing needs at home!**

**We must invest in our own economy and create jobs for them to come home to.**

**And we must invest in our next generation.**

**And that begins by taking on the one issue we all know will ultimately determine our future course as a nation.**

**Let's make this the year that the Conference of Mayors takes the lead on the cutting issue of education reform.**

**Whether we are Democrats or Republicans...**

**Whether we have children in our public schools or not ...**

**Whether, as mayors, we have the responsibility of running the school district...**

**We all have skin in the game.**

**We know the future of our cities more than anything else depends on providing every single child with access to a quality education.**

**In Los Angeles, even without mayoral control...**

**We've been able to elect and reelect a pro-reform majority on the school board...**

**We've passed one of the most transformative school choice resolutions in the country...**

**That gives parents a vote and a voice in their child's education.**

**And with the Mayor's Partnership, we've taken over the lowest-performing schools in the most underserved neighborhoods.**

**Every day, we disprove the doubters by demonstrating that it IS possible to turn around failing schools and bring opportunity to urban campuses.**

**Right here in Baltimore and around the country, in places like New Haven, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Boston, and Detroit... mayors are leading the way.**

**Teachers and school districts are coming together to give students and teachers what they need:**

**Higher expectations and greater accountability.**

**A REAL evaluation system, based on multiple measures that doesn't stamp every teacher with the same satisfactory grade...**

**A tenure process that teachers can be proud of, where tenure is earned and comes with a significant salary increase.**

**And an end to the notion that says the last hired should be the first fired. This is an absurd and archaic policy and it's costing us far too many excellent teachers.**

**We need to stand up and be counted.**

**We need to support the expansion of high-performing public charter schools.**

**And we need to take the Race to the Top program local and allow cities and districts to qualify where they lack a willing state partner.**

**Mayors have done it before. And mayors can - and must - do it again.**

**We can do it if we remember our history.**

**The year was 1932. 14 million Americans were unemployed.**

**Veterans were marching on Washington. Homeowners everywhere were under water.**

**Responding to the call of the nation's mayors, Congress enacted a \$300 million federal assistance program, the first in the nation's history.**

**A few months later, they came together to write the charter for the US Conference of Mayors.**

**Mayors led us out of the Great Depression.**

**Mayors led on civil rights**

**Mayors led when the AIDS epidemic hit.**

**Mayors stood with Mandela when it wasn't popular.**

**There is a magic when mayors stand together. Let's unleash that magic.**

**Let's pull together. Let's send a message to Washington.**

**It's time to stop playing politics and start doing the hard work of the American people.**

**It's time to start investing in our future again.**

**It's time to put our people back to work.**

**It's time to bring our troops home.**

**It's time for our nation's mayors to take the lead.**

**This is our time to lead. Thank you all.**