



NEWS The United States Conference of Mayors

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For Immediate Release
July 18, 2005

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**Mayor Beverly O'Neill
President, The U.S. Conference of Mayors
Address to the National Association of Counties**

Honolulu, HI – *It is a pleasure for me to be here with you today. I want to congratulate your outgoing President Angelo Kyle for a great year, for his leadership, and for his true commitment to the partnership between National Association of Counties and the Conference of Mayors.*

I look forward to working with your President-Elect Bill Hansel, First Vice President Colleen Landkamer and Second Vice President Eric Coleman.

I also want to recognize your Executive Director Larry Naake, who works so closely with our Executive Director Tom Cochran, who is here with me today.

I have come here with two thoughts I would like to share.

First, we all just witnessed the unconscionable attacks on the people of London.

I know that NACo has a strong partnership with counties in Great Britain, and we have been working closely with London Mayor Ken Livingstone and have expressed our support to him and his citizens.

These attacks remind us all that we continue to live in a dangerous world.

Sometimes, due to the inherent optimistic spirit in all Americans, and to our desire to return to what we consider “normalcy”, we tend to forget that the world we knew before September 11 no longer exists.

*For example, despite the growing number of terror attacks on bus and rail systems worldwide, such as the attacks last year in Madrid killing 191 and in Moscow killing 41, the Senate appropriations committee **CUT** transit security funding for bus and rail by \$50 million prior to the London attacks.*

And following the London attacks and a strong lobbying effort, the Senate still rejected floor amendments to increase bus and rail security, which remains cut by \$50 million. This really boggles the mind.

Sometimes our federal leaders seem to take the view that the issue of homeland security is too large to impact, too complicated to consider, or too costly to fully address.

That is completely wrong.

Every day, we, at the city and county, spend a majority of our government resources on providing public safety through police, fire and emergency management services. We do this because we know that there is no quality of life unless there is life itself, free from crime and violence, safe from fire and disasters.

I know that our nation has made significant progress on increasing homeland security since September 11, and that our federal-local partnership is much stronger with more resources, better information sharing, and a greater level of general communication.

But I fervently hope that the tragic attacks in London serve as a reminder that we must not settle for “good enough.”

We must re-commit ourselves to doing all that we can to make sure our city and county citizens can get on that bus, step into that train, go to work, cheer at that sporting event, and just go about their daily lives knowing that everything that can be done is being done to make them safe from terror.

The second thought I want to share is this: I truly believe that the nation’s local-elected leaders – coming from counties, suburbs, exurbs and urban areas, have the power to unite our nation and build communities that take us into the future with hope and opportunity.

The issues we deal with are not red state or blue state; are not African-American, Asian-American, White, or Latino; are not male or female; and do not respect political boundaries.

For example, on the issue of transportation security, and transportation in general, 32 million times every weekday, city and county residents get on commuter trains, transfer to subways or buses, go to work, and seek entertainment in our larger cities.

And vice-versa, center-city residents are increasingly commuting out to more suburban cities and counties for their jobs.

I cannot over-emphasize the critical importance of public transportation to our local economies and the long-term vitality of our cities and counties. That is why we must invest in both transportation mobility and security.

We are all in this together.

And take the issue of gangs. National experts are now documenting what we already know, that violent gangs are spreading to all parts of our nation, and communities large and small.

We held a special gangs summit this past spring at which officials from Fairfax County, Virginia, Montgomery County, Maryland and Los Angeles County, California told us of the spread of gangs and the threat to more and more their residents.

And the nature of these gangs is changing, with many being formed by new immigrants, and with growing concern about links to international terrorism. NACo has done a fantastic job focusing national attention on the issue of methamphetamines, and its impact on suburban and rural communities. We also know that a majority of the meth in this nation is coming across our borders from Mexican super-labs, with much of it brought to us by gangs and other criminal organizations.

We must strengthen our nation's resolve to fight the scourge of all illegal drugs, and to prevent young people from turning to gangs and violence so that we save children and families from destruction and build healthy communities.

Again, I say, cities and counties are in this together.

But sometimes, I don't think Washington recognizes the linkage of our metro economies and cities and counties.

Take our continuing campaign to save the Community Development Block Grant, created more than 30 years ago by the Conference of Mayors, NACo and other organizations. I think that when staff at OMB came up with the idea of eliminating the program, they saw it as just another big city, anti-poverty program.

But we showed how CDBG impacts communities of all sizes, and in all parts of the nation.

This fact was demonstrated by the overwhelming, bi-partisan support cities and counties garnered from Congress in defense of CDBG.

As we continue to fight for full funding, we have strong support from many members who do not have a long history of focusing on our priorities, but who know that CDBG is a partnership which strengthens working families, builds affordable housing, and creates jobs.

We are all in this together.

We must continue to innovate at the local level, and then push our state and federal governments to support our innovation.

We must focus on the big, difficult issues like education, energy, transportation and taxes that will impact our communities for decades to come.

And we must continue to think bigger than just our particular jurisdictions, and recognize that we are not really competing among ourselves, but with economic forces around the world.

We are in this together, and together, we will build strong communities for a strong America.

Thank you very much.

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