Future Transit Funding Threatened in House Bill

By Kevin McCarty

More than two years after the federal surface transportation law first expired, Congressional leaders are shifting their full attention to renewing this law, with the full Senate and House scheduled to debate their respective proposals (S. 1813 and H.R. 7) during the week of February 13.

Efforts to advance final legislation this year received a big boost following a Congressional agreement breaking a longstanding impasse, clearing the way for renewal of the nation’s aviation law. After nearly two dozen extensions and one shutdown, the Senate approved the “FAA Modernization and Reform Act” (HR 658) February 6 on a 75-20 vote, sending a final aviation bill to the President for his signature. On February 3, the House passed the measure 248–169, which authorizes programs and activities of the Federal Aviation Administration through Fiscal Year 2015, including authorizing Airport Improvements Program (AIP) grants at a $3.35 billion annual level.

This momentum will soon be tested, as the House and Senate both prepare for floor action on their competing surface transportation renewal plans. While each chamber proposes spending about the same amount of money on

See TRANSIT on page 9

Villaraigosa Receives Top Honor for Public Service from NALEO

Left to right, NALEO Educational Fund Chairman Juan C. Zapata, NALEO Educational Fund Board Member Lucille Roybal-Allard, 2012 Edward R. Roybal Award for Outstanding Public Service Recipient USCM President Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa, and NALEO President Sylvia R. Garcia. See STORY on page 6
February 13, 2012

There were 18 Presidential Debates in 2011. There have been seven this year, making a total of 25. There are four already scheduled that will take place through March.

Mesa, Arizona, the home of our Second Vice President Mayor Scott Smith, welcomes the next debate on February 22 in the Mesa Arts Center.

By the end of March, we will have had 29 presidential debates. There is a concern that the subject of the debates have been deoided and bereft of the issues of our people, the 84 percent of the American people who live in our metropolitan areas.

Rather, it’s been rather vicious and somewhat personal. Even when some of the persons in the audience have asked questions about housing, etc., there are no rational approaches offered to show us where the candidates stand today and what they would offer as solutions if they were to take the oath next January.

It is our hope that as the debates go forward and as the Republican primaries move toward more metro-urban/suburban states, our city people issues will be addressed. In the past on the Democratic side and the Republican side, and even with the Independent candidate, we have been successful at times in pushing our metro city issues forward. President Nixon’s general revenue sharing plan providing over $6.5 billion for flexible use to local governments was widely accepted by all mayors. Congress initially rejected it, McGovern rejected it, but Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley, New York City Mayor John Lindsay, New Orleans Mayor Moon Landrieu and other mayors got McGovern to change his mind and his platform that year. And I, along with the distinguished African American Woman Mayor Jessie Rattley of Newport News, met with the top team of independent Presidential candidate George Wallace to get his support. If united, we can get the bipartisan political job done.

We have no way of knowing where the general election will take us once the Republican nominee comes swinging out of Tampa in August, and in September when President Obama comes forward and starts his march to November from the Bank of America Stadium in Charlotte.

But here’s what we do know and it is looking us straight in the face: President Obama, as Commander in Chief, working with Secretary of Defense Panetta are ending the war in Iraq.

Last week, President Obama declared that we must bring the money we are spending in Iraq home and half of it should go to deficit reduction and the other half of it should go to nation building here at home. That’s where we come in. That’s our opening.

We have to ask ourselves, where is The United States Conference of Mayors when the President of the United States challenges us to support and implement the long deferred and needed nation building plan for America to be funded with half of the money coming home from long war in Iraq? We have to come forward with a smart nation building plan that would put the war money in investments to make our daily lives more pleasant, more productive, and beneficial to our people.

Last June at our Annual Meeting in Baltimore, Conference President Villaraigosa led the nation’s mayors to support an end to the Iraq war and he coupled his support and eventually he got the majority of the mayors to support investments toward nation building in the post Iraq war era.

Since June, the Villaraigosa call and the Conference of Mayors resolve has moved forward and we are now in the Presidential campaign year that will take us again to the Presidential ballot box nine months from now.

As we gather our message for the Presidential candidates when President Villaraigosa convenes our 80th Annual Meeting on June 13, we will hear Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa again with a more specific charge and help design a plan for how the post Iraq war nation building money will be invested.

Conference President Antonio Villaraigosa will provide the American mayoral response this June in Orlando at our 80th Annual Meeting. Then, Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter will take the mayors nation building plan forward. Our Vice President Mesa Mayor Scott Smith, a Republican, will be beside him with strong support. And we will have all mayors supporting our USA Mayors Nation Building Plan as we go through the general election and beyond.

The United States Conference of Mayors gave its first Award for Distinguished Public Service, our highest award, to George Marshall in The White House presented by President Truman in 1949. The award was given from USA mayors to General Marshall for his leadership in directing the USA national heroic and massive rebuild-
By Allentown Mayor Ed Pawlowski

This past July [2011], I had the privilege of traveling to Haiti and work with the mayor of Carrefour in his rebuilding efforts. Carrefour is adjacent to Port-a-Prince, has a population of over 600,000 people, and was at the epicenter of the earthquake that caused mass destruction throughout Haiti in 2010 leaving over 200,000 dead and three million homeless.

A year after the quake's devastating effects had fallen from the headlines, the country and city lay in significant disrepair. My desire was to do something to help. After speaking to the mayor, he had two major requests; one revolved around sanitation and his need for a garbage truck and the other centered on recreation. As I drove from the airport to Carrefour, I quickly understood why a garbage truck was needed. Haiti has no visible sanitation policy and pile upon pile of garbage burns openly in the streets. Thanks to the generosity of the Waste Management Corporation, I was able to secure a used garbage hauler that the mayor is using to vigorously clean the streets of Carrefour of trash.

The second request was not so evident to me at first. With the many needs that existed in Carrefour, why request a playground? As the team assembled the donated equipment from PlayWorld Systems, the answer became clear: the power of play and the impact it can have in a community and on a child's life is profound. I had later come to find that throughout the entire country of Haiti, there were only three or four actual playgrounds for children. This one playground would serve the entire city of Carrefour. Through the sheer misery that exists in the daily life of these children and their families, that one playground brought joy. To see that joy manifest on a child's face when using a swing for the first time is a sight that is transformational to one's soul.

This is why I'm reaching out to you, my fellow mayors, asking you to help. Help bring that sense of joy to children in some of the poorest cities on the globe. Consider donating your used play equipment to an organization called Kids Around the World.

Kids Around the World (KIDS) is a 501(c)3 organization that builds playgrounds for children in communities devastated by poverty or natural disaster. For the past 15 years, they have built playgrounds in more than 35 different countries. This has taken KIDS into many countries in Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe, as well as Haiti (before and after the major earthquake damage), Thailand after the tsunami, and our own Gulf Coast after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.

Recently, they have been "recycling" playgrounds donated to them for children in underprivileged areas. They remove the equipment, refurbish it as necessary and then ship it overseas to other countries, where children are waiting — but they need your help. The demand for these "recycled" playgrounds has increased and they need more. If you are aware of a playground that is being replaced or removed in your city, please consider donating the equipment to KIDS.

KIDS is fully insured and can offer you a certificate of insurance, plus they provide a liability waiver that protects you from claims during the onsite removal, and extends to future claims after the equipment has been reinstalled in another country. None of these playgrounds will be installed in the United States. Once they have reinstalled the equipment, they send you a picture of the children.... enjoying your gift of play!

Not all playgrounds can be refurbished effectively, so while KIDS will do all they can to accept playgrounds that are badly needed, there will be some they have to decline. All they ask is for us to consider them and offer them the chance. They will then find a way to remove the equipment and have it brought to one of their facilities.

Let your old, used play equipment bring joy to children in need. Consider donating it to KIDS. If you have any questions or have used equipment to donate, please do not hesitate to call them at 815-229-8731.

Thank you for your help.
Creating a Green Legacy for Our Future

By Westland Mayor William R. Wild

As mayor, I remain committed to providing a high-quality-of-life for my constituents and while Michigan has suffered a recession, I continue to actively seek opportunities to create a thriving community. In 2009, Westland adopted Mission Green, a program designed to promote sustainable living while also encouraging our citizens to incorporate environmentally best practices into their daily lives.

One inventive – Westland Mission Green program, curbside recycling, has saved the city several hundred thousand dollars each year on landfill costs, recycling over one million pounds of trash annually. This program has neighboring communities, as well as cities around the nation, contacting us to find out how they can establish a similar program. In this recycling program, Westland partners with a group called Recycle Bank, a National Rewards Program that awards participants with discounts to be used at area retailers. Because this program is easy and rewarding, both economically and environmentally, it became an instant success, with 90 percent of Westland residents participating in the recycling program within the first six months, nearly doubling our recycling intake. In the first year alone $6-15 million was awarded to participating residents to inject back into the Westland economy. As the program progresses, all city buildings, businesses, apartment buildings and condominium complexes will be, or are, a part of curbside pickup and the rewards system as well.

Additionally, from the start, alternative sources of energy have been encouraged. Most notably, several police cars have been replaced with flex fuel vehicles, with the intention of eventually having a completely green fleet. I have also encouraged the conservation of energy by frequently sending residents e-newsletters containing energy-saving tips. Additionally, our efforts to decrease various forms of pollution have been remarkable. Specifically, our efforts to clean up Rouge River through storm water pollution prevention have had widespread effects on the local ecosystem and wildlife. Active community awareness and participation has also been encouraged in our green initiatives. For example, residents are encouraged to work as volunteers in the Westland DTE Community Garden, which serves to feed the homeless in our county through sustainable, local gardening practices.

More recently, the United States Department of Energy awarded Westland with an Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) in the amount of $731,100. With the goal of reducing our energy costs, the majority of the grant is being spent on municipal building retrofits of existing, low energy efficient heating and cooling equipment that was installed 25 or more years ago. The city expects to see approximately a 28 percent reduction in energy costs. This grant has also afforded us with a tremendous opportunity to continue our work with the community and businesses, providing seminars focused on energy saving strategies. Our first seminar was held February 1, giving the attendees an opportunity to learn more about low cost energy upgrades, operational energy cost savings, utility rebates and incentives, tax credits and deductions.

To honor the green achievements in Westland, I created two awards including the Mission Green Eco Friendly award and the Green Leadership Award. To date, we have honored seven individuals and businesses with the Mission Green Eco Friendly award and bestowed three Green Leadership Awards. These awards were created to inspire, educate and recognize those in the community who are taking proactive steps to protect the environment. One of our awards was presented to the owner of the Westland Colonial Village Apartments, Jeffery Spoon, for putting our city on the map as the first complex in the nation to install an electric vehicle charging station in January of 2011.

As a staunch supporter of numerous green initiatives and smart energy policy, Westland was honored to present United States Senator Carl Levin (MI), with our third Green Leadership award on January 13. As a proud owner of a Chevy Volt, the Senator’s visit to Westland included an opportunity plug-in the first Volt purchased by a Westland Citizen at the new charging station. It was certainly a proud day for the city.

If you have any questions, or would like to learn more about our Mission Green Programs, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

First Lady Michelle Obama Celebrates “Let’s Move” Anniversary

By Crystal D. Swann

As part of her campaign to battle childhood obesity, First Lady Michelle Obama visited the site of a future grocery store in Inglewood and spoke about the importance of bringing fresh food to disadvantaged communities. The market, which will open in April in an empty warehouse on South Prairie Avenue, is part of a statewide push to reduce obesity by attracting grocers to low-income neighborhoods and making healthy food more accessible. The First Lady was joined by Conference President Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Inglewood (CA) Mayor James Butts at the grocery store event.

First Lady Michelle Obama is on a national tour to celebrate the second year of her “Let’s Move” initiative to end childhood obesity within a generation. The initiative, which was pre-launched in January 2010 at The U.S. Conference of Mayors Winter Meeting, will celebrate its official two year anniversary on February 9.
Bloomberg, Menino Urge Common Sense Gun Law Reforms in Super Bowl Commercial

Super Bowl rivals New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino used a commercial during the broadcast to call on the nation to “do more to keep guns out of the hands of criminals.” The ad has had more than 60,000 views on YouTube. Bloomberg and Menino are the co-chairs of Mayors Against Illegal Guns. The commercial is available at www.MayorsAgainstIllegalGuns.org/superbowl. Following is its text: Bloomberg: Giants! Menino: Patriots! Bloomberg: Eli! Menino: Brady! Bloomberg: We don’t agree on much. Menino: It’s the PATRIOTIC thing to do. Bloomberg: And believe that America must do more to keep guns out of the hands of criminals. You know, more than 600 mayors agree on common sense reforms that would save lives. Menino: Add your voice. Bloomberg: Go to MayorsAgainstIllegalGuns.org. Menino: For example, the Red Sox! Bloomberg: Yankees! Menino: Beans! Bloomberg: Bagels! Menino: But we both support the Second Amendment. Bloomberg: We don’t agree on much. Menino: You can make a GIANT difference in our country.

APPLY NOW: City Livability Awards

By Jocelyn Bogen

With a wide range of programs eligible, The United States Conference of Mayors and Waste Management launched the mayor’s race for the honor of calling themselves a 2012 City Livability Awards Program winner. The program has begun with the mailing of the application and guidelines to mayors of cities of 30,000 or more. “For the past 32 years, the City Livability Awards Program has been one of the most competitive programs sponsored by The U.S. Conference of Mayors. Each year hundreds of mayors and their city governments submit applications with a wide range of programs to compete for the honor of calling themselves a City Livability Award winner. I would like to thank Waste Management, Inc. for their two decades of support in honoring and giving national attention to mayoral excellence. And it is through this partnership that we are able to continue to salute the mayors who have developed innovative and successful programs that improve the quality of life for their residents,” said Conference of Mayors President Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa.

For the past 22 years, Waste Management has partnered with the Conference of Mayors to honor mayors and their cities for outstanding programs that contribute to the quality of life for their citizens. Waste Management Chief Executive Officer David Steiner added, “Waste Management is the largest environmental solutions provider in North America, serving nearly 20 million municipal, commercial and industrial customers in the U.S., Canada, and Puerto Rico. We are developing waste solutions for a changing world. This includes not just disposal and recycling, but sustainability services that help customers achieve their green goals, including zerowaste. We are making investments in technologies that will change the way our waste is managed and that will extract the highest value from the materials that pass through our hands. The City Livability Awards is a reflection of our values and commitment – identifying new and innovative ideas that make our communities better places to live in.”

Participating cities will submit an initial application of 500 words, due on Friday, March 9 (deadline has been extended), which briefly describes their program and indicates when and why it was created, how it has improved the quality of life of the community, and why it is outstanding or innovative.

From these initial applications, about 20 finalist cities in each of two population categories will be selected. These finalists will then submit a more detailed application, due on April 27. An independent panel of judges will select the winners in May. Award winners will be announced in June at the 80th Annual Conference of Mayors in Orlando.

The 20 City Livability Awards are presented in two population categories – ten awards to cities of less than 100,000 people, ten for cities of 100,000 or more. Every municipality in the United States is eligible to nominate one or more city government programs in any policy area, regardless of whether the municipality has applied for or received a City Livability Award in previous years. All programs initiated by the city government are eligible, including those developed and implemented in cooperation with private sector and/or community group participation.

2012 CITY LIVABILITY TIME LINE

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 9</td>
<td>Initial Applications Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 23</td>
<td>Announcement of Finalist Cities</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 27</td>
<td>Finalists’ Applications Due</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2012</td>
<td>City Livability Awards Announced in Orlando at 80th Annual Conference of Mayors</td>
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At left, Boston Mayor Thomas Menino and New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg at the commercial shoot.
Mayor Villaraigosa Receives Top Honor for Public Service from National Association of Latino Elected Officials

By Evangelina Garcia

Conference of Mayors President Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa was honored for his public service from the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) in Washington (DC). Villaraigosa, who was presented with the 2012 Edward R. Roybal Award for Outstanding Public Leadership, delivered strong remarks focused on hot-button issues including immigration reform, education and Congressional inaction.

The mayor opened his remarks by thanking leaders of NALEO for their advocacy and leadership efforts over the past four decades, which have led to a change in the political landscape and more Latinos and Latinas serving on city councils and chair town boards than ever before.

At the top of his remarks, Villaraigosa said that last year, America reached an important milestone. For the first time in our country’s history, the numbers of white children and children of color being born were roughly equal. “This transformation causes some to talk about a clash of civilizations. They worry that our growing diversity makes it hard to find common ground and define the common good. But we know better, because America has thrived on this diversity and our story is about working together,” he said.

According to Villaraigosa, the country has experienced an impressive growth and expansion of the Latino middle class. And it is not just those who have been here for generations that are climbing higher on the ladder of success. Those new to our shores are gaining success too. Back in 1990, under ten percent of Latinos who had recently arrived owned their own homes. Less than two decades later, over half now do. As a tireless education advocate, Villaraigosa added, “More and more Hispanic children are going to college. From 2009 to 2010, the number of Latino students on college campuses jumped by over 345,000.”

In addressing the challenges that cities have faced under the Great Recession, he said the Latino community was among the hardest hit. When the housing bubble burst and the financial sector crashed, Latino household wealth fell by two-thirds. In December, the Latino unemployment rate was still in double digits at 11 percent. “The poverty rate has increased among Latinos faster than among other groups. More Latino children are now in poverty than any other ethnic or racial group,” he said.

On the issue of immigration, the mayor said that both Democrats and Republicans have recognized that our immigration system is broken and needs to be fixed. Villaraigosa added that we must pass comprehensive immigration reform, a tradition that until recently was a bipartisan one that ran from Ronald Reagan to Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. “We can’t let every proposal for a path to citizenship be drowned out by a knee-jerk chorus of opposition. We can’t be a country where ‘Show me your papers’ is routinely heard on our sidewalks and in our streets,” he said.

Villaraigosa reminded the crowd that America was built by immigrants, where they were told that “if you work hard, play by the rules and believe in this country, you will be rewarded.”

“The 11 million people who work the hardest and do the hardest work, but who are forced to live in the shadows are counting on us. There is not a single problem that we face as a nation that will be solved by deporting millions of hard-working, law-abiding people who’ve done nothing except reaffirm the American dream again and again,” he added.

Delivering his speech only a few blocks from the nation’s Capital building, Villaraigosa called on Congress to extend the payroll tax cut before the month is up. “Now is not the time to raise the taxes on millions of working families, including millions of Latino working families. Let’s finally get the DREAM Act passed, so that all deserving students regardless of their status have a fair shot at the American Dream.”

Villaraigosa said that Los Angeles welcomes more tourists from Mexico than from any other country and emphasized that tourism thrives due to tourists visiting from the neighboring country. Mexico is now America’s third most important commercial partner and the Mexican market is the second largest for US exports. “The border is busy, but it is busy with the flow of tourists and trade. For too long, opponents of reform have raised the border alarm. They’ve used the issue of enforcement to block progress in creating a pathway to citizenship and improving the system of legal immigration. That excuse is now off the table,” he added.

In closing remarks, Villaraigosa stressed the importance and value of honoring our culturally diverse nation. “Our country has always inspired strong feelings in the rest of the world. And those who look to us are most inspired when we are true to our founding spirit. America’s song sounds the sweetest when sung by many different voices,” he said.

“...we can’t let every proposal for a path to citizenship be drowned out by a knee-jerk chorus of opposition. We can’t be a country where ‘Show me your papers’ is routinely heard on our sidewalks and in our streets.”

– USCM President Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa

At right, USCM President Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa with NALEO Educational Fund Executive Director Arturo Vargas.
Mayors Continue Push for Education Reform at Gates Foundation Meeting

By Kathy Wiggins

Seventeen mayors, including Conference of Mayors President Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa and Vice President Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, travelled to Seattle for a “Mayors in Education” meeting held February 2 to discuss the crucial role mayors can play in turning around city schools that are not meeting the needs of students. Sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the meeting also served as an opportunity for mayors to hear about resources or initiatives at the Foundation that would benefit their cities in attempting to dramatically improve college-ready graduation rates nationally.

Centered around the spectrum of mayoral involvement in education as outlined in the new Conference of Mayors publication Mayoral Leadership and Involvement in Education: An Action Guide for Success, the meeting focused on the mayors’ engagement in their school districts. “At the end of the day, mayors know that when schools fail, cities pay the price in terms of the economy, public safety and quality of life — it is not possible to have a great city without great schools,” said Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson, Chair of the Conference of Mayors Education Reform Task Force and host of the meeting. “Mayors are the key actors in formulating policies and programs that have a direct impact on children’s lives and have a unique ability to foster collaboration between school, health and social services. With the breadth of possibilities for mayoral involvement, one pivotal question for mayors to ask themselves is: What role should I have as the chief elected leader of my city to ensure that every child has an opportunity to have a quality educational experience?”

“Across the country, mayors are being challenged with shrinking budgets, public safety concerns, record unemployment rates, and countless other pressing issues. Yet, we would agree that education is the central platform underlying most of the issues currently facing cities,” said Allan Golston, President of the Gates Foundation United States Program, keynote speaker for the session. “Mayors can and should serve as thought partners to one another in facing these challenges.”

Following their discussion of mayoral spectrum of involvement in education, and a presentation by Gates Foundation staff sharing what they learned is working in education — e.g. Multidisciplinary Education Teams (MET), Next Generation School, and other projects — the mayors broke out into individual working sessions on: 1) Engaging Community to Attract Funds and Support Partnerships; 2) District Charter Collaboration and Equity; 3) Connecting pre-K, K-12 and Higher Education; and 4) Next Generation Classroom Technology.

The final discussion centered on an education policy to be brought before the 80th Annual Conference of Mayors in June. Johnson outlined plans to develop policy resolutions in support of teacher effectiveness measures, charter compact and the parent trigger for review, discussion and consideration at the Jobs, Education and the Workforce Standing Committee meeting in Orlando, followed by review, consideration and hopefully passage by the entire Conference of Mayors membership.

Hartford Mayor Segarra Receives $20,000 DollarWise Innovation Grant

By Javier Arvelo

The United States Conference of Mayors financial literacy campaign, DollarWise, made a visit to Hartford on January 12 to make the official presentation of the Innovation Grant 2011 award to Mayor Pedro Segarra and the citizens of his city.

The check presentation took place at Burr Elementary School in the heart of the city. Local board of education representatives, United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut President and CEO Susan B. Dunn, United Way Women’s Leadership Council representative Melanie J. Cecarelli, and the principal, staff, and students of Burr Elementary joined Segarra at the check presentation ceremony. Also present was Bank of America Senior Vice President Dean G. Andrews who was on hand to join DollarWise in congratulating Segarra and his city for their achievement in innovative financial literacy education. The Bank of America Charitable Foundation is the founding sponsor of the DollarWise Campaign.

After receiving the ceremonial check from DollarWise and Bank of America, Segarra took to the podium to address not only those in attendance at the press conference, but also a television audience in the city through the local UniVision affiliate. In his remarks, Segarra addressed the importance of the DollarWise funds at this crucial moment for his city. As with many cities, Hartford is going through tough financial times. “Funds that can help the city advance important programs targeting its residents’ financial education are not only welcomed but greatly appreciated,” the mayor said.

Hartford received a DollarWise Innovation grant for $20,000. The city will use the funds to target the Burr Elementary School community and to create a network of families that regularly meet for financial education workshops. Segarra’s goal is to create a community of families that act as a support system and source of positive feedback. Weekly meetings will alternate between group seminars that discuss income, assets, debt, and credit, and one-on-one financial assessment sessions.

The DollarWise Innovation Grant encourages mayors and cities around the U.S. to start or expand programs that provide financial literacy education for their citizens in innovative, replicable ways. So far, mayors and cities have taken advantage of these funds to promote a variety of programs throughout their communities. Established in 2004 under The United States Conference of Mayors Council for Metro Economies and the New American City, with the generous help of The Bank of America Charitable Foundation, DollarWise has awarded hundreds of thousands of dollars to many cities through its Innovation Grants.

DollarWise encourages mayors and city staff to address the growing need for financial literacy in their nation’s cities. To assist cities in their efforts, the DollarWise campaign works to build partnerships with national organizations, including federal agencies, nonprofit groups, and corporations that offer technical support, curricula, and financial support. While DollarWise is an ongoing, year-round effort, events such as DollarWise Month help communities, and the media focus their attention on financial literacy.
Mr. Walker Goes to DC, Thanks to Mr. Wild

By Sue Mason

Garden City Mayor Randy Walker has a few things to say about his recent trip to Washington (DC): “It was great, it was cool and definitely an opportunity of a lifetime.”

Walker was among 250 mayors who attended the recent United States Conference of Mayors Winter Meeting in the nation’s Capitol, a conference he attended at the behest of Westland Mayor William Wild. Knowing Garden City’s financial situation, Walker paid for the entire trip, which cost $2,000.

“I want to thank Mayor Wild for giving me the heads-up,” said Walker. “He told me about the invitation to visit the White House and that I had to come. It was an opportunity of a lifetime.”

“I’m the Michigan ambassador for the conference and one of the things I do is recruit members,” said Wild. “While Garden City is too small because its population is under 30,000, I thought it would be good for him to attend.”

Unfettered access

According to Wild, the speakers at the conference are members of President Barack Obama’s administration. Attending the sessions “gives you unfettered access to ask questions.”

“That’s why I thought it would be a great opportunity for him,” Wild said. “We’re all facing the same issues.”

Wild, who has been attending the conference since he became mayor in 2007, said he feels like he’s “attending mayors college” when he goes to the conference. Everyone is treated the same whether they’re the mayor of Los Angeles or Philadelphia or Westland.

The two men picked from a variety of meetings. Walker focused on a meeting with the Environmental Protection Agency about water as well as childhood obesity.

“All the mayors in the water meeting were giving the EPA a lot of heat about a lot of unfunded mandates like our $40 million catch basin,” he said. “They were telling them to be more realistic and come to the table with plans and funding.”

He also learned in the other meeting the effect childhood obesity is having on the next generation.

“Every generation’s lifespan has gotten longer, but this generation is starting to go the other way because of childhood obesity,” he said, adding that he plans to share his information with the Garden City Public Schools.

Wild served as a panel member on a session on how communities use social media. Westland utilizes Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Livestream to communicate with residents. But he also tried to get more information on the police grants to see how Westland can get some of the funding to hire more officers and investigated the Mayors’ Institute on City Design to see what benefits it might have for the city which faces the prospect of replacing its aging city hall.

“There’s an opportunity to apply to the institute and if your accepted, you meet with a group of professors at Harvard and they look at the city and what you want to do, then tell you the things to look out for so you don’t make any mistakes,” he said.

On the Radar

He also attended a task force meeting on how to get on the radar for new franchises. While a lot of it was meant for inner cities, it had a lot of good information about how to make a city franchise friendly, information he is sharing with the city’s Community Development Department.

But the highlight for both men was a White House reception and a chance to meet President Barack Obama. While many of the mayors toured portions of the White House, Walker followed Wild’s advice and staked out his spot by the rope near the podium. He waited there for more than 45 minutes.

“They would come up and tell him that the President wouldn’t be out for another hour, he didn’t move,” said Wild. “Westland has an fantastic mayor,” Wild said. “He’s straight up and very professional,” he said.

That’s not all Walker got to do. He also participated in a conference call to talk about Garden City with the White House, which was looking for stories to tie in with the President’s State of the Union Address. Garden City didn’t make the cut, but Walker was able to tell them about the city and the challenges it’s facing.

“The auto companies are on the rebound, however, we are still hurting,” Walker said in a follow-up e-mail. “I think President Obama’s speech theme should definitely cover jobs, foreclosures, and infrastructure. U.S. cities are the backbone of America, where the leather hits the pavement. We need to put America back to work with skilled jobs. As you know when people make money they spend money and the economy takes off in the right direction.”

Walker also got to share the stage with a group of mayors who stood around the podium as the mayor of Los Angeles delivered the opening speech. It aired on C-SPAN, and he also had the chance to introduce himself to the viewing audience.

“This gave me the opportunity to meet with mayors from all over the U.S. and learn some best practices,” he said. “I enjoyed it thoroughly. I spent a lot of time in the meetings, there was so much to pick and choose from, things you think will work for your city.”

“It was very interesting, very educational,” he said.

Walker is thankful Wild urged him to attend the conference, something he would like to do again.

“Westland has an fantastic mayor,” he said. “He’s straight up and very professional. Westland’s lucky to have him.”

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a yearly basis, their leaders have taken distinctly different paths in renewing this federal law that is likely to direct more than $50 billion annually in investment in highways, transit and safety.

The nation’s mayors, led by Conference of Mayors President Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa have been urging Congress to develop a bipartisan agreement in renewing the nation’s surface transportation law, with more than 100 hundred mayors conveying this message to House and Senate leaders.

Senate transportation leaders, for their part, have consistently sought bipartisan consensus in developing elements of their two-year renewal plan, with the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee unanimously approving their respective titles on highway and public transportation programs. Even the always divisive issue of revenue raisers for the bill garnered a 17–6 majority within the Senate Finance Committee.

Reflective of its broad, bipartisan commitment to its renewal process, the Senate on February 9 voted 85–11 to proceed with consideration of S. 1813, far exceeding the required 60-vote margin. The Senate will entertain all amendments to S. 1813 in an open amendment process during Senate floor action, ensuring that a broad range of issues and concerns of Senators are debated and considered.

TIFIA Expanded

The Senate legislation preserves a number of current law programs and activities, and also incorporates new initiatives, such as expanded commitments to innovative financing, notably increased funding for the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA). A significantly expanded TIFIA program has been championed by Villaraigosa and the Conference of Mayors, and is included in both the Senate and House bills.

S. 1813 also includes a number of provisions that increase flexibility and funding options for states seeking to improve freight networks and goods movement, supporting maritime, freight rail and freight intermodal connectivity.

At the same time, S. 1813 proposes numerous program consolidations, eliminating the Bridge Program (including its directed funding to large system bridges as well as local bridges), Safe Routes to School, Recreational Trails Program, Rural Safety Initiative and the separate Transportation Enhancements Program. S. 1813 also reduces the funding share committed to metropolitan areas and local areas under the Surface Transportation Program (renamed the Transportation Mobility Program), and provides less flexibility to local areas under the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program (CMAQ) by directing how CMAQ funds are expended locally.

Notably, what the Senate bill doesn’t do is break the longstanding Trust Fund commitment to funding both highway and transit programs, ensuring that both modes are considered and addressed in tandem, not separately as the House bill proposes.

House Bill Severs 30-Year Commitment to Highway/Transit Programs

In the House, its leaders pursued a partisan path in developing and approving a surface transportation renewal plan (H.R. 7), relying on its majority to push through a five-year authorization package and doing so on an expedited schedule.

While the pending Senate legislation has generated only modest opposition, the House bill has precipitated a furor over its proposal renewal plan, fracturing the bipartisan tradition that has so defined prior Congressional action on transportation legislation, especially highway/transportation legislation.

The Administration, for its part, has been very vocal in opposition to the House bill, with Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood calling H.R. 7 “the worst transportation bill I’ve ever seen during 35 years of public service.” Generating the most opposition is a committee-approved plan that removes all transit funding and some highway funding (e.g., CMAQ program) from the Trust Fund, leaving these programs to fend for themselves in the growing battle over future General Fund revenues are allocated. Reversal of this 30-year policy commitment to public transportation was unveiled with only a few days’ notice, leaving local areas, local leaders and others little time to review and register their opposition. This longstanding commitment to an 80/20 highway/transit split of Trust Fund revenues was originally championed by the Congress of Mayors, transit leaders and others, beginning in the 1970s.

The practical effect of the House bill is to assign the entire revenue shortfall—about $40 billion over the life of the 5-year bill—to public transportation and CMAQ funding. As such, both public transit and CMAQ are now unfunded under the House bill. This anticipated revenue shortfall was to be funded originally with revenues from increased oil production in the Gulf of Mexico and Alaska, but a recent Congressional Budget Office report indicates that recently-approved committee provisions would generate about five percent of the funds needed. Importantly, the CMAQ program directs federal transportation resources to help local areas comply with certain federal Clean Air Standards, with local officials citing its assured funding as helping to fund this mandate.

The House bill, similarly, adopted many of the programmatic elements of the Senate bill regarding program consolidations and eliminations, including outright elimination of the Transportation Enhancements as well as the Bridge Program, a similar reduction in the local share of funding under the STP program, among other provisions. In contrast with the Senate bill’s streamlining of environmental processes and planning, the House bill goes futher in environmental safeguards found in current law.

After amendments, the Senate is expected to clear its renewal plan overwhelmingly on a strong bipartisan vote. In the House, H.R. 7, if it wins a majority, will rely on a mostly partisan vote.
Local Groups Express Opposition to Proposal Banning New Taxes on Rental Cars

By Larry Jones

Arlington County (VA) Deputy Commissioner of Revenue Ray Warren told members of the House Subcommittee on Courts, Commercial and Administrative Law during a February 1 hearing on the so-called “End Discriminatory State Taxes for Automobile Renters Act of 2011,” H.R. 2469, that the major public interest groups that represent local governments in Washington (DC) — the National Association of Counties, National League of Cities, The United States Conference of Mayors and the Government Finance Officers — oppose the bill because it “poses a dire threat not merely to state and local tax revenues, but to the entire existence of independent state and local taxation authority in our system of federalism.”

He explained that the car rental industry was just one of many claiming that state and local sales taxes are discriminatory in order to convince Congress to ban new taxes on the industry. When examined closely, it is clear these industries are seeking favorable tax treatment. Since Congress approved a similar ban on state and local taxes on Internet access fees in 1998, local governments have maintained that any industry’s plea for federally mandated favorable tax treatment would open the door to other industries asking for similar exemptions or protections from state and local taxing authority.

Over the past year, Warren said the communications industry, hotel industry and now the car-rental industry have asked Congress to preempt state and local taxing authority.

He also criticized the bill for how state and local taxes would be determined “discriminatory,” for its vague language, and for not identifying an administrative agency that can issue interpretative rulings. He cautioned this could lead to “expensive litigation and result in budgetary uncertainty at a significant cost to taxpayers.” Under the bill, he said, “The determination that a tax is ‘discriminatory’ is made without any reference to the factors that state and local policymakers use to evaluate local needs and the best manner to distribute the local tax burden.” Further, it does not take into account offsetting exemptions. For example, Warren said, in Virginia, car rental companies are exempt from the property tax, and from the state sales and use tax which amount to a significant savings.

Several witnesses testified in favor of the bill: National Consumers League Executive Director Sally Greenberg, National Sports Fan Coalition Executive Director Brian Frederick, and Global Business Travel Association Executive Director Michael McCormick. All claimed that the car rental industry is being unfairly burdened with discriminatory taxes that state and local officials use to fund sports stadiums. But Warren pointed out that many state and local governments put revenues from the car rental tax in their general fund, which is used to fund critical services. He also pointed out a flaw in the bill that attempts to compare car rental taxes with taxes levied on all other commercial and industrial taxpayers instead of other retailers. “Yet common sense dictates that different taxes are imposed on retail sales than on manufacturing. Indeed, it is unclear if the ordinary sales tax, a mainstay of local finance, would be held discriminatory if a similar apples to oranges test was applied,” he said.
Washington State Adopts Same-Sex Marriage Legislation

Ninth Circuit Rules California Ban on Same-Sex Marriage Unconstitutional

By Laura DeKoven Waxman

Washington State is poised to become the seventh state to allow same-sex marriages. Legislation passed the State Senate 28-21 on February 1 and the House 55-43 on February 8. Governor Christine Gregoire supported the measure and is expected to sign it quickly into law. The bill:

• Allows couples of the same sex to marry;
• Provides an exemption for religious organizations regarding solemnizing a marriage and providing accommodations, goods, and services related to the solemnization or celebration of a marriage; and
• Provides that a state registered domestic partnership in which the parties are the same sex and under the age of 62 will be merged into a marriage as of June 30, 2014, unless the parties marry or dissolve their domestic partnership before that date.

Strickland Urged Passage of the Measure

During a January 20 press conference at The U.S. Conference of Mayors Winter Meeting, which launched Mayors for the Freedom to Marry, Tacoma Mayor Marilyn Strickland said the measure appeared to be about one vote short in the State Senate and urged senators “to do the right thing and pass marriage equality in Washington State.”

“The denial of marriage withholds not only the personal significance and social recognition that comes with marriage, but it deprives same sex couples of the critical legal and economic safety that marriage brings,” Strickland said. “This is about equal protection of the law; this is about civil rights; it’s about who we are as a nation, and the values we hold dear.” Strickland called the denial of marriage “one of the harshest inequalities inflicted upon lesbian and gay Americans and their families and it is discrimination enacted by our own government.”

Same-sex couples are able to marry in New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Vermont, Iowa, and the District of Columbia.

Villaraigosa Praises Ninth Circuit Decision

The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals on February 7 struck down California’s ban on same-sex marriage, saying it violated the 14th Amendment’s equal protection clause by stigmatizing a minority group without legitimate reason. “Proposition 8 serves no purpose, and has no effect, other than to lessen the status and human dignity of gays and lesbians in California, and to officially reclassify their relationships as inferior to those of opposite-sex couples,” the ruling read. Proposition 8, which defined marriage as between a man and a woman, was a statewide California ballot initiative adopted in 2008 with 52 percent of the vote.

Conference of Mayors President Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa called the decision “a decisive victory for freedom and equality.” In a statement issued the day of the ruling he said, “Today, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals validated what we know in our heart of hearts: that all Americans enjoy the basic right to marry the person they love. With its decision, the court has affirmed the fundamental dignity of gays and lesbians and has reaffirmed a basic American truth: bigotry and prejudice have no place in our laws.”

“If we truly believe in family values, we must value all families,” Villaraigosa continued. “I fully expect that this issue will reach the US Supreme Court. I am hopeful that the highest court in our land will follow the wisdom of the 9th Circuit and grant all couples – gay and straight – the freedom to marry.”

Proposition 8 came about in reaction to a California Supreme Court decision earlier in 2008, which struck down a 1977 state law that had limited marriage to a man and a woman. That decision found the law to be in violation of the state constitution’s privacy, due-process, and equal-protection provisions, and paved the way for same-sex marriages to take place in the state.

The Ninth Circuit ruling applies only to California and does not immediately take effect. Proposition 8 supporters have two weeks to appeal to the full circuit court and 90 days to file a petition for Supreme Court review.

President Obama Presents Details of Housing Plan to Help Responsible Homeowners

By Eugene T. Lowe

President Barack Obama presented on February 1 the details of his plan to deal with the nation’s housing crisis. Specifically, the President is proposing to offer broad-based refinancing to help borrowers take advantage of historical low interest rates and save an average of $3,000 per year. While there are many details to the plan, what should be noted is that borrowers not insured by Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac will be able to refinance their homes. Currently, this is not the case. Through the use of a proposed Financial Crisis Responsibility Fee, large financial institutions will have to pay a fee that will pay for the plan, thereby not adding to the national deficit.

The President’s plan also introduces a Homeowner Bill of Rights that is intended to “make sure that borrowers and lenders play by the same rules.” These rules include such provisions as “full disclosure of fees and penalties” and “support to keep responsible families in their homes and out of foreclosure.” Borrowers would also have “access to a simple mortgage disclosure form” to make sure that they understand the loans being received.

A number of other steps are also a part of the President’s plan, such as a pilot to transition foreclosed property into rental housing to help stabilize neighborhoods. The Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA), Treasury, and HUD are developing the pilot. In addition, banks and GSEs (Government Sponsored Enterprises) will provide up to 12 months of forbearance to unemployed borrowers looking for work. There will also be resources devoted to investigating “the misconduct that contributed to the financial crisis.”

The Home Affordable Mortgage Program (HAMP) will have its eligibility expanded to reduce additional foreclosures and people will be put back to work through a program called Project Rebuild that will help rehabilitate neighborhoods.
State, Local Legal Center Advocates to Supreme Court for Mayors

By State and Local Legal Center Executive Director Lisa Soronen

Since 1983, the State and Local Legal Center (SLLC) has filed amicus curiae briefs to the United States Supreme Court on behalf of the “Big Seven” national organizations representing the interests of state and local government, including The U.S. Conference of Mayors.

The SLLC files an amicus brief in a Supreme Court case as long as three of the seven members of the SLLC want a brief written and two organizations do not veto participation. Each SLLC member decides whether to sign onto an SLLC brief after reviewing its contents. To date, the SLLC has filed over 300 Supreme Court briefs. The SLLC also offers moot courts to attorneys arguing state and local government cases before the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court frequently hears cases affecting local government. In many of these cases a city is a named party. Since October 2011 the SLLC has filed amicus briefs, which The U.S. Conference of Mayors has signed onto, in the following three cases:

- Filarsky v. Delia
  The issue in Filarsky v. Delia is whether a law firm attorney hired by a city to conduct an internal affairs investigation can be sued for violating someone’s constitutional rights, even if the law firm attorney could not be sued if he or she was the city’s in-house counsel.

- Reichle v. Howards
  The issue in Reichle v. Howards is whether a person arrested based on a probable cause can bring a lawsuit claiming he or she was arrested in retaliation for asserting his or her First Amendment rights.

- Armour v. Indianapolis
  This issue in Armour v. Indianapolis is whether the Equal Protection Clause prohibits a city from refusing to refund payments made by taxpayers who have paid their assessments in full, while forgiving the obligations of identically situated taxpayers who chose to pay over a multi-year installment plan.

To learn more about the SLLC and to read the briefs the SLLC filed in these three cases, visit the SLLC’s website at http://www.statelocallic.org/.

Cities Can Protect Benefits, Save Money with New Program

U.S. Conference of Mayors - Colonial Life Partnership Brings Sustainable Benefits Solutions to City Governments

By Kathryn Kretschmer-Weyland

City governments can protect the benefits programs their employees rely on while also curbing growing costs, thanks to a new partnership announced today between The U.S. Conference of Mayors and Colonial Life & Accident Insurance Company.

The partnership brings together mayors and other key leaders in cities of population 30,000 or more with specially trained Colonial Life benefits counselors to offer and help implement a cost-containment health benefits program centered around value-added services and supplemental insurance benefits. The program focuses on effective cost-saving strategies while preserving the value of employees’ benefits.

“Thanks is the beauty of this program,” said Conference of Mayors CEO and Executive Director Tom Cochran. “We’re focusing on cost-saving measures that could have a significant impact on the bottom line while minimizing the impact on employees. Mayors and their cities need a strong benefits program to obtain and retain the best employees. The solutions Colonial Life brings our members can help them continue to offer a stable benefits package in a more financially sustainable way.”

The Conference of Mayors selected Colonial Life for this partnership based on its long experience, proven track record of success in providing employee benefits in the public sector, and full-spectrum approach to cost containment through value-added services. The partnership is being rolled out nationwide beginning this month.

Like other employers, city governments have seen health insurance costs rise year after year. Continuing to absorb those cost increases without cutting benefits isn’t a sustainable long-term model, says Pat McCullough, Assistant Vice President and Public Sector Practice Leader for Colonial Life. “In today’s economy, most people recognize changes in benefits programs are inevitable, but many city governments aren’t taking advantage of the opportunities available to them. They’re more likely to be able to continue offering high-quality benefits if they find ways to make them more cost-effective.”

City governments nationwide collectively spend an estimated $30 billion a year on employee health benefits.1 A recent survey of government financial officers showed more than half saved at least 6 percent on their benefits during a two-year period by implementing cost-control strategies, and 40 percent saved more than 10 percent during that time period.2 Even a modest three percent annual savings on benefits costs would represent $900 million that could be redirected to prevent reductions in staffing and service levels.

If your city could use help containing benefit and benefit administration costs, contact Kathryn Kretschmer-Weyland with The U.S. Conference of Mayors at (301) 460-5251/ kweyland@usmayors.org or Jeannie Fanning at (240) 393-9672/jfanning@usmayors.org, or Pat McCullough with Colonial Life at (803) 678-6980 or pmcullough@coloniallife.com.

About Colonial Life

Colonial Life & Accident Insurance Company is a market leader in providing insurance benefits for employees and their families through the workplace, along with individual benefits education, advanced yet simple-to-use enrollment technology and quality personal service. Colonial Life offers disability, life and supplemental accident and health insurance policies in 49 states and the District of Columbia. Similar policies, if approved, are underwritten in New York by a Colonial Life affiliate, The Paul Revere Life Insurance Company, Worcester, Mass. Colonial Life is based in Columbia, S.C., and is a subsidiary of Unum Group, one of the world’s leading providers of employee benefits. For more information, call Colonial Life at (803) 799-7000 or visit www.coloniallife.com.

Energy Efficiency: Future Is Bleak for Popular Stimulus Grant Program

Emily Yehle, E&E reporter; Greenwire: Wednesday, February 1, 2012

Solar-powered trash compactors began showing up on the streets of Bridgeport, Conn., last year. The local library got a new roof, light-emitting diodes replaced old streetlights and city officials took the first steps toward implementing a plan to treat sewage locally.

It was all funded through the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants (EECBG) program, which is nearing its end just as the nation’s mayors begin to categorize its successes. The program has been funded only once with more than $3 billion from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and a tight fiscal environment makes its future bleak.

But Republican and Democratic mayors alike say the grants are among the most successful tools in the Energy Department’s clean energy arsenal, spurring innovative projects that would languish on paper. The U.S. Conference of Mayors has released three separate reports on the program. One says 162 of 221 cities surveyed planned to undertake new projects with the funds.

In Bridgeport, its $1.2 million grant was mostly spent on tried-and-true renovations to increase energy efficiency, like replacing the main library’s heating, ventilation and air conditioning system.

But the money also paved the way for more ambitious plans. For example, less than $50,000 funded a feasibility study on treating sewage sludge with a new plant rather than shipping it away to be burned. Now, the city has issued a request for proposals from interested developers.

Without the grant, “the things we would have funded would have been things like LED lights – an anaerobic digester, that’s a little bit out there,” said Ted Grabarz, the city’s sustainability director. “Would that have happened without that initial torrent of cash? Yes, I guess there would have been some discussions, but like a lot of discussions in this world, there are a lot of ‘I’d like to’s.”

So far, recipients of the grants have spent about $1.8 billion of the $2.5 billion DOE obligated to local governments. The Recovery Act gave DOE until the end of September 2015 to ensure the funds were spent, but most of the funds will probably be gone by the end of this year, and already cash-strapped cities will once again have to find space in their budgets for efficiency projects.

To Jim Brainard, the Republican mayor of Carmen, Ind., that seems foolish.

“There is disappointment that this program that had so much progress was only funded that one time,” he said recently at a meeting of the Energy Independence and Jobs Task Force, a panel he chairs as part of the Conference of Mayors. “This committee and those involved have not given up and will not give up.”

Proving Its Worth

There is disagreement over whether the grants have created jobs and helped spur the economy. Though the Conference of Mayors – which conceived of the program – has lobbied repeatedly for the funds, it still does not have data on the overall return on investment. Funds took time to trickle out to communities, and it is still too soon to measure the effects.

But on Monday, the Recovery and Accountability Transparency Board ranked the EECBG program as the ninth-strongest jobs producer among programs funded through the stimulus law. In the last quarter of 2011, recipients reported it had created more than 4,700 jobs.

Republicans have criticized such job estimates as inaccurate, saying they are dependent on recipient reporting and a formula that counts jobs that may have existed without the stimulus. Furthermore, five months ago, DOE’s inspector general delivered a blow: Recipients, he said, were not spending the money fast enough.

By then, recipients were reporting that they had spent a third of the funds allocated for the program, a slow trickle that IG Gregory Friedman warned could undermine the “basic premise” of the stimulus to quickly pump money into a suffering economy. Many recipients had also not met DOE’s self-inflicted 18-month deadline to obligate funds, and the vast majority had not asked for an extension (Greenwire, Sept. 7, 2011).

In a recent interview, Brainard dismissed such criticism, arguing that DOE took more than a year to release funds, meaning he had to repeatedly ask bidders to sit tight. Other problems included determining what programs qualified for the grants. Grabarz said DOE initially denied Bridgeport’s request to use some of the money to pay for a white roof on the library.

Today, DOE says recipients have spent 70 percent of obligated funds. The agency is also working on improving the reporting process for the program and plans to submit a proposal this spring to the Office of Management and Budget that would eliminate cumbersome monthly reporting requirements and simplify quarterly reports. Such changes could enable cities to report their progress more quickly.

According to DOE, the EECBG program so far has funded 44,000 building upgrades and 242,000 energy-efficient traffic signals. Those projects are all but guaranteed to save as much money as they cost. By using less energy, cities will have smaller utility bills and will likely save on maintenance costs.

Some cities have gotten more creative. Will County in Illinois, for example, used $1 million to help develop a landfill gas electricity-generation plant that will provide power for 8,000 homes.

Grabarz of Bridgeport said such innovative projects go beyond city budgets by testing out technologies local private sectors may be unwilling to risk. By having the upfront money to experiment — and then show a return on investment — cities could leverage EECBG money to spur new industries with new jobs.

“We set through our bully pulpit in our communities something very important,” Bridgeport’s mayor, Democrat Bill Finch, said at last month’s Energy Independence and Jobs Task Force meeting. “We set the conversation.”

A ‘Downpayment’ on Clean Energy

President Obama is unlikely to ask for a funding extension for the program in his upcoming fiscal 2013 budget. Congress says shrinking the federal government’s budget is a priority, and agencies have been offering buyouts and early retirements to prepare for bare-bones budgets. Grants will probably be the first to go.

At the task force meeting, Nancy Sutley, chairwoman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, skirted questions from the mayors about whether the administration would fund the program. Instead, she encouraged mayors to demonstrate how the grants were successful.

DOE declined to comment about whether it has prioritized the program — or whether it will request funds for next year. But the agency highlighted other programs that help states and local governments deploy clean energy technology.

All those programs leverage far less money to encourage private-sector investments. In the Better Buildings Challenge, for example, Obama has pledged that agencies will spend $2 billion on upgrades, while companies and mayors have pledged to spend the same. To be sure, agencies are already required to make energy efficiency upgrades as part of a 10-year government-wide sustainability plan.

In an email, DOE spokesman Bill Gibbons characterized the grants as a foundation that can be built upon.

“These investments were designed to be an important downpayment to help thousands of U.S. cities, counties, state, territories and tribal nations to develop and implement energy efficiency and renewable energy programs that will continue to save money and energy for years to come,” he said. “The Energy Department is committed to building on this downpayment, working with communities across the country to thrive in America’s growing clean energy economy.”

But still, the program’s long-term future appears to be up in the air. Many lawmakers support it because, like earmarks, the grants help foster local projects that directly benefit constituents. The Conference of Mayors also plans to start a study later this year on the results of grant-funded projects.

“I’m optimistic that it’ll continue and get done,” Brainard said, adding: “Whether you believe in global warming or not — regardless of that, look at the economic argument. ... There’s a lot of different ways to get philosophically to the same place.”
A Citizen’s Report From The U.S. Conference of Mayors

Last week I found myself with a last-minute invitation to become a fly on the wall of the U.S. Conference of Mayors in Washington, D.C. Since the last conference in June 2011, an widespread movement called Occupy Wall Street has arisen to protest the fact that 99% of the country gets to have meaningful access to our government. As a member of the 99%, and without hesitation, I used the last of my credit and favors from friends to arrange for my child’s care and my own accommodations in DC, and I hopped on a flight to the Capital 12 hours later.

The U.S. Mayors Conference is where the 99% can find the leaders with the most realistic solutions to our nation’s problems; those who are charged with carrying out the federal, state, and local policies that most directly affect our families. Standing in their shoes are just bricks, but twice each year they come together to make a very powerful wall.

Comparatively speaking, most mayors are in fact accessible on the local level, however, the tragedy of our media industry is that the politicians and programs that are effective rarely receive adequate coverage.

Attendance at this particular conference was up, undoubtedly because at the helm of the organization now sits President Antonio Villaraigosa, mayor of Los Angeles, California. Villaraigosa’s commitment to drawing more leaders and using innovative solutions to the problems faced by municipal leaders was clearly reflected by the conference itinerary as well as an impressive list of speakers from President Obama’s Cabinet, Speaker John Boehner, and the media -- even the comedian Jimmy Tingle’s performance at the gala.

On Tuesday, we heard from various mayors about their juvenile delinquency and youth and families programs, and we also heard from Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis about the new summer youth employment initiatives. The Department of Labor has announced that it will be investing hundreds of millions of our tax payer’s money to fund jobs for youths between the ages of 16-24 this summer. If done well, this could be very good for our country’s youth, who might otherwise spend the summer relaxing.

Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, perhaps the most impressive woman in politics I have ever met, hit the nail on the head when she stated, “Make sure that the people you are hiring for the summer youth programs are qualified, enthusiastic, safe, and actually want to work with children.”

Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson quickly became my hero when he presented his excellent work on education and keeping children actively engaged in school. Rather than focus on the things wrong with the system, he chose to recognize the diverse leadership strategies of the mayors by highlighting the many excellent early childhood education programs in different cities that are highly refined, delinquency and increased proficiency of students and teachers. It costs $230 per day to keep a child in juvenile detention center. The biggest indicator of a child’s success in life is their level of engagement in their education, and Mayor Johnson’s work was a solid answer to the concerns of parents and educators faced with flagging budgets.

Several mayors raised legitimate concerns that the Department of Justice is going to allow the banks to cut a deal that leaves municipalities holding the bill while the 1% and banks receive immunity and bail outs. If you watch the tapes of conference presentations on C-SPAN, you can feel the tension in the air as the mayors confronted speakers from the new consumer protection board.

The general consensus was that “the foreclosure rate in my town has become unmanageable as banks become overly aggressive to collect on mortgage payments from struggling families who are unemployed. What can we do to help them stay afloat?”

The answer to the mayor’s concerns about the banking, housing, and jobs crisis from the Obama administration is, of course, “never again” and the Department of Labor’s Summer Youth Corps grants. But is the goal of the DOL programs really to revamp the economy of America, and if so, that are we really training them to do? What will their unemployed parents be doing while the children work?

As a parent, I have serious concerns about the summer youth programs. The DOL programs will be run in tandem with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, whose track record with youths could use improvement. Despite the fact that the National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect found that children are six times more likely to die in the State’s care than those with their parents, it is still assumed by some politicians that if you are poor, then you must need the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services programs to tell you what’s best for your own family.

In the back of every parent’s mind is undoubtedly the “Kids for Cash” scandal, and more recently the Penn State scandal that brought to light the deficiencies in our mandatory reporting laws. Has HHS addressed these concerns to ensure our young people are going to be safe this summer?

For the following reasons, rather than invest more grant money into "old reliable," I think that the mayors in the country should pressure the Obama administration to invest a little more hustle into selecting mentors for the summer jobs program. In addition, I recommend the following to promote government integrity and protect American families:

- Occupy Wall Street: Diffuse tensions between Occupy protesters and mayors by giving the Occupy protesters a moment at the podium to tell you what their solutions are. Occupy’s message is that the average person does not have access to government and their leaders are ignoring them.
- Training the next generation: Many of the "partners" in the summer jobs program, such as Bank of America, JP Morgan Chase, State Street Corporation, Wells Fargo, and Price Waterhouse Cooper are responsible for this nation’s economic crisis, which have not used TARP funds to repair the problems, and therefore, should be immediately removed from the list of sponsors receiving DOE grants to train our youth.
- Promote gender equality in government programs: Make sure that adequate resources are spent on recruiting and mentoring girls into the Summer Youth Program. Men still occupy 84% of leadership roles and women’s pay is still far less, with the gender gap widening as we get older.
- Grant steering, kickbacks? Make sure the Department of Labor summer programs are not just funneling more grants to those employers already receiving billions in grants to do the same thing with the Fatherhood Initiatives and offender release programs, such as:
  - Manpower: Has received hundreds of millions in grants through HHS Fatherhood Initiatives. The EEOC filed suit against Global Horizons Manpower Inc. in 2011 for discrimination and trafficking of immigrant farm workers.
  - Goodwill Industries: Has received tens of millions in grants to employ sex offenders, parolees, and other offenders on work release. According to their 2010 990 tax returns, Goodwill spends more than $1 million per year on lobbying, and more than $22.2 million on the top 10 salaries of board members. Some of those public funds need to be audited and given back to the children they were intended to benefit.
- Protect families with government transparency, accountability: Fire Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius for failing to address the public’s complaints of widespread fraud, extortion, and child trafficking within her administration. Just today it was announced that an FBI sting in Florida netted 40 alleged pedophiles, including teachers, coaches, and PGA golf pro Stephen Wesley Thomas. We cannot afford to continue to allow Sebelius to cut blank checks with no strings and send our disadvantaged children into unsafe programs Sebelius’s administration refuses to vet or properly oversee.

New York Times commentator Thomas Friedman spoke at the lunch on Wednesday. He said in order to survive in the 21st century, America needs to become the place where inventions are imagined, not just made; that being busy is not enough to sustain our position as world leaders, that somewhere along the line we lost our innate sense of “hustle” to wheel and deal.

Mr. Friedman may be right about the global economy, but it is my opinion that Americans are now required to purchase the right to express any innovations they may have at a financial cost they cannot afford. This includes innovative mayors whose campaign war chest donations are filled by the people, not corporations. I think there should be a law that for a corporation, or political action committee donates to a candidate, they must donate three dollars to the public schools in the state in which they are registered. That way the poor kids experiencing “lack of free speech” will have a better chance of purchasing their First Amendment rights as they get older.

On the whole, I found the convention inspiring. On an average day, I am in my home office using government reports and databases to discover whether grants coming from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services actually reach the children they are intended to benefit in an efficient and effective manner. Quite often I do find fraud, corruption, and grant steering, even child trafficking, but my ultimate goal is to use the ideas from the convention to figure out a way to change the laws to improve these programs to protect the children affected and increase their opportunities in life. It was an honor to be there.
In Memoriam:
Menino Eulogizes Former Boston Mayor Kevin White

Kevin Hagan White, the 51st mayor of Boston, died January 27 at the age of 82. White was elected mayor in 1967 and served for 16 years. Following is Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino’s eulogy of Mayor White, which he delivered during the February 1 funeral mass St. Cecilia’s Roman Catholic Church in Boston:

“Mrs. White, members of Mayor White’s family, Father Unni, Father Moran, ladies and gentlemen;

We are here to celebrate a great life. All of Boston joins the White family in your grief. It is hard to imagine this city without Kevin White, but it is true. He is gone, and we are here to commend him to the Lord.

But, weren’t we lucky to have him? And does anyone doubt that Boston was put on its path to greatness by Mayor White?

I am privileged to sit in the chair he sat in. And from my office window I look down every day on the statue that honors him. And on the thriving Quincy Market—which is still what he created—one of the marvels of the urban renaissance that he did so much to spark not only here, but in cities across America.

Kevin White, with his grand vision and his irresistible personality, did more to change Boston for the better, perhaps, than anyone in his lifetime. You know all that.

You can’t know, however, what he meant to a wet-behind-the-ears city councilor who shortly after being elected in 1983 shows up at a dedication ceremony. The mayor is presiding. He sees this young city councilor in the crowd and invites him up. The councilor is shy and waves it off. Mayor White laughs, and says, ‘Someday, you’ll be up here.’

‘Not likely, Mister Mayor. And, as you all know, what happened exactly ten years later was not likely. An unexpected mayor, who was — truth be told — not all that sure of himself. One of his first phone calls: ‘Mayor White, it’s Tom Menino.’

To which he says, ‘Wait a minute. Hold it. I’m Kevin. You’re Mayor Menino. I’m not Mister Mayor. You are!’ Which is maybe when I started to believe it myself. And that was just the start of the affirmation I received from this generous, large-hearted man. I am personally so grateful to him.

But he had already taught this city what greatness in a mayor looks like. Historians like to say that Boston mayors are either ‘downtown’ mayors or ‘neighborhood’ mayors, but Kevin White was both. With the explosion of big-time development he launched, and with his ground-breaking outreach to the neighborhoods — his famous ‘Little City Halls’ just the start of it.

When you think ‘Kevin White,’ you think ‘leader.’ And nowhere in his sixteenth years as mayor was that more clear than on the night of April 5, 1968. I was there, at the Boston Garden, when he introduced James Brown.

You know the story. I still remember how that crowd of angry, heart-broken people. We were all angry and heart-broken — how we responded to Mayor White. The city responded with trust. The city believed him. The black community believed him. And because of him, unlike so many other big cities in America, Boston kept the peace. Talk about unlikely.

But Kevin White had already walked the talk. He had already appointed the first black deputy mayor in Boston’s history — Jeep Jones. I asked Jeep the other day what his appointment meant to Boston. And Jeep told me that Reverend Michael Haynes at Twelfth Baptist Church said, ‘It’s about time!’ Finally, the black community had a way to connect with city hall. And that night in April, what a connection it was!

While Mayor White was at Boston Garden, Jeep Jones was over at Blue Hill Avenue. ‘The mayor sent me over there,’ Jeep told me, ‘to try to keep the peace.’ In the early chaos of that evening, police rounded up three young kids they tagged as trouble-makers, and Jeep intervened. So the police threw Jeep into the Paddy Wagon, too. The Deputy Mayor went to jail — booked in Division Nine. When Kevin White heard about it, he made a furious phone call, ordering Jeep’s release. ‘Not without the kids,’ Jeep said. And the mayor ordered their release, too.

If Boston has healed from the wound of racial hatred — and I pray to God it has — that healing began with Kevin White. And that should have been the headline of his obituary.

But then, so much of what we love about our city began with him. With his style, his wit, his big smile, he made us proud to be Bostonians. For those of us in public service, he showed what a difference one leader can make. And he set a standard that many of us are still trying to live up to.

And in these last years, Kathryn, you set a standard, too. Of what a loving wife can do for her husband. What dignity Mayor White had to the end! What dignity he brought to our city his whole life long! On behalf of all of Boston’s residents, it is my honor to say thank you to the White family. And thank you to Kevin White. But on one point he was wrong. He will always be ‘Mister Mayor’ to us. May he rest in Peace.”
“My priorities as mayor are jobs and education. I believe that if you are really serious about creating jobs, you have to address the health insurance issues that job-creators face.”

– Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett