



The United States Conference of Mayors

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U.S. Conference of Mayors President, Mayor James Garner, Addresses OAS on Democracy and Decentralization

Participates as Official White House Delegate to Meeting in Mexico City

Mexico City, Mexico - United States Conference of Mayors President, Mayor James A. Garner of Hempstead, NY, delivered a major address at the second meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS)-RIAD Conference on Democracy and Decentralization in Mexico City on Thursday, September 25, 2003.

Mayor Garner participated in this international meeting as part of the official delegation from the White House. Other members of the delegation included Presidential Advisor Ruben Barrales, White House Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Mayor John DeStefano, President of the National League of Cities and Mayor of New Haven, Connecticut, and Karen Miller, Commissioner of Boone County, Missouri and President of the National Association of Counties.

Mayor Garner focused his remarks around the theme of decentralization. "Decentralization means localism and localism is extremely important to the United States Conference of Mayors and especially to me as its 61st President because localism is the essence of sustainable development, which is my Administration's platform," he said.

Garner went on to say that few issues are as important to a country's health and well-being, and to the U.S. American constitutional order, as the continuing need to strike an appropriate balance between the powers and duties of the federal government and those of state and local governments.

"Localism, or what we call *"Federalism"* at home, is the cornerstone of our Democracy. It is a central tenet and the guiding principle of our democracy that the federal government has limited powers and that state and local governments, which are the responsible authorities that are closest to the people, play a critical role in our system of governance," Garner continued.

In concluding his speech, Garner made two important points: First, in order to advance democracy - and to make decentralization work - local government leaders must work across party lines. "We in the U.S.

Conference of Mayors do that, working together as both Democrats and Republicans, because there is no partisan way of fixing a pot-hole or putting out a fire,” he added.

Secondly, one of the strongest arguments for localism is that it promotes competition. Cities and counties of all sizes compete to attract businesses, and to provide a good quality of life that attracts upwardly mobile citizens.

Garner said, “This competition at the local level drives us to improve services, protect the environment, balance our budgets, keep taxes at reasonable levels, invest in infrastructure, improve public safety, and promote sustainable development.”

Federalism allows for uniformity of purpose, planning and control across a broad spectrum. It also ensures, through constitutions and popularly elected governments, that there is protection and equality for all of its governmental subdivisions.

Garner concluded by saying, “Our job as mayors, county executives, popular Caudillismo Leaders, and other RIAD members is to underwrite, promote and strengthen federalism by encouraging citizen participation, and ensuring that we have an accessible technical support group that can share knowledge and provide resources and assistance. Together we can tackle the challenges of globalization, universal economic social and institutional development, and democratic governance.”

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