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Mayors, Local and County Officials Seek Answers from Presidential Candidates on Jobs, Crime, Health Care, Housing and Education

Tempe, Arizona—Leaders from three national organizations representing towns, cities and counties across America today sought answers from the presidential candidates on the critical issues facing more than 250 million Americans, posing a series of tough questions on job, crime and homeland security, health care, housing and education (see attached).

At a news conference overlooking the site of the final debate at Arizona State University, elected officials representing Republicans, Democrats and Independents, including the National League of Cities, the National Association of Counties and the U. S. Conference of Mayors, said the time had come for the candidates to tell the American people where they stand.

"After three debates, we are still not getting answers to the profoundly important issues facing our communities--what are the candidates planning to do to improve the job market, boost the quality and quantity of affordable housing, assist us in securing a better education for our young people?" said NLC President Charles Lyons, selectman from Arlington, Mass. "The time for partisan bickering and mudslinging is long past. We need to know what your administration will do in the coming four years to ensure that every American has a real chance to achieve, enjoy and sustain something we call the American Dream."

USCM President, Akron, Ohio Mayor Donald L. Plusquellic said, "America's strength has always been locally driven, in its communities. The country has lost more than 600,000 good-paying jobs over the last four years. The American people want to know—and deserve to know—the specific plans President Bush and Senator Kerry have to improve this significant job loss. Our people are suffering and they need real answers now."

Karen Anderson, Mayor of Minnetonka, Minn. and former NLC President warned, "Rather than assume that we are just looking for a federal handout, let me remind you that local governments are where the rubber meets the road--we're the ones taking national policy and having to implement it every day."

NACo President Angelo Kyle, Board Member for Lake County, Ill., cited concerns among rural areas as well as more populace regions over growing costs for housing and health care. "The presidential candidates must address eliminating the disparities in the health care system and increasing quality housing and home ownership opportunities, particularly for America's first responders - police officers, sheriffs deputies, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, as well as teachers." NACo recently released a report, "Paycheck to Paycheck", showing income levels for these groups dramatically lagging behind housing costs nationwide.

Also participating in today's news conference were USCM Vice President and Long Beach, Calif. Mayor Beverly O'Neill; Bill Hansell, President-Elect of NACo and Commissioner of Umatilla County, Ore.; and Miami Mayor Manuel Diaz, as well as Tempe Mayor Hugh Hallman and Maricopa County Board of Supervisors Chairman Don Stapley.

Questions for the Presidential Debate: Domestic Priorities for Counties, Cities, and Towns

The American public is ready to hear a frank discussion about the issues that affect their daily lives. The following are several questions for consideration by the two Presidential candidates at their debate on Wednesday, October 13, 2004, offered by the National League of Cities, the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National Association of Counties. These questions have also been provided to Bob Schieffer of CBS News, who will moderate the debate.

Housing:

- Recent surveys have shown that incomes lag dramatically behind housing costs nationwide. Will you commit to working with us on a true housing strategy for the 21st century that will provide affordable housing for all, including ensuring that our teachers, police and firefighters can live near where they work?

Health Insurance:

- More than 43 million people lacked health insurance in 2002. The number is even higher today. In addition, more than 80 percent of the uninsured are in working families. What are you going to do as President to enable minorities, the elderly and individuals without insurance to receive quality health care?

Transportation:

- Each year, more than 25,000 people die on rural roads, a fatality rate that is 2.5 times greater than on urban roads. What are you going to do as President to stop the sharply increasing number of deaths that are occurring on rural roads every day?
- More than 90 percent of future economic growth will occur in the nation's counties, cities and towns. Yet it seems that just getting from point A to point B is a major challenge throughout the country and the congestion problems are getting worse. What is your vision for a 21st century transportation system? Do you have some new ideas?
- What will you do to ensure that our aging transportation infrastructure gets the fundamental improvement it needs?

Jobs:

- What is your strategy for tying together the importance of education and workforce development to create jobs for the future, and how are you going to pay for it?
- On the issue of jobs, the country has lost more jobs than it has gained during the recent recession. As of the end of August, over one million jobs have been lost. How would you improve this significant loss of jobs and ensure that newly created jobs enable workers to earn a decent wage?

Homeland Security and Hometown Security:

- Many counties and cities are spending their own money for homeland security and much of the Federal funding appropriated by Congress for first responders - firefighters and police officers - is still not getting down to the local level. What will your Administration do to help reduce the red tape and get the funding where it's needed most?
- Are you prepared to put gang and drug violence in our core urban areas on the same level as homeland security and put the funding where it is needed most?
- What do you see as the role of the Federal government in supporting local public safety and crime prevention efforts, and what resources of the Federal government are you willing to devote to **hometown** security?