

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON

SPEAKER: MIAMI MAYOR MANUEL DIAZ (I), PRESIDENT, U.S. CONFERENCE  
OF MAYORS

SUBJECT: INVESTING IN SOLUTIONS TO THE GROWING PROBLEMS THAT  
THREATEN AMERICA'S CITIES AND METROPOLITAN AREAS

MODERATOR: DONNA LEINWAND, VICE PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS  
CLUB

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MS. LEINWAND: Good afternoon and welcome to the National Press Club for our  
annual speaker luncheon featuring Mayor Manny Diaz. My name is Donna Leinwand of  
USA Today, and I'm vice president of the National Press Club.

I'd like to welcome club members and their guests in the audience today as well as  
those of you watching on C-SPAN. We're looking forward to today's speech. And  
afterwards, I will ask as many questions as time permits. Please hold your applause  
during the speech so that we have time for as many questions as possible. For our  
broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you hear applause, it may be from the guests  
and members of the general public who attend our luncheons and not necessarily from the  
working press. I'd now like to introduce our head-table guests and ask them to stand  
briefly when their names are called. From your right, we have Thomas Burr from The  
Salt Lake Tribune and NPC and president of the Regional Reporters Association; Jessica  
Brady of Roll Call; Libby George of Congressional Quarterly; Deborah George,  
Washington bureau chief, Univision, and a guest of the speaker; Will Lester of the  
Associated Press; Tom Cochran, CEO and executive director of the U.S. Conference of  
Mayors, and also a guest of the speaker.

To my right, we have Melissa Charbonneau of CBN News and vice chair of the Speakers Committee -- and skipping over our speaker for just a minute -- Jonathan Allen, Congressional Quarterly and Speakers Committee member who organized today's event - - thank you very much, Jonathan -- Chief John Timoney, Miami Police Department, and a guest of the speaker; Lisa Lambert of Reuters; Rodrigo Valderrama, freelance writer; Peter Urban of The Connecticut Post; and Charlie Ericksen of Hispanic Link.

Today's luncheon speaker was sworn in as the 66th president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors a little more than a month ago, and already he has ramped up a campaign for more federal spending in American cities. We expect to hear quite a bit about that and what commitments the second-term Miami mayor hopes to wrangle from presidential candidate Barack Obama and John McCain before the November election.

But first, I'd like to tell you a little bit about Manny Diaz, who is making his first luncheon address at the National Press Club. Born in Cuba in 1954, Diaz fled with his mother to Miami in 1961. His father remained behind as a political prisoner. He grew up in the city's Little Havana neighborhood, graduating from Florida International University and University of Miami's Law School. And I don't think he would ever forgive me if I didn't say he also is a graduate of Belen Jesuit. (Laughter.)

He gained fame in 2000 for representing Elian Gonzalez' family in the United States as they unsuccessfully tried to prevent the child from being sent back to Cuba. Diaz, who has no previous political experience, ran for mayor as an independent and won a runoff election after the incumbent mayor was eliminated in the first round of voting. He campaigned on a promise to run the city more like a business.

In his first term, he was credited with declining crime rates, low unemployment and booming development in the city. The latter accomplishment proved a double-edged sword for Diaz, who was blamed for overbuilding as Miami experienced a flood of housing followed by plummeting home prices during the year's foreclosure crisis.

In addition to his responsibilities in Miami, he is now the chief spokesman for the nation's mayors on issues ranging from their support for comprehensive immigration reform to their opposition to the use of bottled water in municipal facilities and, of course, pressuring the federal government to invest more in cities. Diaz, who endorsed New York Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton during the Democratic presidential primary, caused a little bit of a stir in late June when he pointedly refused to transfer that endorsement to Barack Obama. Perhaps he'll tell us where he stands.

Please help me welcome Mayor Manny Diaz to the National Press Club.

(Applause.)

MAYOR DIAZ: Thank you. Thank you, Donna, although I'm not sure I should thank you for that introduction. (Laughter.)

Good afternoon. It's really an honor for me to be here with you today. I want to thank all of you for inviting me to join you. I particularly want to thank so many friends that have joined me here this afternoon and many even traveling from Miami. So thank you all of you.

I'm privileged to be mayor of the city of Miami, a city built on the aspirations and the dreams of so many who have come to America searching for freedom, searching for a better life. It is what this country gave my family, and it is what this country has given me.

I came to the United States when I was 6-years old on a freedom flight, sitting on my mother's lap. We fled a place where the government denies its people the very freedoms and the opportunities that all of us take for granted. We saw this country, as so many others still do, as a beacon of hope, a land of boundless opportunity.

My mom and dad worked two and three jobs at any one time. They cleaned toilets, parked cars, washed dishes. And yet, they never despaired. They knew that if you work hard, you can provide your children a better life. We lived in a clean, safe neighborhood. I attended a public school. And after-school programs kept me from getting into trouble. I worked as a school janitor making \$1.10 an hour as part of a program called the (FEDA ?) program which some of you may remember.

Student loans made it possible for me to attend college and earn a law degree. At every turn in my life, especially in my youth, I benefited from a partnership. Because government invested in me, I can now give back as mayor of the city of Miami and as president of the United States Conference of Mayors.

Not long ago, I spoke at a naturalization ceremony in Miami. I could not help but remember the day that I raised my right hand and swore allegiance to this great nation. As I looked out at the crowd of over 3,000 people from all corners of the world, from all walks of life, all eager to join this great American democracy, I asked myself, do they see the same things in America that I saw all those years ago? Is this country still willing to provide the tools for advancement? Is America still willing to invest in its people? Does a 6-year-old child today have the same access to opportunity that I did or that any of us did?

This is a time when Washington has lost its values, lost its principles, lost its sense of purpose. It no longer invests in our cities. It no longer invests in our people. Plain and simple, Washington has abandoned us. While Washington engages in endless debate and partisan bickering, people throughout this country continue to suffer cuts to education, to housing, health, public services, public safety, youth programs, economic development, job training, arts and infrastructure. Government investment in our cities and in our people all cut.

When Washington does act, it is to clean up a mess that should have never happened in the first place because Washington plays catch-up. Just look at the recent

housing bill, a bill, by the way, that the current president threatened to veto. It is a fix for a problem that mayors saw coming. A problem that would not have spiraled out of control had those in Washington heard our cry for help.

Right now, solutions are not coming from Washington. Solutions are coming from America's cities. We drive the national economy, 92 percent of the nation's economic growth, 86 percent of all jobs, 90 percent of income and gross domestic products. Over 85 percent of Americans are now living in cities. Cities are not the problem. Cities are the solution. And while Washington sleeps, mayors are working 24/7 to keep this country going.

We address the issues that most matter to Americans -- Greg Nickels of Seattle on climate change; Mike Bloomberg of New York on infrastructure; Tom Menino of Boston on illegal guns; Rich Daley of Chicago on education; and Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa of Los Angeles on poverty reduction. And the list goes on and on and on. We are the front line, the last hope, that in cities not all is lost. We are the government of first resort. We accept that responsibility, but we should not have to be the government of last resort.

And so today, we face a moment of choice. In November, we will go to the polls to elect the next president. The American people demand an accountable federal partner. We are prepared to sit down with Senator Obama and Senator McCain. Tomorrow, we begin our Mayors' March for America -- Five forums, five cities, 60 days -- Philadelphia, then New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami. And why these forums? Why now?

We see violence increase in our cities. Today, there are more gang members in America than police officers. On the streets of Miami, an AK-47 is cheaper to buy than a PlayStation. Youth violence accounts for 20 percent of all violence and it is the second leading cause of death among our youth. Children are killing children. Is crime a local problem or is it an American problem? One in every six children lives in poverty with nearly half living in extreme poverty. Over 60 percent -- 60 percent -- of America's children cannot read or perform math at grade level, and in our largest cities over 50 percent of our children do not make it past high school. These numbers are much higher if you're black or Latino. Are poverty and economic opportunity a local problem or an American problem?

The American Society of Civil Engineers grades our infrastructure at a D, requiring a \$1.6 trillion investment just to fix it. A bridge collapsed in Minneapolis. Steam pipes explode in Manhattan. Levees bust in New Orleans. And these are not isolated incidents. They are symptoms of an underfunded national infrastructure. Mothers and fathers spend 4 billion hours a year stuck in traffic -- 4 billion -- time that they don't spend with their children. Over a third of our cities do not know where they will get their water from in the next 20 years. Is investing in our infrastructure a local problem or is it an American problem?

The U.S. economy has lost nearly 450,000 jobs so far this year. Wages remain flat - - gasoline at \$4 a gallon -- rising food prices, rising medical costs, hitting each and every

one of us in the wallet. Is our economy a local problem or is it an American problem? We import well over half of our oil, most from unfriendly governments, and the prices continue to rise. We face mounting evidence of a global environmental crisis, and in this century the house where I live in could very well be under water. Is preserving our environment a local problem or is it an American problem?

For the first time in our history, we are in real danger of failing to give our children a better world than the one our parents left us. We are in danger of raising a forgotten generation. This is not the America I grew up in. These are not just Democrat or Republican problems. These are America's problems. Our five forums will focus on crime and public safety to make our streets and neighborhoods safe for children and families; poverty reduction and economic opportunity so that we can financially empower all Americans; arts, culture, and tourism, stimulating an industry that creates jobs that cannot be outsourced -- a generator of over 10 million jobs and a trillion dollars in economic impact. Infrastructure investments to repair and rebuild our nation's resources with every billion invested generating 47,000 jobs that cannot be outsourced. And our environment -- again, generating millions of jobs that cannot be outsourced while preserving our planet and our nation for generations to come.

These are investments that will add millions of jobs, trillions of dollars to the GDP, billions in personal income, and billions in energy savings. It is the best economic stimulus that our nation could ever have. How can the presidential candidates even begin to talk about an urban agenda without including our nation's mayors? Are people stuck inside the Beltway supposed to decide what is in the best interest of our nation's cities? You don't need to spend money on polls to figure out what the American people want. Mayors are on 24 hours at the coffee shop, at PTA meetings, at church, at Little League games. We don't need polls. We are the polls. We know what Americans want and we know what Americans need.

We will present to the next president the urban agenda for the first 100 days. The next president must understand that an investment in America's cities is an investment in America's people and it is an investment in America's future -- that our next president should be the mayor of the United States. The stakes could not be higher. The status quo has clearly not worked. We need a clean and historic break with the past. While the twentieth century saw the end of European political and economic dominance, will the twenty-first century see the end of American dominance? World powers today compete for economic strength. The weapons are not nuclear or missiles. The weapons are information and currency. China, Russia, India, Brazil, and many others are gaining on us by investing in their people, investing in their cities, and investing in their nation. They're also buying us out. In 10 years, our foreign-held debt has doubled and half of our debt is now foreign owned.

Not surprisingly, China holds the greatest portion of our debt -- \$1.5 trillion -- \$1.5 trillion. And we ask them for money so that we can buy oil from the Middle East.

Other countries have figured out that it is easier to buy us than to bomb us. A recent report shows that Moscow is now the world's most expensive city. Our thirst for oil has put us on a path where we are engaged in the greatest transfer of wealth in human history, \$700 -- \$700 billion a year -- all going overseas. Just think about what this money could do to improve American cities, and the people of America who live in those cities.

What will it take for our next president to realize he cannot afford, that we cannot afford to ignore the needs of Americans. After 9/11, the term "America's mayor" was coined. It meant reassuring all of us during tough times, providing hope that we can get through this. The truth is, every day in America, in small towns and big cities, there are mayors who earn this title, reassuring us that not all is lost, restoring pride, providing confidence that we too will get through this.

And we do this because of the opportunities that this country still holds, the promise that it stands for. We do this because it is the only country in the world that inspires a dream -- a phrase that was coined in the early part of the last century during the Great Depression, a dream of a land in which land should be better, and richer, and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for all.

Mayors have never lost sight of that. The American people are yearning. They want the dream again. Ours is a country founded on the belief on equality and self governance. We forged the path for the rest of the world. We build skyscrapers, eradicate disease, liberate continents, send men to the moon. We are Americans. We have sacrificed before. We must do it again.

There is no reason we cannot be greater than what we already are. There is no reason we cannot overcome these challenges; seize this opportunity to lead cities where poverty is not life-long sentence, but a temporary condition to be overcome; to lead cities that combine economic prosperity with environmental sustainability; to lead cities where our children can receive the best education, afford a home, hold a good-paying job, have access to the arts, and live in clean and safe neighborhoods; to lead cities where everyone has access to the promises of the dream. This is what mayors do, and this is what the next president of the United States must do so that our children and their children may inherit cities, may inherit a country better than was left to us. Thank you. (Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: Okay, folks, we've got some time for questions. The audience has sent up some very good questions, so I want to make sure we have time for all of them.

The first one is about your plan. The president, in his budget, has proposed cutting things like Byrne grants, and COPS grants and all kinds of programs that go down to the local government. In this time of economic crisis when the federal government is hurting for money, how realistic is it to expect that Congress and the federal government will actually send more money down to the cities?

MAYOR DIAZ: Well, I don't -- I don't think the issue here should be about how realistic it is, the real issue here should be the fact that we have to do it. We are seeing, in cities across America today, an increase in violence -- gun violence, in particular, assault weapons all over the place.

I have my chief here with me who keeps me informed of everything that's going on in that regard. And when you see, as I mentioned in the speech, when you see children, teenagers, in their young 20s, running around the streets of Miami with these weapons of war -- because that's really what they are, they're weapons of war that have been used in war -- and shooting other children you realize that we have a problem.

Now, obviously we're seeing increases in homicide rates. There are other areas that haven't necessarily increased, and so some people have argued that the problem is not as bad as it should be. Well, I submit to you that why should we wait for the problem to get to be "as bad as it should be" before we do something about it?

In the late '80s and early '90s we had a serious crime problem in this country, and those programs -- some of those programs that you mentioned were crafted to deal with this, with the crime problem, and to reverse it. We're seeing that begin to happen again. We're seeing that pattern start to happen again. And so why not get out front and get our arms around it before it becomes a problem?

Perhaps the number one obligation that we have -- more important than anything else, is to keep our cities safe, to keep our people secure. It all starts with that. If you live in an unsafe city, if live in an unsafe neighborhood, forget about everything else you're trying to do. You're not going to be able to attract people. You're not going to be able keep people. So, to me, that's a fundamental issue, and that's why we start tomorrow in Philadelphia dealing with this. MS. LEINWAND: Okay, you mentioned quite a bit about oil. Do you think the nation's governors, state transportation authorities and mayors are doing enough to support public transportation?

MAYOR DIAZ: Well, we look forward to -- we're lucky that we have a former Philadelphia mayor, Ed Rendell, who's now governor of Pennsylvania, who is the head of the National Governors Association, and we'll be meeting with them over the next few weeks to talk precisely about this.

We need to change the paradigm here. America has been all about building roads -- and that was great, once upon a time; and that was a massive infrastructure project that this country did in the '40s and '50s and '60s, creating jobs and creating the kind of economic prosperity that we're experiencing today, and allowing people from Maine to come down to Miami and spend lots of money. (Laughter.)

That's all very good stuff. However, the world has changed and we need to change with it. And so even today, when you see the tremendous number of vehicle miles -- the reduction in vehicle miles traveled over just the last few months, it is staggering --

billions and billions of less miles every single month, the tremendous bump in increase in transit, public transit use, millions higher than we're accustomed to.

That's what's being done in Europe; that is what is being done in Asia to create the kind of sustainability that those countries are looking ahead to maintain. We need to get away from the -- from the mentality of using the car, and getting on I-95 and driving from one place to the next. We need to create the infrastructure, which is not only good, very good, for the environment, but it's also about the very essence of who we are as Americans, in terms of moving goods and commerce, and in terms of moving people from one place to the next.

You're very lucky up here. I love coming up here because I can get on the train and go to New York; I'll be getting on the train and going to Philadelphia tomorrow. That's the kind of thing that we -- those are the kinds of plans that we should be developing all throughout America. And we hope to start that process, obviously working with the -- working with the governors.

Of course, all of you would suspect that my answer would be that I would rather that money come straight to the cities. And, of course, I would rather it come straight to the cities and not go through the states. (Laughter.)

MS. LEINWAND: One of the things that the U.S. Conference of Mayors is supporting is arts, as part of their 10-point plan. Can you talk about Miami's impact -- the impact of arts on Miami?

MAYOR DIAZ: Miami is -- actually, when I first got elected, one of the marks on Miami was that we did not have a strong arts and cultural community. And as a result, our growth, our revitalization, was being stunted because of this inadequacy in our city.

Over the last six, seven years it has dramatically changed with the construction of a brand new, state-of-the-art beautiful performing arts center, by attracting Art Basel to Miami, that I hope all of you will join us in December this year -- the largest art fair in the world that now calls Miami home -- only home outside of Basel, Switzerland. We're in the process of building a couple of museums.

And then, of course, as you've seen in cities throughout America, we've had neighborhoods that five years ago, six years ago you wouldn't drive into -- certainly not after 5:00 in the afternoon -- that now, for example, our Wynwood (sp) neighborhood has over 80 art galleries. And so you're beginning -- and art, as usual, is serving as the great generator for the revitalization of many of our neighborhoods.

MS. LEINWAND: We are currently in a housing crisis. What do you see as the role for government, private enterprise and nonprofits in helping keeping people in their homes? And what is Miami doing on this front?



MAYOR DIAZ: Could you say it again? That's a lot of questions -- a lot of parts to this question.

Well, part of government's role is what we saw last week -- I think it was last week -- with the approval of the housing bill. That was an important bill -- something we were all looking for.

The problem that we have is that when we don't get -- just so you understand -- when we don't get support from government, from Washington, then as cities -- whichever area it is and I could go through a whole slew of them -- we have to develop our own programs to be able to deal with these crises, because we can't say no.

I'm at a street corner having a cup of coffee and I have a constituent coming to me and saying, "I'm about to lose my home. What can I do?" And I can't say, "Call your congressman or call your senator or call someone else in Washington." We have to do whatever we can. What we've done through the years is work on private enterprise. Now, here's an important part of the equation as well, because part of private enterprise is the reason why we're in this mess in the first place. And so, you know, obviously, there has to be a much more responsible private enterprise.

I think some of what the legislation deals with in terms of regulating the private sector, I think, is going to be very important, because what occurred should have never been allowed to happen. We have put ourselves in a very, very tough position right now and it's going to take us awhile to get out of where we are.

We work continuously with nonprofits on financial literacy programs, for example, which are very important and which the legislation includes money for as well, which is going to help.

And let me just talk about that for a second, because in my opinion, one of the greatest problems that we have -- and when you look at the education statistics that I mentioned in my speech, it shouldn't come as a shock to anyone -- that we are in an extremely financially illiterate country. And if we don't do something about improving the financial literacy of our people; if we don't do something today with children, for example, to get them involved in the digital era, technical information today turns over every -- I believe it's every couple of months, I think; in the near future, projections are every 72 hours -- if we don't give our people -- and this is when I go back to tools for people -- if we don't go back to giving the people that live in our cities the kinds of tools that are necessary to be self-sustaining, then we're getting ourselves into a very deep, long-term mess.

Forget getting through a current problem. What I'm worried about is where this country is going to be in the next 10, 15, 20 or 50 years when my children and grandchildren are growing up in America. That's what I worry about today.

MS. LEINWAND: What should the city's role be in enforcing immigration law?

MAYOR DIAZ: Last time I checked, I don't have a federal badge. So that's not my job.

MS. LEINWAND: In terms of economic stimulus, many say that increased infrastructure spending will help the economy. Will it? If so, what type of projects could help Miami?

MAYOR DIAZ: Absolutely infrastructure can help the economy. And I mentioned the example earlier of what had occurred even in this country. I mean, we post-created one of the greatest industrial nations in the world, primarily through a significant amount of infrastructure investment in the last century. The problem is that then we stopped. And yet, you see, for example, today the examples of countries all over the world who are doing it and whose economies are prospering. When you see Ireland and the progress that Ireland has made in terms of its economy. When you see Spain -- and I could go on and on and on.

And it's not just, as some people would say, well, this is just really because in the case of India or China or others, these are countries that are beginning to develop. No. It's developing countries and developed countries that are making significant investments in their infrastructure and you're seeing their economies skyrocket.

We have gone flat. And that's why I think it is so essential and it -- I mean, you show it. I mean, even in the environment. Let's talk about the environment. The number of green jobs that are being created today in European countries that are dealing with -- that are implementing wind power and solar power, changing the vehicles that people are driving. Those industries are creating millions and millions of jobs. And those industries should really be creating millions and millions of jobs here in the United States.

MS. LEINWAND: We have loads and loads of political questions, so I'm going to turn to those.

For decades, South Florida has been a Republican stronghold. Is that changing? Why or why not?

MAYOR DIAZ: Of course, now I'm -- I guess most of you know, I've taken off my U.S. Conference of Mayors hat now. You're asking local issues.

Actually, to be totally frank with you, registration numbers that I've seen -- not just locally, but really throughout the entire state of Florida -- seem to indicate that more and more people are registering like me, independent.

And I think part of that is because of the tremendous amount of dissatisfaction that the people have or the fact that they don't see, have not seen either party really talk about the issues that I talked about today and the issues that are most important to Americans. And that's why people are choosing not to go one way or the other.

I think the registration numbers are even higher in that regard than they are for either party.

MS. LEINWAND: Do you think Senator Obama should pick Senator Hillary Clinton as vice president? (Laughter.)

MAYOR DIAZ: Yes. (Laughter -- applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: And if he does -- (laughter) -- will you throw your support behind Barack Obama? MAYOR DIAZ: Can we turn that off for a second? (Laughter.)

You know, what's most important for me right now is not so much -- in case you have another one coming up after this one. I'll anticipate it.

It's not so much who I'm going to endorse, but who endorses the mayors' plan that I've been talking about. (Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: I believe you met with Senator Obama in June. What kind of indication did he give you that he was on the same page with your 10-point plan?

MAYOR DIAZ: Actually, he has endorsed our 10-point plan before June. He did come to our meeting in June. I was actually with both Senator McCain and Senator Obama last week in Orlando for the National Urban League Conference -- annual conference -- and I had an opportunity to meet with both of them.

I'm encouraged, really, more encouraged than I've been for a very long time seeing the two of them begin to address the issues that we're talking about in the ways that we want them to.

So that is our mission. Our mission in this whole process is really about putting that agenda in front of both of them and having them, as I said, whichever one of them wins in November, that they not just become president of the United States, but mayor of the United States.

MS. LEINWAND: Okay, we have to throw in a few questions from our local reporters here.

Do you plan to seek higher office after your term as mayor expires?

MAYOR DIAZ: I don't know. I've enjoyed very much what I've done. This is the first time I ever ran for office. Not to disagree, but I had been actually involved in politics all my life. I just never sought elective office.

Even when I was in high school I was already organizing and doing some other things.

And so I love it. I have a commitment to helping people -- I guess that's part of the Jesuit training that I got. (Scattered laughter.) And I will never give that up.

I decided to run in this particular case after telling my friends for years that if I was ever stupid enough to tell them I was going to run for office that they had authority to shoot me on the spot.

But Miami was in such dire straits, in my opinion, in 2002, that I said I have to stop talking about why people from the private sector don't jump in and run for office and I have to practice what I preach. And so that's why I did this.

I did this because I wanted to turn what I believed to be -- no offense to anyone here -- what I believe to be America's greatest city, the new face of America, and I wanted to turn that around. We didn't deserve the reputation that we had, the one that you all enjoyed making fun of for all those years. And I wanted to turn that around.

And I think we have, to a very large extent, done so. Whether or not I do something else really just depends on how strongly I feel about something. It's not just a move just for the sake of a political move. It's a move that would have to be based on that fire that I felt in my belly in 2000.

MS. LEINWAND: Okay. Going back to mayors' issues, energy and climate issues are among the many issues confronting cities. How are cities adapting to such changes? How will they affect transportation and other city services?

MR. DIAZ: This is an area that I am so proud to be a mayor and so proud to be a part of a group of people in this country that, when you think about it, have led the greatest grassroots movement in, certainly, my lifetime.

And we are now close to -- 900 mayors, Tom? -- that have signed the U.S. Climate -- Mayors' Climate -- I wish we had a U.S. climate protection agreement -- that signed the Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement, because mayors became frustrated. Again, we heard from our constituents in our streets, at city halls, that we had a problem and we needed to do something about it. And so we decided to do --

Now, I don't need to tell you that environmental issues are not typically -- of this sort -- are not typically in a city's budget. But how can we sit back and not do something when the situation is so critical right now? And so mayors decided to take it upon ourselves.

And I am pleased now that it has filtered up and that we're seeing more and more states; we're seeing for the first time Washington beginning to talk and pass legislation that will help mayors continue to do what it is that we've already started doing.

And what have mayors -- if you go on our Web page, you would love to see all the different types of initiatives that we've really undertaken, from -- in my case, for example, in the city of Miami, we actually now have solar-paneled city hall. And by the way, I did that without spending a dollar of taxpayer money. I did that with a joint private-public partnership.

But that's what mayors do. We know we have a problem; we know we have to deal with it. We have to address it; we have to look for solutions. And we -- in that process is really where the ingenuity is started in America, which is in cities, because we have to do more with less. We have to do things that we didn't -- that weren't necessarily in the budget when we approved it at the beginning of the fiscal year, and yet we need to do something about it.

And so we do that all the time, and from converting all of our fleets to hybrid or flex fuel or other alternative fuels, trying to -- in our case, for example, right now we've been working on building a streetcar system running through our city to get people out of cars.

We're trying to do that also through a private-public partnership, because transportation is so essential -- promoting all sorts of alternative modes of transportation, including just riding bicycles and creating bike lanes and making all of our cities bicycle-friendly.

So this list goes -- just planting trees. Planting trees are a front line of defense against emissions. So all of those things are the kinds of things that we've been doing and will continue to do.

It's not that mayors are standing here saying we're not going to do anything unless Washington helps us. What we're saying is that this is not only -- at this point, certainly not an American problem. This is a world problem.

And I wasn't kidding when I said that my house could be on the water this century. There are studies, plenty of studies that show that I've just -- (Chuckles.) My kids are going to own waterfront property in a way they didn't think -- (Laughter.)

So these are real, real problems, and they require that someone up here look down to us and say, gee, I love what you guys are doing. How can we help? That's all we're saying. We're not holding our hand out. We're just saying be a part -- be a part of what we're doing.

And when you look at the statistics that I cited earlier where 85 percent of Americans live in cities, where we produce 90 percent of income and jobs and our GDP. Where else do you look?

When people up here stand up and say "the American people," who are the American people? The American people are people living in cities. So doesn't it stand to

reason that if the American people are living in cities that you should be more helpful to cities? And that you should work with cities and you should work with the mayors of those cities? Makes sense to me.

MS. LEINWAND: There's been a lot of talk lately about offshore drilling, even in Florida. Is that a solution, part of a solution, or no solution at all? Why?

MR. DIAZ: Yeah. I've never supported offshore drilling. I still don't. I will tell you that obviously mayors are -- we're practical. We want things to happen. But personally, and whether it's part of some kind of a compromise that has arrived up here at Washington, but it is, in my opinion, quite frankly a smokescreen.

It's not going to save any money for any one of us to drive our cars now. There are leases for -- I don't know the exact number, but thousands and thousands of acres that exist today that are not being drilled.

I really think this is a great election year issue because all of us in America are suffering, some a whole lot more than others, with high gas prices. And if you throw out -- bait out there that we need to drill for more oil, obviously people are going to take that bait.

But to me it's a political issue and it is something that should never, ever, ever, ever be discussed in isolation and not in the context of a whole lot of other investments that you're going to make to improve our environment and bring the -- and really, really bring the cost of gasoline down.

Which, at the end of the day, the best way to do that is to conserve by just not using vehicles. How about we put money into public transit?

(Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: What is the number one reason Miami's reputation has improved? MR. DIAZ: (Laughs.)

(Laughter.)

I hired a great chief of police. (Laughter.) (Applause.)

I think for -- probably the number one issue would have to be how people are working together in ways that are unprecedented. Miami is America's most diverse city. That's why I always refer to it as the face of the new America. Over 60 percent of our residents are foreign-born, and they come from everywhere. I think it's 140 languages and dialects that we speak in Miami right now.

And what used to happen is that there were a lot of silos and everybody lived in their silo and nobody was working together. And I always thought to myself, imagine all

of that untapped energy and resource, if it could be harnessed to bring everybody to work together, what a great city you could build.

And I think that that's what we're seeing in Miami today is the ability of people from all walks of life, all countries of the world coming together, to build the city and have pride in the city that they live in.

And I think that's really -- if I had to pick one, that would be what I would pick.

MS. LEINWAND: Okay. First -- let's see. What message might you have for the South American politicians that are attempting to reintroduce socialism based on Cuban models?

(Laughter.)

MR. DIAZ: Well, I could tell you for sure I do not like the Cuban models.  
(Laughter.) (Chuckles.)

Well, this is an important, very important issue for me, and I will tell you that over the last three years I have organized -- with a group of, naturally, mayors all over this hemisphere-- something that I the Mayors' Hemispheric Forum.

We've had three of these meetings and the reason I did this is because, again, I looked at what was happening on a national level in this country, I looked at what was happening to the south of us, and I started to really worry because 10 years ago or so we -- or, you know, within the last 10 years we all patted ourselves on the back and said how great it was that we only had one undemocratic country left in this hemisphere and how much progress we had made in that regard. And we should have been proud back then of that fact.

The problem is you don't just leave, pack up your bags, and forget that those countries still exist. It is inconceivable to me -- inconceivable to me how we totally and completely ignore what happens in the rest of this hemisphere, especially to our south -- completely. And the only time -- to get back to the Washington point -- the only time we ever pay attention is when something happens in Venezuela, something happens in Bolivia, something happens in Ecuador. Then we're shocked. Oh, my God, what's going on over there -- there's a new socialist group over there and what's going on.

Well, if you were paying attention and if you were helping those countries achieve a sense of long-term self-sufficiency to feed a democracy -- a democracy -- you know, when you're really hungry you're not thinking too much about what kind of a system you're living under. You're thinking about how to take care of your family. And if we don't start to pay attention it's going to get worse than what we've seen today. And so these forums that we've held have been very successful because they brought in all of the mayors and we all understand each other. Again, it doesn't matter what country, what

political affiliation -- we can all sit down because we're all dealing with the same issues, each and every single day.

And it's been very successful. This year we actually merged -- overlapped the forum with the U.S. Conference of Mayors' annual meeting in Miami and it was incredibly, incredibly successful. Among other things, for example, right now the mayor of a section of Caracas is a fine, upstanding young man who has been a part of our three forums. He is possibly the most recognized and probably most viable political opponent to the current system. He came to our conference. When he got back to Caracas he was detained. Our conference -- our forum was so successful and word of it got back home that when he actually arrived at the airport the government detained him and searched him and his wife and his family.

So this is what we're trying to do at a mayoral level. Why aren't we doing this at a national level? Why does it take the mayor of Miami and the mayor of Chicago and others around the country to realize how important it is to reach out to these mayors? And by the way, as many of you probably know, mayors in South American and Central American cities are very likely to become presidents of those countries, and so we're developing relationships today with future heads of state -- of states. And so again, it's just -- it boggles my mind that it takes mayors to recognize the importance of the future of this country and the interconnectivity that we have with what happens in Colombia, what happens in Mexico, what happens in Brazil, and all the other countries, and yet nothing happens up here.

MS. LEINWAND: Should the next president relax U.S. trade and travel restrictions with Cuba?

MAYOR DIAZ: No. I support the embargo. Now, with respect to remittances and travel -- family travel -- no, I support relaxing those.

MS. LEINWAND: Okay. We're almost out of time but before I ask the last question we have a couple of important matters to deal with. First of all, let me remind our members about future speakers. August 6th, Governor Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota -- the governor's topic will be Sam's Club Republicans, outlining his view on how the GOP can achieve success by addressing the needs of this group of voters. On October 7th we have Christo and Jeanne-Claude, world-renowned contemporary artists who've spent some time in Miami -- October 23rd, Billy Joel, the Grammy Award-winning artist. On September 13th, the National Press Club will host the 11th Annual National Press Club 5K Run, Walk, and Auction. For more information about that go to [press.org](http://press.org).

And second, I would like to present our guest with the centennial National Press Club mug. (Laughter, applause.) And I must apologize for this last question. I fear you are in somewhat hostile territory today and I'll say that this question comes from a Redskins fan. He identified himself as such, and he would like to know will the Miami Dolphins win more than one game this year? (Laughter.)



MAYOR DIAZ: How are the Nationals doing? (Laughter, applause.)

MR. : (Off mike.)

MS. LEINWAND: (Laughter.) I'd like to thank you all for coming today. I'd also like to thank the National Press Club staff members -- Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booz, and Howard Rothman -- for organizing today's lunch. Also, thanks to the NPC library for its research. The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by National Press Club broadcast operations center. Many of our events are aired on XM Satellite Radio and available for free download on iTunes as well as on our website. Nonmembers may purchase transcripts, audio and video tapes by calling 202-662-6598 or by e-mailing Archives at [press.org](http://press.org). For more information about the Press Club please go to our website which is [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). Thank you and we are adjourned. (Applause.)

END.