EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Yale SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

CEO SUMMIT

Yale Mayors College

The New York Public Library | June 7, 2016

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Chief Executive Leadership Institute
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The Yale Mayors College brought together more than 20 mayors from across the United States, along with academics, futurists, and leading thinkers to examine some of the most critical issues facing mayors and cities. Topics discussed included global lessons on urban modernity, improving community engagement and public safety, economic development, and disruptive technologies in cities. Participants included:

Anthony W. Marx, President & CEO, The New York Public Library
Maxwell L. Anderson, Executive Director, New Cities Foundation
Peter C. Perdue, Professor of History, Yale University
Toni Nathaniel Harp, Mayor, New Haven, Connecticut
Greg Fischer, Mayor, Louisville, Kentucky
Tom Tait, Mayor, Anaheim, California
Carolyn G. Goodman, Mayor, Las Vegas, Nevada
Tony Martinez, Mayor, Brownsville, Texas
Paul Soglin, Mayor, Madison, Wisconsin
Douglas W. Rae, Professor of Management, Yale School of Management
Christopher Shays, Congressman (1987-2009), State of Connecticut
John Curtis, Mayor, Provo City, Utah
Melvin L. Holder, Mayor, Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Tim Mahoney, Mayor, Fargo, North Dakota

Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, Mayor, Baltimore, Maryland
Mark Stodola, Mayor, Little Rock, Arkansas
Dean M. Esserman, Chief of Police, New Haven, Connecticut
Byron Brown, Mayor, Buffalo, New York
Virg Bernero, Mayor, Lansing, Michigan
Oscar B. Goodman, Mayor (1999-2011), Las Vegas, Nevada
David R. Martin, Mayor, Stamford, Connecticut
Stephanie Miner, Mayor, Syracuse, New York
Chuck Barney, Mayor, Minot, North Dakota
Ethan Berkowitz, Mayor, Anchorage, Alaska
Jon Mitchell, Mayor, New Bedford, Massachusetts
Richard J. Berry, Mayor, Albuquerque, New Mexico
Sly James, Mayor, Kansas City, Missouri
Beth Van Duyne, Mayor, Irving, Texas

Mayors occupy a unique position in America

Americans think the political process is broken, especially at the state and national level. But mayors and cities are different. As one mayor said, “We can put our swords down” more easily than in DC and get things done. Mayors don’t have to respond to special interests, and are pragmatists, not ideologues. Mayors all want more resources, yet mayors can leverage resources that may not be obvious – like libraries – to make progress and drive change.

“Mayors are our last great hope.”
—Former political leader

Carolyn Goodman, Mayor, Las Vegas, Nevada, and Richard J. Berry, Mayor, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Much can be learned by examining global cities.

Professors Peter Perdue of Yale and Quinn Mills of Harvard Business School shared insights and lessons from global cities, with a particular focus on China and India. Among these insights:

• Tremendous urbanization has occurred in China, resulting in the most megacities in the world. This rapid urbanization is the largest rural/urban change in history.

• China has made massive investments in infrastructure, including state-of-the-art transportation systems. Infrastructure investments in cities have been supported by national and state funding, which is lacking for cities in the United States.

• The Chinese economy has been manufacturing and export driven, which is unsustainable. It needs to transform to become more consumption driven. The U.S. needs to become more investment driven and take a longer-term perspective.

• Gun ownership and violence is far lower in Asia, where previous eras of dictators and strong state control restricted guns. Even as regimes have changed, guns are not readily available. Some U.S. mayors believe that guns are directly related to violence in the United States.

Cities are creating cultures of compassion.

Being a mayor today means often dealing with large numbers of citizens who are homeless and mentally ill, including panhandlers in many cities. Mayors shared examples of attempting to reduce panhandling and homelessness through specific initiatives including collaboration among faith leaders, law enforcement, and non-profits. Dealing with homelessness is a complex challenge. Cities are compelled to provide services and facilities for people in need, but don’t want to support and perpetuate an “industry” of homelessness; they want to solve the problem.
Mayors are taking unconventional steps of working to create “cultures of compassion” and advocating “kindness” with a goal of “making kindness contagious.”

**Relationships are the key to improving community engagement and public safety.**

Many cities and mayors have experienced challenging situations involving violence and disorder. There was agreement that preventing such incidents and being able to effectively manage them starts with proactively investing in developing personal relationships, particularly between police officers and people in the community.

“We started building relationships long before this incident; not during it.”

— A city police chief

A mayor whose city had experienced some unrest described articulating to the community and to law enforcement that they were in a marriage and divorce was not an option. They were stuck together and had to decide whether to make the relationship healthy or unhealthy.

Part of forging a healthy relationship is for the mayor and others in the city to listen to people. In Lansing, Michigan, the city listened to citizens’ concerns about lead in pipes; in nearby Flint, Michigan, officials didn’t listen.

**Attracting companies and creating jobs is about more than tax incentives.**

Mayors feel trapped by the game of having to offer various types of tax and economic incentives to attract corporate employers to locate in their cities. Most frustrating to some is spending huge sums to attract or keep professional sports teams, which are private entities owned by wealthy individuals. In general, such deals don’t net a positive payout. Others argued against taxes and economic incentives, asserting that business are attracted to good communities that have good schools, roads, education, and a good quality of life. Investing in a modern infrastructure was seen by some as a better strategy than tax giveaways. And, even better than trying to lure outside companies is having an entrepreneurial ecosystem that produces new companies and jobs organically.

**Social media is a disruptive technology that many mayors are embracing.**

Social media gives mayors and other city leaders the ability to disseminate messages and communicate with citizens without having to rely on the media. The mayors were generally critical of the media for being lazy and preferring a sensationalistic narrative that involves conflict. When using social media, like Twitter and blogs, mayors can communicate facts and can deliver messages to the community that are unfiltered by the media. Several mayors, some of whom were initially skeptical, have had tremendous success with social media. They have high readership and have created a vehicle to interact directly and inexpensively with large numbers of citizens.

Those mayors who are now tech and Twitter savvy urged others to spend at least 10 minutes per day on social media communicating with citizens, to not delegate this responsibility, and to require that all parts of city government use social media to provide greater transparency.

“Social media is more important than I ever imagined it would be. A modern city needs social media in all city offices.”

— Mayor

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Use of social media enables mayors and cities to decrease the reliance on traditional media to get messages out, and to be able to go around the press, which is now much less important and relevant. Some mayors mentioned no longer issuing press releases and decreasing the frequency of meetings with the editorial board of local newspapers. However, others countered that despite the power of social media, and despite at times having adversarial relationships with the press, it is still important to meet with the editorial board, which holds sway with some older constituents who tend to vote.

Other Topics Discussed

• **Digital infrastructure.** As cities think about modernizing their infrastructure they should not just think about the physical infrastructure but should also include the digital infrastructure.

• **Taxes/services.** Several mayors expressed frustration that while cities’ primary source of revenue is property taxes, a significant percentage of their property is off the tax rolls. This often includes universities and non-profit hospitals, which use city services (like the police and fire department) but don’t contribute to paying for them. This led multiple mayors to state, “The property tax model is broken.” Some cities have worked with non-tax payers to establish service agreements or arrangements for “payment in lieu of taxes.” But these are more the exception than the rule.