

AD HOC COMMITTEE OF MAYORS

Minutes of Meeting
January 9, 1967

The first meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee of Mayors was called to order by Mr. Stephen R. Currier at 10 a.m. on January 9, 1967, in the Board Room of Urban America. Participating in that meeting were Mayors Theodore R. McKeldin of Baltimore, Thomas G. Currigan of Denver, Jerome P. Cavanagh of Detroit, Robert King High of Miami, Henry W. Maier of Milwaukee, John V. Lindsay of New York City, Joseph M. Barr of Pittsburgh, and Harold Tollefson of Tacoma. Unable to attend were Mayors John F. Collins of Boston, Terry D. Schruck of Portland (Ore.), and John F. Shelley of San Francisco. Unable to attend, but represented by staff members, were Mayors Ivan Allen, Jr. of Atlanta, Richard J. Daley of Chicago, Richard C. Lee of New Haven, and James H. J. Tate of Philadelphia.

Mr. Currier opened the session by stressing the importance of obtaining a national commitment to meet urban needs. He outlined various needs to be met: the need for a more definitive statement of urban problems, the need to tell the story of the performance of cities in the line of self help, the need to gain a greater commitment for cities from Federal appropriations, the need to mobilize support from a variety of interest groups (such as business, labor, civil rights, education).

Mayor Lindsay emphasized the need for consolidation of existing programs, rather than cutbacks on any of them. He said lack of financial resources was crucial to the governing of cities.

Mayor Cavanagh maintained that the Great Society programs themselves have been successful - the financing of the programs has been the failure. In any event, it would be "catastrophic" if any of these programs were cut back.

Mayor Cavanagh noted that mayors were looked upon in Washington as "special-interest pleaders." He suggested that Urban America be the catalyst in putting together a national coalition for urban improvement and said that the calling of this initial meeting had been most helpful. Continuance of lobbying by the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National League of Cities is not enough; a broad new coalition is needed (education, civil rights, labor, business).

Mayor Cavanagh also suggested the forming of a Council of Economic Advisors for Cities to serve as an information resource to mayors. Such an information bank would be drawn upon for discussion of Federal allocations to cities and in the formation of alternatives to Federal economic policy.

Mayor McKeldin commented that money could solve most of Baltimore's problems. He concurred with Mayor Lindsay's discouragement at the lack of financial resources available to cities. In Baltimore, he explained, there is only one form of taxation - the property tax; since many people are leaving the city, this tax base is dwindling. The City is now fighting for a payroll tax, though the people are against it.

Mayor Currihan said that transportation is one of the biggest problems in Denver and that there is no alternative except public ownership. His city is also pressed "to the wall" by the tax situation; Denver has a sales and a property tax, but the State Constitution prohibits a much-needed income tax.

Mayor Currigan stressed his hope that the mayors stay united in their efforts. He was concerned that Urban America might begin competing with the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National League of Cities, the latter two being "too splintered" already. He mentioned that time is a critical factor and that he hoped this meeting could lead to a program of action.

Mr. Currier interjected a definition of Urban America's role in relation to the other groups. Urban America will act, he said, as a voice for citizens groups (business, public, etc.).

Mayor High pointed up the misunderstanding on the part of the public when it comes to urban programs and needs. "Somehow we have not gotten across the role cities play, that the destiny of the country is wrapped up in cities." The press makes a fetish of deprecating cities, and people look upon the Great Society as a handout and react to it with horror.

Mayor Cavanagh commented that many people think cities aren't imaginative when they must try to solve their own problems but that actually, many imaginative programs translated into Federal legislation have originated in cities (e.g. Model Cities, urban renewal, and the poverty program).

Mayor Tollefson warned against interpreting the last election to mean there should be a cutback on Federal programs. He suggested the first step be to present the problems to Congress and the second, telling people in cities that these programs are needed and good.

Mayor Maier said it is imperative to tackle the problem of allocation of resources and that the tactic of using a neutral force (Urban America) to project

this agenda item is a good one. The National League of Cities has been conducting an educational campaign on resources, but the League cannot do it alone. A broad alliance of ad hoc groups and special task forces is needed. This has been done in Milwaukee to organize forces in order to attack the state legislature. He mentioned gratitude to Urban America for offering to take on this task.

Mayor Barr said the greatest thing Urban America could do was to get to people the mayors can't reach as easily (e.g. businessmen). As the mayors' biggest enemy he cited columnists' interpretations of the elections.

Mr. Slayton directed the discussion to the method of forming a national coalition with the following questions: should we plan a meeting with mayors and the nation's top business leaders, civil rights leaders, etc.? should Urban America undertake some special studies or publish some certain publications?

Patrick Healy of the National League of Cities offered two suggestions for relieving the financial burden on cities: (1) have the Federal Government completely responsible for welfare (payments and administration), since it is a national problem, and (2) have states completely responsible for schools and education (60% of property taxes goes for welfare and schools).

He mentioned that we shouldn't ignore state action to meet urban needs, saying that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce has been concerned over a lack of state action in this area.

John Gunther of the U.S. Conference of Mayors emphasized the need for a national organization of local groups.

Mr. Gunther praised the idea of a Council of Economic Advisors because of the need for solid information in the local government sector. He suggested, however, that the emphasis be placed on information-gathering rather than on advising. He urged the systematic collection of information.

Mayor Cavanagh suggested that Urban America proceed along the following lines: (1) start sounding out the national coalition idea - i.e. investigate the mechanics of forming such a coalition, (2) study the possible structure of a Council of Economic Advisors, (3) examine feasible ways of establishing the credibility of urban leaders (emphasizing a new breed of leadership and narrowing of the credibility gap). In line with the latter, place greater emphasis on programs considered good today and the source from which they originated.

At the suggestion of Mayor Cavanagh, it was decided to hold another meeting of the same group, to be held on January 27 (luncheon and an afternoon meeting). It was also agreed that certain statements should be included in any comments to press people: (1) that there are many other leaders and interest groups in the country which the mayors propose to ask to join them in articulating the needs of our urban areas, (2) that this was more than a meeting to discuss ways of getting more Federal money, and (3) that it would be catastrophic to cut back expenditures for current Federal programs.

The meeting was adjourned at 3 p.m. after final editing of the press release. The next meeting will be held at 12:30 p.m. on January 27, 1967.