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Mayor's Conference Notebook

01:00 AM EDT on Sunday, June 14, 2009

SPECULATION THAT Vice President Joe Biden was to address mayors was still rampant on the second full day of the U.S. Conference of Mayors 77th annual meeting at the Rhode Island Convention Center in Providence.

Television news stations Friday night and early Saturday morning reported rumors that Biden might still make an appearance at the conference, which he (as well as a hundred other federal officials) had backed out of after receiving word that city firefighters were set to protest.

But conference officials and Providence [Mayor David N. Cicilline](#) said Saturday morning that there was no truth to the rumors that Biden was to make an appearance either Saturday or Monday, when he was scheduled to speak during the swearing-in ceremony for the new mayors' conference president.

"There has been no further discussions to have Biden come today or any day of this conference at this point," said Cicilline.

MIAMI MAYOR Manuel Diaz, in his last address as president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, called President Obama's administration decision not to send any federal officials to the conference's annual meeting on account of a union protest "a very dangerous precedent."

He said that the time for campaign slogans was over and that the new president needed to focus on the work of governing.

"Unlike D.C., we don't have the luxury of talking about sacrifices, we make them. We don't print money, we balance budgets. We can't blame others, we answer questions and give solutions," he said.

He stressed that no one at the conference was being asked to cross a picket line, a point that local union officials have disputed. "It's an informational picket," said Diaz.

On Monday, Diaz turns over the reins of the conference to Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels, who has served for the past year as vice president.

MEXICO'S AMBASSADOR to the United States, Arturo Sarukhan Casamitjana, called on mayors Saturday to step up efforts to stop the flow of guns and U.S. dollars into Mexico.

While it is difficult to get guns in Mexico because of relatively strict gun laws, there are more than 7,000 federally licensed gun stores on the U.S. side of the Mexican border. And nearly \$8 billion in drug sales in Mexico come from the United States alone, Sarukhan said, giving the drug cartels the financial leverage of a small country.

"They are feeding the drug syndicates," he said. "We need to de-fang the syndicates."

HOW DO YOU FILL the time that otherwise would have been allotted to speeches from federal dignitaries? Give out awards.

The mayors conference Saturday morning took a time-out to honor a longstanding member, who was given time to address her fellow mayors. The time was originally reserved for U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and White House drug czar Gil Kerlikowske to talk about crime reduction and public safety. Palatine (Ill.) Mayor Rita Mullins, who served 20 years until losing an April election to former Chicago Bears linebacker Jim Schwantz, kept her remarks brief: "I'm very proud to have been your colleague and your friend."

MAYOR OF HIROSHIMA, Japan, Tadatoshi Akiba — leader of the city that was leveled by a U.S. atomic bomb to bring an end to fighting in the Pacific front in World War II — spoke to mayors on Saturday about the dangers of nuclear proliferation.

Akiba, who is president of Mayors for Peace, an international group of mayors that advocates for nuclear disarmament, talked about his groups' efforts to push for the elimination of nuclear weapons by the year 2020.

THE PROVIDENCE AFTER SCHOOL ALLIANCE took honorable mention in the conference's annual City Livability Award at a Saturday luncheon.

Mayor David N. Cicilline, accepting the award, called PASA “a true model for excellence” for offering afterschool activities to middle school students.

— Journal staff writer Phil Marcelo