



Providence

[Comments](#) 15 | [Recommend](#) 0

Cicilline concurs with Obama message to mayors

01:00 AM EST on Saturday, February 21, 2009

By Philip Marcelo

Journal Staff Writer

Providence Mayor David N. Cicilline says he and other mayors are prepared to accept President Barack Obama's challenge that federal stimulus money be spent with the highest level of accountability, transparency and prudence.

Mr. Obama warned the mayors at a meeting at the White House yesterday that he is not afraid to "call them out" for projects that he finds wasteful, just as he expects to hold state and federal government agencies accountable for their expenditures.

"His remarks were completely appropriate," Cicilline said from Washington, D.C., following his meeting with the president. "It is a privilege that we have been given this sort of public investment and it is our responsibility to make sure that it is done well, that it is free of the politics that come with policies of this kind."

The Democratic mayor said he intends to reassign a member of his administration to coordinate the execution of the recovery plan. "He'll make sure that deadlines are met, that compliance reports to the federal government are filed and that there is proper coordination with the federal and state" agencies.

There will also be a link on the city's Web site to a new federal government Web site, www.recovery.gov, where the public can access project reports from federal, state and local agencies that receive stimulus money, Cicilline said.

"Each and every city needs to develop its own system to do this, so that every penny that is spent will be known to the public," Cicilline said.

Cicilline was one of 80 mayors who met with the president, Vice President Joseph Biden and five members of the Cabinet to talk in detail about the federal Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Plan. Mayors met for an hour and a half with the Education Secretary Arne Duncan, Transportation Secretary Raymond LaHood, Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan, Energy Secretary Steven Chu and Attorney General Eric Holder.

Cicilline said that after having a conversation with the education secretary, he believed that the city could

find additional funds for the public school system and the Providence After School Alliance in the \$5 billion worth of competitive education grants in the stimulus plan.

The mayors then met with the president and vice president in a 90-minute session closed to the media that Cicilline said provided a “very frank” discussion about the stimulus plan.

He said the tone of the conversation was promising for the relationship between mayors and the White House. “This is a president that has, in 31 days, shown that he intends to restore the partnership between the federal government and cities,” he said.

At an earlier news conference, the president told the mayors: “The American people are watching ... They expect to see the money ... spent on its intended purposes, without waste, without inefficiency, without fraud.”

Cicilline found out the meaning of that message early.

He took criticism even before the recovery plan was approved about one of the projects that he had identified as a good use of federal dollars: a new \$4.8-million polar bear exhibit at Roger Williams Park Zoo.

Cicilline has maintained that the zoo, part of the largest tourist attraction in the state, is an important economic and tourism generator for the city and the state.

But he confirmed this month that the project would not qualify for federal dollars under the final version of the stimulus plan.

“No one expected that everything would be eligible under the recovery plan,” Cicilline said yesterday. “There is plenty of work to be done ... We’ll find other ways to do museums, parks, and zoos.”

pmarcelo@projo.com