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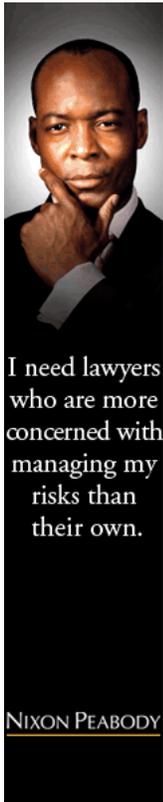
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GOVERNMENT

Summit: clear sight, teamwork needed

Local, national leaders brainstorm on way to create jobs

By Richard Asinof
Contributing Writer

WARWICK – U.S. Rep. James R. Langevin, D-R.I., hosted a one-day, Rhode Island economic summit on Monday for a diverse group of business and community leaders, modeled on the Jobs and Economic Growth Forum held in December 2009 at the White House. The goal, Langevin told the more than 75 participants, was to "leave no stone unturned to get Rhode Island's economy back on track in order to put thousands of Rhode Islanders who are out of work, back to work."

The summit, held at the Community College of Rhode Island in Warwick, featured four discussion groups:

- "Attracting job creators to our state," moderated by U.S. Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development John Fernandez.
- "Creating a 21st century economy," moderated by Rhode Island School of Design President John Maeda.
- "Educating our children and narrowing the skills gap," moderated by Dr. John Uvin, senior adviser at the Office of Vocational and Adult Education at the U.S. Department of Education.
- "Strengthening small business and creating good jobs."

Neil Steinberg, CEO and president of The Rhode Island Foundation, told the assembled group that he was getting impatient. "We need to have a sense of urgency, with positive energy," he said. "We need to get going."

To do so, he advocated for "one Rhode Island plan." Steinberg said that The Rhode Island Foundation has chosen to put its focus on two primary arenas: public education and primary health care. "I want to see signage when people enter Rhode Island that says, 'Best public education' and 'Best health care' in the United States," he said.

U.S. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I., also addressed the gathering, saying that Rhode Island needed to focus on the delivery system of the new health care reform legislation as a potential business and jobs creation engine, which he called "the equivalent of a new Internet" in terms of opportunity.

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The dialogue in the small session, "Attracting job creators to our state," included Gary S. Sasse, the former administration director in Gov. Donald L. Carcieri's administration; Kathie Shields, the executive director of the Tech Collective in Providence; Thomas W. Kelly, president and CEO of BankNewport; Paul Rich, chief development officer of Deepwater Wind; Heather R. Singleton, senior vice president for education at the RI Hospitality Association; Fred S. Hashway Jr., the R.I. Economic Development Corporation's director of government affairs and policy, and Richard Spies, executive vice president for planning and senior advisor to the President at Brown University.

Fernandez, the former mayor of Bloomington, Ind., who moderated the session, summarized the discussion to the larger group as follows:

- There is a need for one plan to be developed, which has shared ownership by both public and private sectors.
- The major barriers to economic growth in tax, regulatory and permitting policies need to be identified.
- The ability to think of Rhode Island within a regional framework, promoting collaboration, not competition, needs to be developed.
- The federal government should be seen as a friend and partner, not a foe, and that its role was not to germinate solutions.
- Whatever plan is created needs to recognize the strong cultural history of small business in Rhode Island, as well as the opportunities to leverage existing Rhode Island businesses for exports within the global economy.

The education small group, moderated by Uvin, reported that instead of one big plan, there was a need for a series of incremental steps, "to hit singles, not home runs." One of the ideas presented was to create a Langevin Internship Program in Rhode Island to place interns in small businesses.

Maeda, in reporting on his group's discussion focused on the developing the 21st century economy, contrasted the excitement of his group with what he called the "complete disempowerment" he experienced at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. He asked all the participants to contribute \$20 in an effort "to take matters into our own hands," raising an impromptu \$300. The group discussed the best ways to leverage college talent locally, and the need to align businesses, educational institutions and the nonprofit world.

CCRI President Ray M. Di Pasquale, who along with University of Rhode Island President David M. Dooley and Rhode Island College President Nancy Carriuolo, attended the summit, spoke about the need to focus on what kinds of job training will be needed in the future. He hoped that the summit would provide the gubernatorial candidates with real ideas to debate for how best to grow Rhode Island's economy. Echoing Dooley's recent inaugural address, he urged the group not to overestimate how uniquely bad we are, but to focus on how uniquely good we can become.

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