



Institute
for
Education

IFE INFO hosts The Honorable Vincent Gray, Mayor of the District of Columbia, March 7, 2013

"I know you all are under the impression we had no snow yesterday. That's wrong, we just did an incredible job getting it off the ground. Isn't it incredible? It was gone in a flash." Mayor of the District of Columbia Vincent C. Gray joked as he began his remarks at Institute for Education's INFO Public Policy Roundtable breakfast on Thursday morning, hosted by the Ambassador of Finland, H.E. Ritva Koukku-Ronde.

The morning after the snowstorm that wasn't, Gray spoke for his third time to an INFO roundtable of Washington insiders, delivering an abbreviated version of his State of the District Address last month.

On the city's finances, education, economy, development, crime, sustainability and changing demographics, Gray discussed the progress of his Administration, now two years in, and his plans for the future.

But he saved his most impassioned remarks for the issue he described as "un-American"- the lack of self-determination rights for the District of Columbia. Even with home rule legislation, the District is still subject to Congressional approval for its budget and local laws

"We've demonstrated responsible management ourselves," Gray said. "It is time for a change."

Gray touted his Administration's newly released District Sustainability Plan, which he said aims to make Washington, DC one of the greenest cities in the country, if not the world. There are 143 objectives in the proposal, with 58 slated to be fulfilled within the next 2-3 years. Already, 60 embassies have signed on to a sustainability pledge along with all of the District's colleges and universities. Among them, the Embassy of Finland, which was the first foreign embassy in Washington to be awarded the EPA's Energy Star rating for superior energy efficiency.

Sustainability, Gray said, is one example of how the District of Columbia is moving forward.



Ambassador Jean-Louis Wolzfeld (Luxembourg), Coach Kemper, Ambassador Ritva Koukku-Ronde (Finland), Ambassador Jan Matthysen (Belgium), Mayor Vincent Gray, Ambassador Romand Kirn (Slovenia) and Ambassador Jose Cuisia (Philippines)

On other indicators, the Mayor also pointed to success. The District's fund balance has improved to nearly \$1.5 billion, the mayor said, unemployment is now 3 points lower than when he came into office and violent crime is at its lowest level in decades (there were 88 homicides recorded in 2012), thanks to the leadership of Chief of Police Cathy Lanier.

Mayor Gray championed the city's growth, evidenced by the number of construction cranes dotting the skyline, increase in sales and income tax revenue, and population boom, primarily the influx of young professionals and the city's growing technology sector.

In fact, the Mayor is headed to Austin, Texas this weekend for the annual South by Southwest technology conference where he hopes to lure entrepreneurs and tech companies to the District.

Gray spoke extensively about a major issue in Washington and across the nation, education. He said that DC has "the most unique public education approach of any city in the nation" and that he meets with his "education cabinet," with representatives from both the public and charter schools, weekly, with an eye towards improving outcomes. Currently, about 43% of District children are enrolled in public charter schools, with the remaining 57% in District Public Schools or private education.

Gray is an advocate of charter schools, saying "I think it's wonderful- it creates a competitive environment in public education" and, when asked during Q&A, said he welcomes the challenges this competitive environment presents, saying it is one of the biggest challenges- and opportunities- to be worked out in the city over the next five years.

"I think we are on the right track," he said.



Ambassador Ritva Koukku-Ronde (Finland), Beverly Perry, Mayor Anthony Williams and Ambassador Jan Matthysen (Belgium).



IFE Interns Scott Weathers, Jordan D'Eri, Mishel Kisi and Skyla Lily with Mayor Vincent Gray.

One of those opportunities may lie in athletics and the Mayor has recently formed a State Athletic Association to encourage interscholastic sports. He also said he is looking for new ways to encourage physical fitness and nutrition for all District residents but especially children and young people. Mayor Gray recalled his time as a high school football player and the life lessons that he learned from that experience.

"The friends that I made on the field are still to this day some of my best friends in life," he said.

The Mayor also touted his early childhood and preschool initiatives, saying that, for the first time, the District has space for every three or four year old in the city who wants to be enrolled in early childhood education. Recent neurological research suggests that a child's brain is 92% developed by age five, so the aim of early education programs is to stimulate the brain while it is still maturing.

"The benefits are obvious," the Mayor said.

Now in its 22nd season, the Institute for Education holds regular public policy roundtable discussions and salons with opinion leaders, elected officials, and notable public figures in a non-partisan venue that advances the organization's mission to recognize and promote civility and leadership locally, nationally and in the world community. IFE also encourages youth global citizenship with programs that foster intercultural understanding, such as Learn Serve International, whose Executive Director, Scott Rechler, was recognized at Thursday's breakfast.

Mayor Gray was introduced by Former District of Columbia Mayor Anthony A. Williams, currently the CEO at Federal City Council, and Beverly L. Perry, Senior Vice President of Pepco Holdings, Inc.

Others attending included: Ambassador Jan Matthysen of Belgium, IFE Diplomatic Steward; and IFE INFO members David Fenstermaker, Raymond James & Associates; Craig Helsing, BMW; Jerry Jasinowski former president of the Manufacturing Institute and member of the IFE Board of Stewards; Tom Patton, Phillips Electronics NA; and George Vradenburg, USAgainst Alzheimers. Ambassadors from Kazakhstan, Slovenia, Finland, Bulgaria, Spain, Luxembourg and Singapore attended.

IFE is led by CEO Kathy Kemper, who Mayor Gray described in his opening remarks as a "force of nature in Washington" for promoting civility and leadership with INFO roundtables and finding common ground, whether on the tennis court, the halls of Congress or within the diplomatic community.

Written by IFE Fellow, Chris Golden with photos by Kyle Samperton