

**Adler: Addressing Climate Change in Intergenerational and Inclusive Dialogue with Citizens.**

I want to thank the **George H.W. Bush Foundation for US China Relations**, and the **University of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, China Data Analysis & Research Hub**, and the **Carter Center**, for the opportunity to participate in a conference centered on fostering dialogue and building a constructive relationship between China and the US, and especially one focused on cities and their role in addressing our world's greatest challenge.

I have both enjoyed and learned a lot from the wonderful speakers, of such expertise, that have presented over the last two days, and the questions and discussions that followed. We've examined the unique and important position of cities to help lead in addressing climate change, painted visions of the potential cities hold, and discussed achieving the best practices in cities around the world.

We also must recognize that, in the safety and closeness of this conference, each session has begun undergirded with the general agreement among us participants that climate change is real, of paramount concern, and that we must find effective tools and strategies to address it.

If the entire world shared this priority and this sense of urgency, we would be getting closer to our goals. But we are not doing as well as we'd like; as well as we need to be doing. So, it is

appropriate as approach the end of this conference, we take a moment to look at what will be necessary to achieve the global popular and political will necessary to mobilize in defense of our planet.

I think that much of this answer lies, again, in our cities and the intergenerational and inclusive dialogue among citizens that can uniquely take place only at that level of society. Big change has to happen at that level. Ultimately, the necessary political will to meet the challenge of global warming, the investment in the necessary technologies and infrastructure, the willingness to endure the social disruption associated with the necessary societal changes, and the collective will to get the international agreements and consensus necessary, all of these things, ultimately depend on the world's population believing that this challenge is the priority challenge for them, too.

Most often, this kind of change, while certainly impacted by global and national people and events, almost always is, also and importantly, associated with grassroots movements that catch momentum and grow and swell into a mighty movement and force.

My topic assignment was to look at the elements of that grassroots effort, at where it happens, dialogue among citizens at the local and city level.

As I begin, you should know that I am a big fan and ardent supporter of cities. While I admit to being biased as a former Mayor, I believe cities are the world's incubators of innovation and the global economic engines that drive progress and it is there where our collective future will be determined. And I mean cities all over the world.

I'm from Austin, Texas, the 10<sup>th</sup> largest city in the United States. And I have to admit that, while I am a proud and devoted citizen of my country, the United States, there is also a very special place in my heart for my city. I imagine I am not alone at this conference with this sense of pride for my hometown. In fact, it is because my love for my city is so great, that I understand and expect the great chauvinism most if not all of you have for the city you call home. This is an emotion on which many people in the world can find common ground.

In December of 2015, much of the world celebrated the signing of the Paris Accords at COP21 by nearly 200 nation-states. It was a considerable achievement. I was in Paris that week, but not as a representative of the United States. I was present representing Austin, Texas, together with about 400 mayors representing other cities from across the world for the signing of the Compact of Mayors pledging our cities' commitment to stop global warming.

That signing did not get the media attention of the international treaty signed at the same time. But in my mind, it was no less important. At least half of the climate change mitigation efforts envisioned by the Paris Accords are actions that need to be taken at the subnational

level, in mindful urbanization, electrification, transportation, power generation, procurement, and so many other locally made policy decisions.

Importantly, I will also share that there was an overwhelming feeling of community and comradery among the mayors that gathered together to sign the Compact, because we were focused only on addressing climate change. In that moment, in the L'Hôtel de Ville, a large part of the world's population was joined together in common purpose. That feeling was palpable. In that Hall, surrounded by mayors from around the world, I felt, for the first time in my life, that I was a citizen of the world. And since that time, the power of that emotion, on this topic of the global threat of climate change, has become a hugely powerful motivator.

There was something unique about that gathering of mayors that enabled us to work together motivated almost singularly with such strong feelings of cooperation, something that was not present in the meeting of national leaders going on elsewhere in Paris at the same time. In those meetings, the representatives of the nation-states also subject to the additional feelings of competition (and even the potential for conflict).

Because we mayors were gathered as representative of our cities, proud of but not representing our countries, we had the unique opportunity and freedom to not be diverted, deterred or taken off task by the geopolitical issues that understandably were a part of the nation-state calculations going on elsewhere. None of us, of course, would act in ways to

undermine our respective national policies or interests, but we acted in recognition that subnational relations between sister cities offers unique opportunities to work together and find common ground, because of the ability to focus on just the challenge before us.

I believe the power of cities to help lead, or push, the world toward successfully meeting the challenge of climate change is one of the most important tools we have.

A little over two years ago, in the middle of COP26 in Glasgow, I joined a handful of international mayors, including the Mayor of London, for a meeting with a rather sullen United Nations Secy General. Many participants, including His Excellency, felt the meeting was headed to less stringent goals than some had anticipated and there was concern that the meeting might end without the world-wide momentum necessary to encourage continuing on the path to achieving effective global action. We talked about the difficulty in reaching broad consensus on far-reaching climate change mitigation measures among nation-state parties because they were also having to balance non-climate change, geopolitical matters as part of their calculations.

To address this and to provide a political and practical “nudge,” the mayors around the table suggested to the Secretary General that cities, states, and other subnational entities be given a larger role in the COP process. Cities around the world are doing great climate change mitigation work and many are meeting or exceeding the established goals. There is persuasive

power in holding up this work to show what's possible and to challenge others to similarly achieve. Cities that have developed relationships and trust on matters of culture and athletics, without competition and conflict, can support and rally one another focusing only on issues of common purpose. I'm sure there were other reasons for the subsequent change, but subnational entities have had a growing measure of participation in the two COP meetings that have happened since that meeting with the Secretary General.

And, I was particularly encouraged to see the Sunnylands Statement, paragraphs 16-18, where China and the US have agreed to facilitate greater subnational climate cooperation.

There is a special potential power and potential to work together that exists between cities that is more difficult to achieve between countries.

When cities work together, they have almost unlimited opportunities for mutually beneficial outcomes. Cities engage in mutually rewarding cultural and athletic exchanges. Cities often have similar urbanization challenges and there is nothing but upside in understanding how other cities have dealt with those challenges to learn and discover best practices. Economic development initiatives most often provide economic benefit for both participating cities. It is no wonder that sister city and similar relationships form so frequently. What often develops is a very special bond between the cities.

This bond can be very strong and, while fundamentally different in so many ways, it can share some similar aspects to the bond of nationalism. Much of the scholarly work looking at nationalism explores the factors that contribute to the making of a nation. Most of these factors that are inherently limiting: such as a certain defined territory, common cultural characteristics, common dominant social institutions, a sovereign government, a common history or language, and common pride in past achievements.

But, there is another unifying element also associated with nationalism that, without being associated with a limitation, can join people together even of different nationalities. That element is a “common hope for a future.”

In the context of relationships between cities, this “common hope for a future” can also be the basis for the special bond between cities that work together. It is a bond that is formed when cities focus on a shared goal, concerted action, and on cooperation rather than conflict.

It would seem that this “common hope” bond might more easily be embraced in a relationship between cities focused on a single issue, like economic development or climate change, than it could be embraced in a relationship between nation-states. These latter entities may not have the freedom to focus on only one issue, even if agreed, but must also factor in what are often competing geopolitical or other interests at the same time.

When applied to cities and people from different nations, this forward-looking “common hope” bond can be built around the realization that all people of all nations share the common goal of saving the planet from climate change. Such a bond that forms beyond national allegiance has been referred to by environmental historian, Angus Wright, as “Planetary Patriotism.” This is the nationalistic-like bond shared between and cities and people from different nations, built on the realization that on some matters we are all on the same team. It would seem that cities across the world, so bonded together in furtherance of climate change mitigation would be good.

But could it really happen? If subnational entities are to form real bonds with other subnational entities around a common hope on an issue, it is necessary that the subnational relationship is able to avoid, to the fullest extent possible, the consideration of other extraneous issues, as such a duty may imposed on national institutions. Relations and agreements between cities would need to be, and could be, transparent and fair and, to the extent possible, focused just on the common hope and the cooperative action.

Just as this conference has focused on cities over the last two days to identify “what” needs to happen, I believe a focus on cities is also appropriate for finding the best answer as to “where” it needs to happen.



There are some lessons that can be learned from the experience of my hometown, Austin, Texas, about engaging people in the behavior changes needed to implement climate change mitigation strategies.

Austin is a progressive American city where the citizenry supports climate change mitigation policies and programs. Historically, Austin citizens are more inclined to believe that global warming is happening and that it will harm them and future generations of people. However, in Austin (as in many cities) climate awareness and environmental concern is not necessarily a strong predictor of environmentally responsible behavior. We have found, consistent with the Magnus Bergquist study presented in the National Academy of Sciences, that the biggest predictor of environmentally responsible behavior is “social trust.” People are most inclined to act in support of the planet when they see their neighbors and those they trust doing so. Social pressure is better at changing behaviors than education or feedback. In Austin, we have focused on empowering and amplifying leaders and messengers from the younger generation and from among trusted voices in those communities most vulnerable.

Our city has learned that using participatory methods to involve citizens and communities directly in addressing climate change allows city leadership to benefit from local expertise and evidence, help address a sense of being left out, support rebuilding trust and lead to more effective and legitimate decision-making, increase the ability to socialize difficult decisions and

ensure a diversity of voices is heard in decision making, and help counteract polarization and disinformation.

We have all seen the power of engaged and mobilized youth in furthering and prioritizing the climate change agenda worldwide. Austin has tried to capitalize on this movement by giving youth real power and resources, and an institutionalized position through our Youth Equity Council. The high school age Council members focus on improving health and well-being within their communities by becoming environmental leaders shaping the environmental policy of their city, including our Climate Equity Plan. They participate in monthly workshops and immersive field experiences, learn about local climate change issues and environmental justice history, as well as skills like collaboration, design thinking, and leadership. The program also provides networking opportunities with professionals, laying a strong foundation for the students' future careers.

The most recent Council cohort executed community impact projects such as increasing community access to and positive perceptions of public land, providing free, nutritious food to neighborhoods where it is otherwise not accessible or affordable through placement of community food refrigerators, promoting and improving affordable public transportation options to provide greater equity and to decrease traffic-related emissions. Prior Councils have helped construct a rainwater garden project at a public school, placed CO2 sensors in then

more sustainable buildings, and raised awareness of the environmental impact of gentrification.

International youth initiatives that focus on local action are also being sponsored by C40, a city climate change organization that also seeks to empower and broadcast youth voices by working alongside youth climate leaders to gain insights into the unique challenges young people face, co-create equitable solutions, and advocate for change. Its youth engagement activities promote action on the local level by providing a platform for young peoples local community work to play a vital role in tackling the climate emergency, ensuring youth voices and perspectives are heard and recognized in the fight for climate justice. The C40 City Youth Engagement Network is a peer-to-peer learning platform for cities, providing a space for collaboration and sharing of knowledge and best practices, to increase youth engagement and participation in city climate action. The C40 Youth Hub brings together young local climate leaders to collaborate, create positive change, and accelerate inclusive climate action in cities across the world. These programs exemplify the power of city-level cooperation and action, transcending geopolitical boundaries to address climate challenges collectively.

In Austin, we also believe that the climate movement must do more to mobilize more senior people and to get more trusted voices directly into vulnerable communities with a climate change message. One way we're doing this is with the Community Climate Ambassadors Program which recruits and pays individuals to host community conversations and lead

projects with historically underrepresented groups about climate change, racial and environmental justice, sustainability, energy use, housing, anti-displacement, transportation access, and access to nature. The older generation is a prime constituency for greater climate action. Those over 65 represent the fastest growing age demographic and two-thirds of the world's elderly today live in emerging countries. In many countries, elderly citizens are more reliable voters and with their networks developed overtime, they frequently have greater political and social influence.

Much of the rhetoric associated with youth engagement focuses on messages of intergenerational tension rather than intergenerational solidarity. This happens when youth call out older populations for being responsible for the challenge we now face and for being insufficiently interested in meeting the challenge since it is the youth that will ultimately bear the brunt of climate change. However, we have learned that action and messaging that builds cooperation and understanding brings greater benefit. It is true that older generations bear responsibility for where we are now and this should be recognized. But the elderly are also disproportionately vulnerable to climate change, adverse health effects and exposure to extreme weather events. These susceptibilities are even greater given limited mobility, social isolation, and poor access to services. There is a natural bond between the young, the elderly, and those most vulnerable on the issue of climate change that should be recognized and leveraged. Accusatory and polarizing messaging should be replaced with messages of

inclusion and cooperation, such as happens with intergenerational communication and interaction.

Different parts of a community have different needs and vulnerabilities, different levels of access, resources, and privilege. Intergenerational and inter-cultural, cross-sector and inclusive dialogue and collaborations are best able to build trust and thus best able to identify and implement solutions that have the potential to be change behavior in support of climate change mitigation.

Such community interactions and initiatives happen most organically at the local level. This is the level at which the roots of real and transformative change often take place.

I believe that establishing a growing grassroots movement in individual cities around the world will be a necessary element of building the level of international political will that is necessary to meet the challenge of climate change. Build the grassroots movement with effective dialogue between citizens, and then use the power that comes out of the unique relationship that can be formed between cities in order to scale that grassroots movement into an international force whose cumulative impact can be great enough to help materially address climate change.

Hopefully, the subnational follow-up, sponsored by China and the US pursuant to the Sunnydale Statement, will help empower and enable such activity. Perhaps this work on climate change, where nation-states enable greater cooperation between cities, allowing them to focus only on shared challenges, perspectives, and policies, underpinned with common values, this climate change work will be a model for other such work between cities. Maybe it is in such unfettered interaction between cities, that China and the US will find additional and broader paths to constructive and positive, communications and cooperation.

Yesterday's session was closed by David Firestein comments encouraging our two countries to focus especially on issues where there is common hope. I endorse the sentiment he expressed yesterday, but with one caveat. I think such interaction will best take hold at the subnational level.

Thank you for this opportunity to address the conference.