

Neighborhood spirit stressed

Richardson advises U.S. mayors sense of community could restore confidence

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San Diego, Calif.

Rekindling a sense of community through neighborhood action could restore public confidence in government, says former federal official Elliot L. Richardson.

He was speaking to a conference of U.S. mayors here.

Mr. Richardson — who launched a long career in government as an elected town official in Brookline, Mass., before serving as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare and U.S. Attorney General — insists that the fiber of cities is toughened through the "richness, diversity, and spirit of creation" of neighborhoods.

He says Dade County, Florida, and Westchester County, New York, among others, have engaged in innovative neighborhood-local government cooperative experiments in mental health, education, and senior-citizen care.

More participation seen

With some adjustment of local regulations and delegation of authority Mr. Richardson sees more communities taking increased responsibilities in providing police, fire, garbage disposal, and other services in the future.

Although this trend towards neighborhood government could increase public costs, this likely would be offset by involvement of local citizen-volunteers, the former U.S. top-law enforcement official insists.

The Richardson message came as



By Barth J. Falkenberg, staff photographer

Elliot L. Richardson

municipal leaders here assessed their gains and losses over the past year.

Conference president Roy B. Martin, Mayor of Norfolk, Va., cites as a definite "plus" federal manpower legislation which is enabling city governments to shape their own programs to meet specific needs.

However, he scores the extension of the minimum wage law — with its overtime provisions for all local employees — as a "minus." Mayor Martin says this legislation is placing heavy financial burdens on many cities — as well as eroding the authority of local governments to manage their own affairs.

Massive funds needed

Mayors here expressed hope that Congress soon will provide them with massive funds for community devel-

opment and public mass transit. And they stress that to bolster cities, the concept of revenue-sharing now must become a permanent feature of President Nixon's "new federalism."

Mayor Martin adds that urban U.S. centers — beset by runaway inflation, high unemployment, and the continuing energy crisis — must seek to become "full-share (fiscal) partners in the government of this country."

However, California Gov. Ronald Reagan — a fiscal conservative and strong believer in local self-determination — warned mayors here to beware of "federal interference" and "domination of local government" by Washington.

Mr. Reagan says revenue-sharing is "not a free gift to state and local governments."

Reagan issues warning

"It comes from your pockets. So stop trying to solve problems by passing them on to the next layer of government," the California Governor cautioned municipal leaders.

"Inflation is the most serious problem facing the U.S. today. It's caused by government spending. And if we don't lick it, nothing else will matter," Mr. Reagan added.

Despite these drawbacks, mayors here reported positive measures for coping with their urban ills.

Among them: Newark's extensive drug-treatment plan which is helping curb narcotics abuse; Seattle's free bus service and Ann Arbor's dial-a-ride minibuses which are meeting inner city transportation needs; Boston and Bridgeport's "little city halls," which are bringing local government right into the neighborhood.