

CLIMATE:

Mayors ask Washington to lead -- or get out of the way -- on resiliency

Jean Chemnick, E&E reporter

Published: Wednesday, December 4, 2013

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Three Democratic mayors say the federal government can help their cities prepare for climate change by offering information and support -- and trying to reverse policies that have inhibited disaster planning.

Visiting Washington, D.C., a week before the first meeting of the White House's new adaptation task force, the mayors of Salt Lake City, Boulder, Colo., and Pinecrest, Fla., praised the Obama administration's Climate Action Plan.

But while new efforts on adaptation and mitigation are important, Boulder Mayor Matthew Appelbaum said, "the first thing the feds should do is stop making things worse." The mayors spoke at a forum hosted by the World Resources Institute and the Union of Concerned Scientists.

Boulder experienced a rare and destructive flood in September, spurring calls from Appelbaum and others to revise policies that encourage building and rebuilding in flood zones and other areas that will be increasingly vulnerable to stronger storms.

By subsidizing flood and fire insurance and backing mortgages in areas where climate-related damage will become more prevalent, Washington is exposing the U.S. taxpayer and local home and business owners to hefty financial risk, he said. This is particularly true for new development.

"Maybe we'll never get up the political gumption to make everybody move, but we should at least stop encouraging people to increase development in those locations," he said. "The feds keep doing it."

Besides phasing out support for construction in risky areas, the federal government can also help local communities plan by offering more information about climate change and encouraging regions to work across jurisdictions to boost their resiliency, he said.

Salt Lake City Mayor Ralph Becker said climate change will pose a threat to his city's water supply, which is dependent on alpine snowpack.

"We are all in trouble," he said.

A Democrat from a deeply red state, Becker conceded that most of Utah's elected officials dispute the existence of climate change, which he said was a disconnect given the effect warming will have on both water supply and air quality in their home districts.

"I walk out of meetings with most of the members of my congressional delegation and most of the members of Congress, and I just shake my head," he said.

But while Becker said the country would be best served by a new federal policy pricing carbon, he advised the local government officials and advocates attending the meeting to focus their message on the practical implications of climate change rather than seeking to tie every weather event to climate change.

Pinecrest Mayor Cindy Lerner said South Florida was making some strides to address climate risk but was "still doing stupid things."

A "stupid thing," she said, is the Turkey Point Nuclear Generating Station south of her suburban village on a shoreline threatened by sea-level rise.

The White House's 24-member adaptation task force, which will be coordinated by the Council on Environmental Quality, has more Democrats than Republicans, but Susan Ruffo, CEQ's deputy associate director for climate change adaptation, said the administration has received broad positive feedback about its aim to boost resiliency on the local level ([Greenwire](#), Nov. 1).

"This is not a political issue," she said.