New Bedford, other 'Gateway Cities' form economic alliance

May 20, 2008 6:00 AM

BOSTON — Urban communities outside Boston that often feel neglected by state government are banding together to fight for common interests, such as job training and economic development.

Mayors and city managers from 11 cities — including New Bedford Mayor Scott W. Lang — met at the Old State House on Monday to form an alliance to fight for "a new urban agenda."


They call themselves Gateway Cities because they have a historic role in attracting immigrant workers.

"New Bedford shares with other Gateway Cities an industrial past and a desire to develop new economic development opportunities, and the Gateways Compact presents a shared vision for sustainable economic development," Mayor Lang said in a statement.

"We've come together in our state's capital today to emphasize the importance of this new urban agenda and to highlight its ability to strengthen our communities as well as reduce the flow of jobs and industry leaving the commonwealth for other states."

A MassINC/Brookings Institute report found last year that the 11 traditional mill communities outside Boston suffered significant losses in jobs and investment as manufacturing declined over the past three decades. The report said the cities had seen little growth from new, knowledge-based industries.

Since 1970, the 11 Gateway Cities lost more than 11,000 jobs, or 3 percent of their job base, while Greater Boston gained 467,000 jobs. Gateway Cities also are home to 30 percent of all Massachusetts residents under the poverty line, while accounting for only 15 percent of the state's population.


Rep. Koczera was able to get a $1 million increase for adult basic education in the House's proposed state budget. He also is seeking more work-force training money and greater tax credits for redevelopment of historic properties.

"I'm high on this initiative," Rep. Koczera said after the event. "It could be the basis of an urban alliance of legislators. Often, we are fighting for the very same things on a regional level separately, but the needs are the same."

Rep. Cabral said a Gateway Cities legislative caucus will emerge out of Monday's announcement.

"I think this is a great initiative," he said.
"I thinking bringing all of the local folks, the mayors in particular, the economic development folks from the cities together and exchanging ideas and strategizing together, I think it's a wonderful idea."