Urban agenda

Alliance should focus on state development policy

In a ceremony at the Old State House in Boston tomorrow, the chief executives of 11 Massachusetts cities will launch an alliance dedicated to promoting a balanced urban agenda in the state and reinvigorating their aging economies. It is a gesture of solidarity in a common cause state policymakers should heed well.

Founding members of the alliance are Brockton, Fall River, Fitchburg, Haverhill, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, New Bedford, Pittsfield, Springfield and Worcester. All have grappled, with varying success, with the shift of the economy from traditional manufacturing toward the information and technology sectors.

The urban alliance grew out of a MassINC/Brookings Institution report last year that focused on the problems and potential of traditional manufacturing cities. What the cities need most is to change policies that fail to factor in the disproportionately heavy burden they bear, such as the difficulty of educating a "majority minority" school population.

Also ripe for revision are policies that encourage industrial development outside urban areas, effectively creating gritty, new cities in the suburbs while allowing existing cities to languish.

As we have said before, the key to a vigorous, sustainable state economy lies not in its affluent suburbs nor in its capital city alone, but in the urban centers that are the critical centers of job creation and growth.

Meeting with the Telegram & Gazette editorial board last week, House Speaker Salvatore F. DiMasi expressed similar sentiments, while noting the difficulty of pressing an urban agenda in a Legislature weighted toward suburban districts.

Lobbying to correct policies that unduly burden cities and industrialize suburbs should be high on the new alliance’s agenda.

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