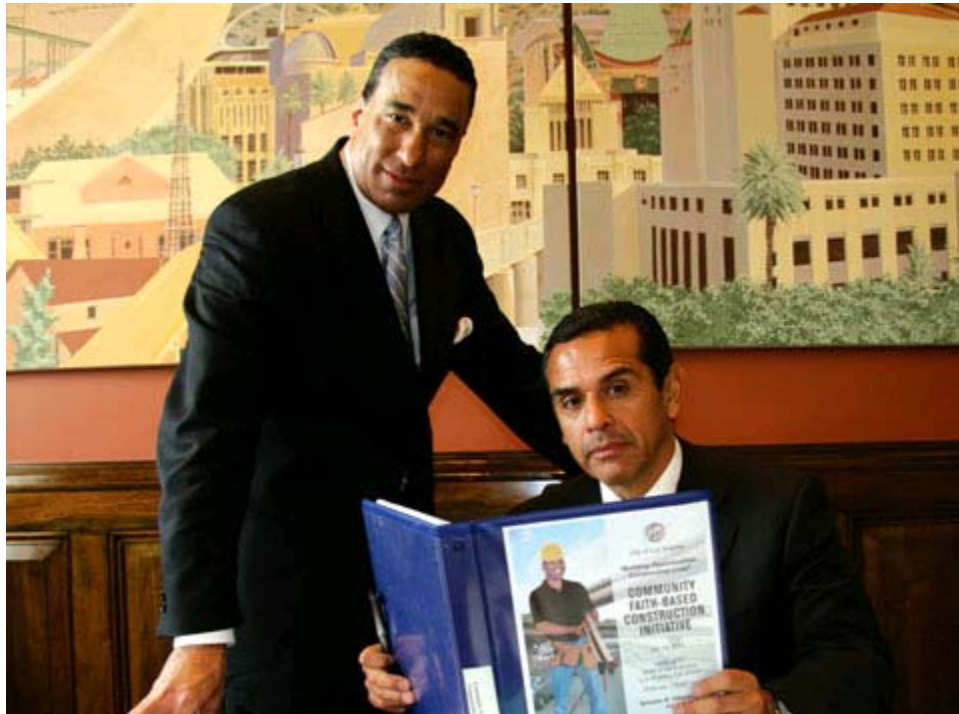


Mayor's Appointee Makes Big Job Impact

Written by Yussuf Simmonds, (Asst. Managing Editor), on 27-03-2008



Gregory Irish with Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa

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Villaraigosa directs Gregory Irish to move 100,000 area residents into living wage jobs by 2010

Workforce Diversity executive Gregory Irish says the Mayor's mandate to recruit, train and place on jobs 100,000 L. A. area residents will be done without fail. Right now, the goal of Los Angeles is to have in its residents, a skilled and educated workforce, whether they come from rich, middle class, or poor families.

That is the purpose of the five-strategy workforce development program, headed by a 51-member board, including visionary and employment development expert, Gregory Irish, who has been the executive director of the Los Angeles Workforce Investment Board for a year. The project has the full support and backing of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa with no holes bared.

"The strength of the board is based on the appointments of the mayor," Irish said in an exclusive interview. "The mayor knew how important it was, if he was going to actually formulate workforce development in partnership with this board, he was going to have a board that was talented. So what he did was replace or actually reinvigorate the board when he assumed office. Almost half of them are new members. A lot of those members are from various sectors of our economy that have potential for growth in the future."

Those sectors are construction, early childhood education, entertainment, financial services, healthcare, hospitality, private security, transportation and goods movement, utilities and advanced industrial manufacturing, all of which Irish refers to as "the greatest potential in the growth of the city's economy."

In addition, L.A.'s Workforce Strategy contains four components: 1) Expand demand-driven workforce initiatives and support professionalization and living wage standards for low-wage workers; 2) Strengthen the region's workforce development system by forming partnerships with LAUSD, LACCD, Business, Labor, L.A. County and Philanthropic Organizations, and by leveraging resources; 3) Leverage public sector hiring and contracting through city departments and public-funded redevelopment projects and 4) Connect young people to jobs.

Irish knows the workforce/City Hall dynamics from experience. Long before the workforce appointment, he worked with one of city's most effective, former council members, David Cunningham, in legislative analysis and then traveled to the nation's capital where he worked for nine years in public policy, specializing in labor, occupational safety, workers' comp and workforce development programs there.

"I have extensive experience, but I was recruited as part of a team," he said. "The reason I came back here... I have known many mayors [and] this mayor's the real deal. [He's] committed to workforce development so I had other option but I wanted to work here. It gave me an opportunity to return home and I saw some fat potential to do some fabulous things."

For example, through a "pipeline-like" system, a non-profit organization would contribute to one of the programs work source centers throughout L.A. County, who would then send recruits to training or apprentice programs, creating skilled people able to make livable wages that in turn maintain the economy. The secret, explained Irish, is teaming up with organizations that have a vested interest in the program. Construction apprenticeship in L.A. contains specific demographical data that lend credibility to the program. It consists of the minority representation figures, African American program shares, and the disproportionate representation of women.

From the information presented, the following can be easily discerned: that apprenticeship training in Los Angeles is more diverse than at the state and national level due to Hispanic representation; that African Americans are slightly under-represented overall and more significantly in specific programs; and that women are significantly under-represented and their number are in decline.

"[It's] coordination between different agencies and we all have a role in workforce development. Workforce development is education, job training and job placement. So it involves LAUSD, the community colleges, it involves the city of L.A., non-profit agencies, etc. And no one can operate programs without having contributions from various sources. So [for example] there are five banks that get 50,000 dollars a year to train people from the community to work as tellers.

"Everybody who is represented on our board, including LAUSD, Los Angeles Community Colleges, the United Way... folks who know definitely know what's going on in the world of workforce development, what it takes to hire good people...people who are decision makers and can really contribute to the process...they all believe this is the best strategy."

The five-point strategy involves supporting living wage standards for low wage workers, forming partnerships with various economy supporting programs and pooling resources, hiring people to publicly-funded redevelopment projects and city departments and connecting young people to jobs. The workforce scorecard as of January 31 shows a detailed listing of placement activity in which all placements are reported through the State's Job Training Automation database. They are also reported directly by city departments, the numbers that reflect initiatives supported by the Mayor's office and the numbers reported by the Mayor's business team and the Community Development Department.

"What we want to do is bring the money from all these different places and have us all deliver services in a collaborative way," Irish said. "That doesn't mean that I get the money or the city gets the money and replaces someone. It means that we all build on each other's strengths."