

The Republican (Springfield, Massachusetts)

Mayor set for climate parley

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PAMELA H. METAXAS, STAFF
pmetaxas@repub.com

CHICOPEE - Mayor Michael D. Bissonnette will leave on Sunday to join sixty other U.S. mayors at the 2007 Sundance Summit on climate control in Sundance, Utah, hosted by Robert Redford and Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson, among others.

Bissonnette said he is the only Western Massachusetts mayor to be invited and only one of two from New England.

The mayor said he believes he was invited to the Sept. 9-12 summit - all expenses paid by Sundance - because he has spoken on national radio on environmental issues and for his efforts to get federal money for energy and efficiency.

Bissonnette said he is looking forward to meeting Redford, who "is a leader in the greenhouse gas and climate change issues. He talks the talk and walks the walk."

On a Sundance Web site, it states the summit "combines the foremost tools and expertise with the influence of visionary local leaders to mitigate global warming, one of the greatest threats to the health and prosperity of communities today. Cities and citizens are first to tangibly experience the impacts of global warming - rising sea levels, shrinking snow packs, ravaging droughts, floods and hurricanes. U.S. mayors are the political leaders closest to the solutions of climate change, and cities taking action are boosting their economies along the way."

Bissonnette said, "A number of our buildings need to be retrofitted. It's not exactly rocket science. We have to get greener to benefit not just the environment but to save money. Utility costs are blowing a hole in the budget. We need to look at hybrid vehicles, be more efficient with fuel sources in our buildings. We need to look at all our municipal buildings."

Bissonnette said Chicopee has budgeted \$150,000 for energy-saving measures.

In April, a preliminary assessment report was delivered on how the city can conserve energy in its municipal buildings with changes in lighting, heating and window devices.

It is the second year the city is seeking energy-saving measures. Last year, recommendations focused on shutting off laptop computers and ink-jet printers when not in use.

Chicopee Electric Light has made efforts for greater energy savings, recently donating 85 energy-saving bulbs to the Chicopee Senior Center and offering them for sale at \$1 each. On July 1, the utility began offering a rebate to customers who install solar panels on their homes.

Bissonnette said he is looking forward to exchanging ideas with mayors at the summit, some of whom he has already e-mailed.

"We need to reach out for the best practices other communities are using and incorporate them here. I think the message is, 'Think globally, act locally.' I think the Sundance summit is all about the realization that we can have an impact on the local level. This is a huge issue, and whether or not people want to accept the science or not, there is a real climate issue on this planet. If we can match environmental issue while saving money locally, it's going to be a win-win situation," said Bissonnette.