



September 14, 2011

Policy Brief: Volume 11, Number 47

One Young World: Many Local Questions

In October 2012, Pittsburgh will roll out the welcome mat for another international-flavored conference, this one called the One Young World summit. Of course the Mayor and civic boosters are overjoyed to have the summit coming since by then it will have been three years since the G-20 was held in the City.

The Mayor stated “2,000 of the world's brightest young people will have the opportunity to experience why Pittsburgh is America's most livable city. They'll see firsthand the transformation Pittsburgh has undergone that is second to none in the country.” That's in case they were unable to read, listen, or view any of the media that came out of the G-20, which officials noted at the time was “...a chance for us to showcase our city, and our region, for the world.” Perhaps the young leaders that comprise the One Young World summit were, well, too young to pay attention.

Recall that the G-20 was supposed to deliver numerous benefits to the City and the region in terms of exposure that would, in turn, lead to investment. An article last September—commemorating the one-year anniversary of the summit—pointed out that the G-20 had helped the City net seven conventions, an invitation to Shanghai, and the designation as host of the UN World Environment Day. No official direct job count was revealed. As we pointed out in a 2009 *Policy Brief (Volume 9, Number 71)* the touted \$35 million in direct economic benefits from the G-20 summit were well in excess of what collections of sales and hotel taxes would indicate.

That's why when the first printed mention of Pittsburgh being a finalist for the One Young World summit appeared in the Post-Gazette in June of this year it must have caused some eyebrows to be raised. The article stated “Organizers are hoping that if Pittsburgh is selected, the city will not only enjoy a spot on the global stage, but also sway global businesses and emerging leaders to consider relocating here, as they are optimistic the conference can showcase Pittsburgh as a hub of vivacious problem solvers and ambitious, budding businesspeople.”

If Pittsburgh is hoping entrepreneurial spirit will be unleashed at the summit, they might be disappointed. There is scant mention of “job growth” or “new investment” in the organization's “impact areas”. Instead, its primary business related objective is to implore “global businesses to define and act on their role in the fight against poverty”.

And on showcasing Pittsburgh to the world, was that not what the G-20 was supposed to accomplish? And, if the One Young World summit really did convince companies to locate at the site of one of their conferences, what makes Pittsburgh think that they could pry away companies who may have chosen to locate in London or Zurich, sites of the previous two summits?

Maybe there will be a positive outcome for future decision makers. One Pittsburgh area delegate noted that at the recent conference “There were some anti-American sentiments expressed here...so I'm looking forward to breaking down some of the barriers in Pittsburgh and showing them what good we can do as well.” Since Pittsburgh will be the first American host for the summit will delegates be treated to the role of free enterprise and limited government upon which the nation was founded? Not likely in light of the political philosophy of the City and County governing class.

Organizers won the bid to host the conference in part by promising there would be “enough hotel rooms and transportation” for the summit attendees. Does this mean that hotel operators will have to guarantee acceptable (below market) rates as they did during the G-20? If they do, at least summit attendees won't be able to complain about “gouging”. But they will be shielded from the role of the marketplace should such a deal be cut.

And it is doubtful that many will be taking the light rail or bus to and from events, which might be a good thing considering that, as of October 2012, the PAT contract with its drivers will have expired and there could be a strike that would make travel quite dicey. Of course, a transit walkout would allow them to see how some public sector unions jealously guard their above-average pay and benefits won by virtue of a state-granted monopoly and their right to strike.

When the One Young World summit desiderata list corporate responsibility, reducing CO2 emissions, and the humanitarian stance of political leaders it should not come as much of a surprise that there were anti-American sentiments made at the last conference. Are they going to take time out of the meeting to stroll around Downtown, spend money, eat at restaurants, and stay in hotel rooms all the while giving no thought as to where the food and services came from, how much profit the sellers of the goods are making, or the presence of multi-national corporations in the City where the summit is held? Indeed, while they are drifting off to sleep they might want to do a mea culpa or two for the carbon footprint they imposed on their flight to the Steel City.

With over a year to go before the summit, perhaps there is enough time to devise an unchallengeable methodology for determining the exact economic impact of the event. And how will the calculations of benefits take into account any negative sentiments that might be carried away by the attendees? For example, what if the Heinz Endowments issue another scathing report on the “poor” air quality of Pittsburgh during the time of the conference? Or what if they have to sit through a City Council meeting?

Eric Montarti, Sr. Policy Analyst

Jake Haulk, Ph.D., President

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<p>Allegheny Institute for Public Policy 305 Mt. Lebanon Blvd.* Suite 208* Pittsburgh PA 15234 Phone (412) 440-0079 * Fax (412) 440-0085 E-mail: aipp@alleghenyinstitute.org</p>
