

Unknown Make Speaker: Ladies and Gentlemen please welcome our next panel from local to Global subnational diplomacy and global economic engagement our moderator is John Yearwood, Editorial Director - Diversity & Culture, Politico and he's joined on stage by Stephanie Agee, Senior Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer, Virginia Economic Development Partnership, The Honorable Frank Scott, Mayor of Littel Rock , Arkansas, Daniel Ricchetti, Deputy Special Representative for City and State Diplomacy, U.S. Department of State.

Background Music

John Yearwood - Good afternoon everyone I hate to uh interrupt your lunch but um, we're about to get started good afternoon everyone um we're about to have a what I think would be a very interesting conversation uh talking about uh subnational diplomacy and uh what various states and cities as well as the state department is doing to facilitate uh doing business with um uh foreign countries so um and I believe uh you know who our panelists are and in the interest of time we'll just go straight to uh our questions uh mayor why don't we start with you uh talking about uh what's what are you doing in Littel Rock to um to support the whole area of um uh doing business with uh foreign countries.

Frank Scott - Well the city of LCK is Arkansas state capital city uh we are the largest city in a small state that has to be actively focused on global trade and economic development uh we're very proud that since our election in 2019 uh we've been able to recruit and create close to 10,000 new jobs many of those new jobs are focused from a global standpoint you take a which is a Italian firm hunting and ammunition company uh that we've been able to recruit and grow having a foreign trade zone as well within the city of LittelRock with our Littel Rock Port Authority and understanding that we are a logistics and a Distribution Hub on what we need to do to focus on global trade and commerce.

John Yearwood - Okay uh thank you mayor uh next why don't we uh go to Stephanie uh but Stephanie uh before you gets oh wow everyone want to, he what Stephanie has to say before I was going to ask folks to pay attention but uh Stephanie, you're in Virginia and uh Virginia is doing a great deal in the space could you talk about what uh Virginia is doing.

Stephanie Agee - Absolutely um so VEDP is Virginia's chief Agency for economic growth uh as any Economic Development agency of the state would be but what we do and what we're really proud of that we do a little bit differently um we focus on export development we focus on enabling companies in Virginia to grow internationally to win international business to make their international business processes faster more efficient and less expensive than if they were to go at international business on their

own um we're really proud of the robust services that we have that are available to Virginia companies whether they're just starting with export whether they been doing it for decades and really built their entire business model on exporting whether they're a Service Company a manufacturing Company wherever you are in this game we have a resource at VDP to help and I know that many of you are not from Virginia and I would say if you're not look to your states to see what they have going on um but some of the really interesting things that we're working on right now that are a bit different.

John Yearwood - It's definitely one question I understand that the programs that uh that you have could bring not just millions but billions of dollars to people like the folks in our audience.

Stephanie Agee - Yeah is that absolutely.

John Yearwood - Can you talk about those programs?

Stephanie Agee - yeah I mean the programs they're designed for Virginia companies to help Virginia companies expand but of course when Virginia companies go overseas and bring Virginia expertise and Virginia technology that's a winning opportunity for companies around the world to partner with those companies as we go overseas we also have a robust arm it's not under my preview directly but we do have a robust arm at VDP that's focused on bringing business to Virginia IL to what the mayor was talking about with Littel Rock.

John Yearwood - Before I go to Dan I just also want to ask you about one other program that that you are involved with in Virginia in fact that actually two programs that you initiated one the work that you're doing with Taiwan and secondly the work that you're doing with Africa

Stephanie Agee - Sure

John Yearwood - Which are relatively unique for many states

Stephanie Agee -Right, right, right very new opportunities for us one is that we just back last month we opened an office in Taiwan a Virginia Taiwan TR office that's focused on helping Virginia companies get to Taiwan to sell there and be successful in the market there but also to encourage Taiwanese businesses when they want to look at North America to come to Virginia and be here with us um the other part the other uh initiative I'm really excited about is a West Africa focused uh effort that we have to promote business between Virginia and really all of Africa but we're really starting with a focus on West Africa specifically Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal

John Yearwood - uh Dan why don't we go to you to talk about what the federal government has been doing in this space in terms of how the federal government has

set up particularly the state department to assist uh states and cities in um in in doing uh business overseas

Daniel Ricchetti - Thanks for having people hear me excellent uh President Biden back in um uh October of last year um along with secretary Blinken announced that um Nahigian would be the new special representative for city and state diplomacy here at the US Department of State and when they did that when Ambassador Hen came on it was a recognition of the immense soft power that cities states communities r urea l areas have when it comes to the international stage so in this recognition we created this new office to be that connective tissue between uh the state department and uh cities and communities here we've I've previously worked with Mayor Scott here uh with Littel Rock and many other communities all over the country and our job is to make sure that one we are bringing the benefits of foreign policy down to the local level that oftentimes focuses on uh urban renewal climate change and especially foreign Economic Development and two-way trade foreign direct investment second we want to get Mayors and local leaders more engaged on the international stage because as I said they have immense soft power I it's always great to see Mayor Scott doing events like these because this is exactly what we want we want these Mayors and these Governors to be players on the international stage that is important for uh their cache um As Cities but it's also important to the department because it provides a real national security benefit when you can have cities and communities extoling the values that the United States has that's critically important and then lastly this is less important um we are now coordinating subnational diplomacy policy within the department and the inter-agency to make sure that our local voices are heard on the international stage.

John Yearwood - Thanks Dan you know what I think Dan that people are not really here to here to listen to me they're here to hear the three of you so I'll go down into the audience and see if anyone has um any questions as we talk about from local to Global uh what the government uh not only the federal government but also states are doing on trying to get business overseas but I wanted to ask um ask you Mr Mayor you see the dysfunction that's happening in some aspects of the federal government namely what we're what's happening in Congress uh as you look to do business overseas is what's happening in Congress sort of making your case are you hearing from foreign countries that uh they don't want to do business nationally they rather go directly to cities and states.

Frank Scott - Well one of the one of the great things about being a mayor uh we have this opportunity to work across party lines geography and across the waters uh I think to what Stephanie just shared earlier uh we as Mayors we're Chief growth officers we're working with our local Chambers our state Economic Development commission and as we are recruiting companies we also have to bring some things to the table I'm a firm

believer that infrastructure is the foundation of Economic Development and in that same vein we have to work with our state Economic Development commission to ensure that we have the incentives uh to bring to the table to really close the deal uh so we're very grateful of that partnership uh as it relates what goes on in DC everyone understands that uh there's going to be political uh fights and infighting every now and then but at the end of the day I'm thanking God that earmarks are back uh grateful for that because that's very beneficial to our local locals I heard shout out there uh and then secondly is that what we've been able to experience recently through the Biden Administration with the bipartisan infrastructure deal as well as the American Rescue plan act that's really been a true Fusion for us as it relates to Economic Development clearly everyone's going to watch the CNN and the Fox News but at the end of the day our residents want to know what are we doing for them.

John Yearwood - Okay you know and I that brings up a question since I'm wondering if anyone in the audience interested in doing business uh with cities States might have a question for either of you uh this is an opportunity I guess there's there are some questions over here but as I walk here I wanted to ask um Dan um there is you know when you look at um you know what's happening uh globally I'm curious about what impact did the global pandemic have on cities and states being feeling more empowered to do business with foreign countries.

Daniel Ricchetti - So I would say the most fundamental thing that we saw coming out of the coming out of the pandemic um and I obviously would love to hear from you too as well transnational issues Global issues are local issues now so when it comes to climate change when it comes to Global pandemics when it comes to Public Safety these issues that were generally previously seen as International or transnational issues really do have huge impacts on local communities this is part of the reason why the department held our city some of the Americas back in April in Denver Colorado because it's at the local level where two critical things happen one local and state leaders often times have such innovative solutions when it comes to solving on the ground problems um it's always great to get a bunch of leaders together at the national level and talk about how we're going to do things but where does the rubber actually meet the road it's with our Mayors it's with our Governors it's with our city managers and we want to make sure as the department that we are tapping into that and the second thing as well in addition to those leaders having those uh those innovative solutions we want to make sure that those ideas are getting transmitted all over the globe so if Mayor Scott has a really great idea on infrastructure in Littel Rock it would be great to connect him with a mayor such as mayor Lopez in Bogota Colombia because she may have a similar issue that she's facing when it comes to infrastructure and that's where our office comes into play where we can be that connective tissue between those two leaders.

John Yearwood - Thanks Dan unfortunately we don't have a tremendous amount of time left but we have a question from the audience.

Steve - Audience -(Unheard for few seconds) Hello well I think we have we have yeah you can go to petroleum company and looking at when you do things in countries like on the continent of Africa and you have questions relative to the state department uh whether or not you everything that you're doing to structure with the people that you're doing with is proper how does one come to the state department and to get any uh confirmation that you're able to uh work with that particular deal way the way it's structured again how do I get to the state department to say this is the project and does State Department approve of it.

John Yearwood - Okay great thank you very much Steve.

Daniel Ricchetti - John just a make sure you're you asking sir how do you connect with the state department.

John Yearwood - Precisely how does how can they access you and the work that you're doing.

Daniel Ricchetti - Well that's an excellent question it's part of the reason why our office uh now exists um contact me I mean that's the simple answer our office was created so that we can connect local elected officials and other community leaders from all across the country and all over the globe to say that we want to work for you guys right we want to make sure that your ideas and your issues are making it into the state department I know Ambassador again and myself say this all the time we are your front door to the state department right we want to be that connective node where you can come and say especially for our local elected leaders like our Mayors and our Governors that if you have an issue that arises on the international stage we want to make sure that your voice is heard both within the department and hopefully uh on the international stage large.

John Yearwood - Terrific thanks Dan there's another question.

Dan Shugar - Audience - First of all we want to congratulate you in your moderation skills Next Level coming off the stage getting everybody to stop talking and focus on it never saw that in my career amazing you put you asked uh a question to the mayor please so what are the challenges for the cities uh my name is Dan Shugar from next tracker I spoke this morning we've helped create 15 track uh factories across the United States the last few years to make Solar Products in communities like Memphis s Texas Pittsburgh Vegas the biggest issue we've seen with our subcontract manufacturers is really labor and getting Workforce to be engaged to keep showing up even you know really well paid so um we've seen great support from the cities like in Memphis but

what uh suggestions do you have for us to work with our local communities to um incentivize Workforce create value and then keep reinvesting there.

Frank Scott -Thank you well thank you so much uh for that statement I think there's one issue that has to be solve right now we need to make certain that you come to the city of Littel Rock and work with us as well um we're always open for business always open to connect uh that being said I think really uh one of the things that we as mayor years are focused on uh in the wake of the pandemic uh we're more focused on Workforce uh Workforce is truly been reimaged and realigned uh and also from a standpoint of we have to make certain that our residents understand what's all out there uh many times it's uh due to a lack of knowledge and many times it's not only due to a lack of knowledge it's a lack of really connecting with those residents and giving that awareness of what's available uh from this standpoint because we are on a knowledge Bas economy uh and so we have to understand how are we going to focus on the hard cost the soft cost and anything in between to make some money for our particular residents because that's the name of the game and then secondly many uh Mayors and myself uh we're hosting Workforce conferences to ensure that everyone's being engaged to really be that connective uh tissue uh that's between uh business and industry as well as with the everyday resident who may not know what's out there um and really can't have a dream realized by having that Focus so again I want to make certain uh to personally invite you to the city of Littel Rock we're actually having a Workforce Summit on October the 27th would love for you to come.

John Yearwood -uh we'll take uh maybe two more questions uh from the audience uh but while we look for one more I wanted to ask Pam I mean what we're talking about is not necessarily new I mean as I mentioned to you before about 20 years ago I attended a conference in Richmond uh that Governor Wilder held with uh presidents from about a dozen countries in Africa so um I'm not quite sure how much business ultimately came out of that but the question for you is how much business are you actually doing with many of these countries I mean are you signing contracts um deals coming out a lot of this stuff.

Stephanie Agee - That's for me.

John Yearwood -yes.

Stephanie Agee - Just making sure just making sure well let me be clear Virginia is not doing business we are helping Virginia companies do business with companies in Africa with companies in Europe with companies in South America all over the world we're helping to enable and facilitate business not to suggest that Virginia wouldn't love to do deals us such as that with foreign governments we have done those before and happy to do those but really our focus is on making sure that business can happen

between the private sector we truly are when we show up at a business we are the government and we are here to help and we mean that very sincerely um so in terms of business being done I will say you know there's as we've started this momentum and this this effort specifically focused on Africa I'm it's interesting to see how many Virginia businesses are already connected uh on the continent and in West Africa where we're where we're initiating our Focus um but there's so much more there's so much more to be done and we know that that companies need more help in certain markets they need more support they need to be connected to the federal government as well and we're here to make those connections help them make those connections so that the business can be facilitated

John Yearwood - You know this is a question for Dan and Dan I'm curious about uh what we you know what we're seeing and the concerns that some may have uh in terms of having states and cities do business with foreign countries the possibility of uh these cities and states not aware fully of geopolitics and are doing business with some Bad actors are we talking China talking Russia how do you avoid that from happening.

Daniel Ricchetti - Sure so obviously we want our uh we want our cities our communities our states to be engaged on the international stage um and when it comes to uh dealing with um stickier situations such as obviously dealing with um uh China um and other countries that are more adversarial to the United States um when a mayor or a governor or a local leader um has questions that is where we want to be um your adviser and your helper uh we understand at the state department um that most City Halls many Governor's offices don't necessarily have an individual or individuals who are working international issues within their with their local leaders because of budgets resources manpower we completely under we completely understand that we are um we want to be that person for you which is why I know we've connected previously with other Mayors when it comes to hey I'm thinking about doing something in China or hey I'm thinking about doing something in the Middle East uh they come to us and they talk to us about what are what's the information that that I need to have and what are the key pieces of information that I need to know so that I can make an informed decision when engaging on the international stage we're we as the state department are not going to tell you what today to do we can't do that we live in a federalized system but we want to make sure that you guys are armed with the tools and the resources to make that informed decision and one of the things that we are releasing down the road and hopefully this will be happening next year is our actually our Reta Joe Lewis local diplomats program uh where we'll be sending Foreign Service and Civil Service officers to cities around the country so that they can advise Mayors and other local leaders on exactly what you just said.

John Yearwood - Well that's a really good point because I'd like to get both the mayor and panelist to address that because I'm curious what guard rails um or safeguards you have in place to prevent uh in this case LittleRock or even um uh Virginia from um going gung-ho doing business with some of the folks that uh the federal government would rather you not be.

Frank Scott - Well I think one of the things from um our City's perspective as it relates to guard we work very closely with our state Economic Development commission um as well as our local chamber and as we tend to engage and go through different uh opportunities uh there are things in place to ensure that one uh I can just think for an instance there was a particular organization that reached out uh we have protocols in place to make certain that those organizations won't be adversary towards us or even become a cyber security issue uh even for myself and so I think having that communication line uh with everyone who's involved in the business deal is always key and not necessarily going rogue and understanding that is a team atmosphere from that standpoint uh and so that's what we've seen to be very successful.

Stephanie Agee - Yeah, I would say we do the same thing at the state level uh where we're we have a rigorous um vetting apparatus that that makes sure that that companies are you know good actors before we before we bring them into the state well

John Yearwood - Unfortunately we're out of time I want to thank uh please join me in thanking this great panel and also thank yourselves for the great attention that you paid to the session thank you all verymuch.