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## Mayors say cities need direct economic help

By Camille Drummond

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NEW YORK (Reuters) - Without more direct aid to U.S. local governments, Washington may make matters worse for cities facing falling tax revenues and increased spending needs, the nation's mayors said at their annual meeting this weekend.

Mayors said they bear the tough task of cutting services and jobs vital to U.S. cities, even with help from the \$787 billion in stimulus funds Congress passed in February.

"We make these decisions because we don't have a choice," said Miami Mayor Manuel Diaz, current president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, referring to layoffs and cost cuts in education and urban development. "We have to balance our budgets, and we cannot print money every week."

Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter said the "toughest part is cutting back on programs and services that people really want in their communities, and having to explain to them why we can't do certain things anymore because we just don't have the money."

Local governments, struggling to issue debt in a largely stalled municipal bond market, expressed worries that current federal stimulus initiatives -- including development grants, infrastructure funding, and the subsidized Recovery Zone and Build America Bonds -- while helpful, may not be enough in the financial crisis.

"And it's important that metropolitan areas get money directly for recovery, and not through the states," said Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, who has voiced concerns that states may use stimulus funds to close their own budget deficits, especially in California with its massive \$24.3 billion gap.

Organizers of the mayor's annual conference had counted on President Barack Obama and others from his administration to attend, but a labor dispute between host Mayor David Cicilline of Providence, Rhode Island, and the area's firefighters union led to the unprecedented federal absence from the meeting.

(Reporting by Camille Drummond; Editing by Vicki Allen)