

FOREIGN

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IN EVIDENZA

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The US mayor: "We've never had to defend ourselves from our own government before."

by [Alessandra Muglia](#)

Lacey Beatty leads Beaverton, Oregon: hers is one of the ten American cities that have joined the Free Cities Pact, founded by Eastern European mayors to resist populism



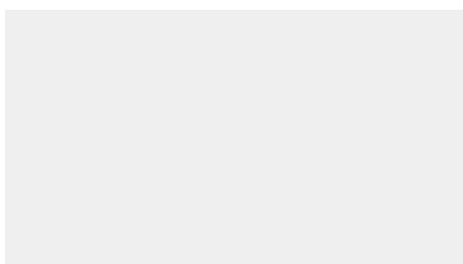
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FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

BRATISLAVA - "We're here to learn from European cities that have been grappling with threats from national governments longer than us," says Lacey Beatty, mayor of Beaverton, the Oregon city long known for hosting Nike's headquarters, and which hit the headlines last year for resisting federal immigration agents deployed by President Trump, a move she and other mayors opposed. Beatty, a 41-year-old Army veteran, flew from Oregon to the Slovakian capital to attend the summit of the "Pact of Free Cities," the alliance launched in 2019 by the mayors of the Visegrád Group—Bratislava, Prague, Warsaw, and Budapest—as a pro-democracy response to rising populism in Eastern Europe. In its initial years, the Pact expanded to include 40 European cities (including Rome and Milan) and is now taking on a transatlantic dimension: following Los Angeles's example, Bratislava has formally joined with 10 other American cities, all but one in Democratic-dominated states. These are Boston, Chicago, Seattle, San Diego, San Antonio, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Montgomery, Oklahoma City, and Beaverton. They too want to increase the resilience of local government in an era of uncertainty and pressure from the federal government, draw on the experience of European cities, and exchange solutions.

What does this pact mean to you?

"What we're experiencing in the US is completely new; we're not used to dealing with a federal government that invades local jurisdictions. We've managed to come together and sue the federal government, something none of us ever expected to have to do. We've seen federal ICE agents arrest people on the street; we're dealing with a president who threatens to withhold funding from cities if they don't comply with his demands. We're the government closest to the people, and it's the people who elect us to manage the day-to-day affairs of their lives. And when the central government—or in our case, the federal government—starts interfering in our affairs or depriving people of their rights in our communities, it becomes difficult for us to function. So I've come to learn from other mayors who've had to operate in a similar environment much longer than I have. Since I took office in 2021, it's been one emergency after another. First Covid, then a scorching summer with 110-degree temperatures, and the following year a severe ice storm sidelined the entire community. And it was unexpected to find myself in the position of fighting against our own federal government as mayor.



What do you expect from this alliance?

"Democracy is perceived first and foremost at the local level; we are the level of government closest to the people. Therefore, building relationships with other mayors is worth its weight in gold. Being able to call a colleague and ask, 'How would you handle this situation?' is invaluable.

European cities even lobby Brussels for more funding, while in the US, federal funds are at risk if you're not aligned.

"It's surprising to discover how much more similar cities are than they are different. Ultimately, we're still trying to fix potholes in the streets, get trash picked up, collaborate with the local school district to ensure children's education, and create jobs. What we're experiencing practically everywhere in the world right now is the rising cost of living. It doesn't matter if you're here in Bratislava or Beaverton, your money isn't worth what it once was. Maintaining a good quality of life is difficult. And so, in this respect, cities are very similar. Immigration issues don't just affect America, they're also affecting Europe. Trying to figure out how to house seniors and at the same time make the community attractive enough for a thirty-year-old—well, those are challenges that exist everywhere."

Here at the mayors' summit in Bratislava, you agreed to nominate Minneapolis for the Nobel Peace Prize. This is a two-pronged signal: a warning that American democracy is in danger and recognition of the role of mayors. It would be the first time a municipality has won the prestigious award. Do you think the time is ripe?

"I think my job, as mayor, is to be optimistic but grounded. Cities have changed since Covid. People expect local government to provide information about what's happening, what's safe and what's not. There are so many cities in the world that deserve the Nobel Peace Prize. The reason I think Minneapolis is so important right now is that America has often been a shining example of democracy for 250 years. So, if our example of democracy is starting to falter, what does that mean for the rest of the world? What does that mean for other countries? If we don't oppose the federal occupation, we don't want the military on the streets, what does that mean for other aspiring dictators around the world and how they intend to use their armed forces? I took the oath as a young soldier. And then, as an elected official, I did it three times to defend the Constitution of the United States. We have a responsibility to the world to ensure that democracy works. So I think this candidacy, right now, is about this city in particular, but it's really about all cities and the important role they play in everyone's lives.

You served for five years during the Iraq War as a radiology specialist, but you said you felt just as unsafe in the United States as you did in the war zone. Can you elaborate?

"That quote was specifically referring to school shootings. As a mother, this quintessentially American problem of school shootings is deeply felt; it causes great anxiety to send your children to school not knowing if they'll return home safe and sound. My eldest daughter, now in third grade, told me a few years ago how they were practicing in kindergarten for a shooting: it was heartbreaking. The fact that ordinary citizens in America are still allowed to own weapons of war is unconscionable. I know only too well what a weapon of war can do to a human body, and that shouldn't be what our children have to endure in a place where they should feel safe. I don't even remember which school shooting prompted me to make this reflection, because there are too many, but the reality is that every day, when I walk my children to school, I remind them to be good people, kind, and to pay attention to what is happening around them."

How are Americans reacting to the conflict in Iran?

Our disconnect from military service and our geographic isolation have prevented most families from understanding what war is beyond what they see on TV. I served in Iraq, my husband in Afghanistan. Generations of military families have been at war over the past 20 years. We don't want to be in this conflict. And the president promised it would be 14 days. And obviously, we've gone far beyond that. And it's time for Americans to start asking the hard questions. This president promised the American people he wouldn't drag us into a war. And here we are. Our midterm elections are coming up, and I think this issue will play a major role. And I hope we continue to talk about the price we're paying for this conflict, not just economically—in groceries, gasoline, and everything else—but also personally. We've already had American service members die in this conflict. And I say conflict, not war, because Congress hasn't passed it. And language matters, words matter. And Americans need to start asking more questions."

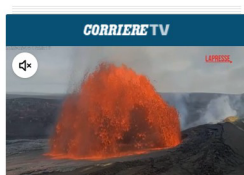
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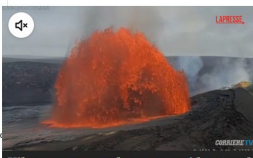
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Kilauea erupts and amazes residents and visitors again: spectacular lava splashes and fountains