

## ***Local Perspective from Chicago***

*Adapted from the broadcast audio segment; use the audio player to listen to the story in its entirety.*

As far as informal public opinion polls go, you could do worse than Manny's Deli. The clientele is a good mix of suits and construction workers, and it's been in the same spot for decades – just a couple miles away from where the NATO summit is being held.

Jason Greenberg falls under the construction category. He says he isn't buying all the PR about NATO being Chicago's moment in the sun – especially for a city wrestling with budget deficits, failing schools and unemployment.

"I think it's too much trouble," he says. "I think there's more important things to the city than some world leaders that come here. I think we have more important issues."

People like Steve Dukatt, a real estate investor, seem to think NATO is a good fit for President Barack Obama's hometown. "I don't think it's going to hurt us," says Dukatt. "It's only going to bring a little economic action. Whatever inconvenience it has will be a short-lived one. I don't think it's going to be a problem."

The NATO summit, after all, is just two days in the life of a big city. But it's a big two days.

Summit organizers estimate the whole operation will cost \$54 million, which they say will be paid entirely by corporate donors and federal grants.

Meanwhile, the Chicago press has been feasting on the spectacle of it all: thousands of anti-NATO protestors, rumors of sharpshooters perched atop buildings in the Loop, dramatic fights between Mayor Rahm Emmanuel and activists.

But all of this stuff misses the larger point, says Rachel Bronson, with the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. "The city does need to do more to connect internationally."

Bronson says the summit is a good opportunity for Chicago to show the world it's no longer just another dirty city in the Rust Belt. Her organization has been holding forums on the policies NATO leaders will discuss, and she says Chicagoans are finally showing some interest.

"Why," asks Bronson, "are they talking about Afghanistan withdrawal in 2014? What does smart defense really mean? What does austerity mean in terms of NATO? Why does this alliance still exist? What are its missions? There's an interest in having those conversations, particularly as we get closer to it."

One of the loudest voices in the conversation belongs to long-time activist Andy Thayer. He's organizing an anti-NATO march for the opening day of the summit. "The notion that the United States, with a tiny minority of the world's population, has the right to dominate other countries is profoundly authoritarian and profoundly anti-democratic."

But as he sits in his cluttered office in the law firm where he works, Thayer concedes his fights with City Hall over protest ordinances and whether he can march down Michigan Avenue have gotten in the way of his real message.

"My message to world leaders, including President Obama, is that we don't care what you say, frankly, because we don't believe you."

Thayer stops our interview to take a call from an evening news show. He's supposed to go on later to talk about NATO, but he says he's told representatives from the city won't be on TV with him.

"It wouldn't be the first time that people on the other side have refused to be on the same show with me."

When he hangs up, Thayer recognizes the irony that once again his fight to deliver his message is overshadowing the message itself. But, asks Thayer, "Where is the debate about NATO? Where is the debate about whether or not this city should host these summits?"

Whatever the nature of the debate about NATO in Chicago in 2012, it doesn't seem likely to end just because all the world leaders go home. Not surprisingly, Mayor Rahm Emanuel's administration has been very forceful in making the case that the summit is good for the city of Chicago.

"It's a huge opportunity for its tourism industry," says Emanuel. "We need to move up in the ranks of the country where foreign tourists come to the city. I think this is an opportunity for people to see what I know this city to be: the greatest city in the greatest country, because this is the most American of American cities."

Back at Manny's Deli, Steve Dukatt seems to buy into Emanuel's message. "I don't think it's a problem. I think it's just another thing that a city like Chicago would expect to have. I mean, I guess it's an honor to have that event here."

But if the protests get out of hand, or the El trains get delayed, Duckatt says, "It's two days, you know? We can live with it."

*– Reported by Alex Keefe for America Abroad*