

GUEST COLUMN  
For  
The Monroe Dispatch  
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For the June 21, 2018 Edition

### **The I's Have it: INCLUSION**

Earlier this month, I had the privilege of attending the 86<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the United States Conference of Mayors. Nearly 250 mayors from cities with a population of 30,000+ met in Boston, Massachusetts, for the four-day gathering.

A major focus of this year's conference was on INCLUSION, INFRASTRUCTURE and INNOVATION. I will discuss one of each of these subjects over the next three weeks.

The discussion about inclusion was all about strengthening our cities through diversity. It reminded me of our February discussion on Race & Diversity.

At the Mayor's Conference, panelists talked about the importance of maximizing our potential by reaching out to all segments of our community. We need to reduce barriers and build more bridges. We can do that by overcoming traditional walls of division, such as race/ethnicity, party affiliation, education levels, disabilities, religion, and income.

Think about how much greater our city, region, state and country would be if hidden gems had equitable access to more educational opportunities, work skill training, music & arts, and entrepreneurship training.

We are proud to say the City of Monroe hires roughly 150 student workers in our annual summer jobs program. Hardly anyone knows that some of those student workers have disabilities. Instead of being exclusive, we are being inclusive.

With city council approval, our city participates in a state program that promotes training and job experiences for high school students with disabilities.

Hopefully, our inclusive summer job program can serve as bridge to a brighter future for all who participate.

Inclusion, infrastructure, and innovation. Three keys to the future of every city. Next week, I will share my thoughts about the importance of infrastructure. By working together, we are stronger. Monroe is one city, with one future!