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For Pittsburgh, G-20 Meeting Is a Mixed Blessing

By [IAN URBINA](#)

PITTSBURGH — For this city, the [G-20](#) economic meeting is a mixed blessing.

The mayor, Luke Ravenstahl, has estimated that the thousands of attendees and protesters will spend \$35 million in the city during the two-day conference, which starts Thursday. But his office has also said the extra security may cost more than \$19 million. The federal government is providing \$10 million, and the state around \$4 million, leaving the city responsible for the rest.

But more important, the mayor said, the meeting will give Pittsburgh the chance to change its pervasive image as a gritty, dying Rust Belt city.

“Since early August, journalists, dignitaries and safety officials have been visiting our city, eating at our restaurants, shopping in our stores and staying in our hotels,” Mr. Ravenstahl, 29, said. “That’s just the short-term gain. In the long-term, you really can’t put a dollar value on the amount of free marketing we’ve received worldwide.”

The mayor said Pittsburgh’s story of economic transformation had helped to dispel “our city’s ‘smoky’ image and replace it with the real ‘green’ image, which tells the story of how you can reinvent and diversify your economy.”

Pittsburgh’s unemployment rate, the mayor noted, is 7.7 percent, below both the state and national averages, and he said the city had been a pioneer in green technology. The G-20 leaders will meet in the new, energy-efficient [David L. Lawrence Convention Center](#), and they will eat dinner at the [Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens](#), which was designed to use almost no outside energy or water.

The protests planned for the conference, however, are also a painful reminder of how many still see this former steel town. Even though Pittsburgh has remade itself by attracting young professionals with university and hospital jobs, the city, for many, remains a symbol of the collapse of the nation’s industrial base and the loss of manufacturing jobs.

“This city is a perfect place to be raising these concerns about jobs being sent overseas and a government that bails out banks but isn’t willing to regulate capital,” said Larry Holmes, a spokesman for [Bail Out the People Movement](#), whose group has called for a new version of the [Works Progress Administration](#) that President [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#) created during [the Great Depression](#). In the Hill District, a largely black neighborhood, Mr. Holmes’s group has erected a “tent city” of unemployed and homeless people who have come here to have their voices heard.

The protests began in earnest Wednesday as [Greenpeace](#) activists unfurled a banner off the West End Bridge that billowed over the Ohio River and read “Danger” above the words “Climate Destruction Ahead” and “Reduce CO2 Emissions Now.”

Fourteen activists were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct and obstructing traffic, among other charges, said Assistant Chief Bill Bochter of the Pittsburgh Police Department.

While most protest groups applied for city permits and have pledged to use nonviolent means to get their messages across, the city refused to grant permits to use several parks and routes that would have allowed demonstrators to march within sight and sound of the G-20 conference.

Two groups sued the city in federal court here for what they described as sustained harassment and pre-emptive arrests by the police, but a judge Tuesday declined to issue an injunction.

The police this week have said they want to be prepared if things become chaotic.

National Guard troops are joining the city’s 900 police officers in patrolling the streets. The city has also called on an additional 3,000 city, state and federal officers to help.

“Our goal all along has been to work with groups who want to peacefully demonstrate their views to world leaders,” Mr. Ravenstahl said.

The police said they wanted to avoid the types of confrontations that occurred in 1999 in Seattle during meetings of the [World Trade Organization](#), when the police fired tear gas and rubber bullets to quell protests, resulting in about 600 arrests and \$3 million in property damage.

Wayne Ranick, a spokesman for the [United Steelworkers union](#), whose world headquarters is in Pittsburgh, said he was focused on other legacies from the 1999 W.T.O. protests.

“The blue-green alliance” is still intact, he said, referring to the partnership formed on the streets of Seattle, where [Teamsters](#) and protesters dressed as sea turtles.

Leo W. Gerard, president of the steelworkers union, said he and several leaders of the [A.F.L.-C.I.O.](#) had organized joint events this week with the [Sierra Club](#) and the Alliance for Climate Protection. Mr. Ranick said that the shared goal would be to push for more vigorous regulation of financial and credit markets, more stringent environmental standards and stronger commitments to human rights and the rights of workers to organize.

Sean D. Hamill and Colin Moynihan contributed reporting.

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