

Economic Sparring Match Turns to Meeting of Minds ***Authors share ideas about cities and the challenges they face***

By Mary Voelz Chandler
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Anyone who expected a replay of the Holyfield-Tyson fight at the "debate" Friday between economists Richard Florida and Joel Kotkin was in for a surprise.

No matter that Mayor John Hickenlooper keyed off the boxing world in his introduction of Kotkin, the urban theorist who in print has taken a different stance than Florida, whose work touts the rise of a creative class as the best hope for the future of cities.

"I feel a little like someone introducing a fight," said the mayor to more than 500 people in the Donald R. Seawell Ballroom attending a program that was part of the C3 Culture Commerce Community conference. "In that corner, Joel Kotkin . . ."

Instead, the discussion of what makes cities great became a near-meeting of the minds between two writers who for years have toiled in the arena of culture, societal shifts and the economy.

"I don't have an arts and culture agenda," said Florida, whose new book *The Flight of the Creative Class* globalizes his 2002 blockbuster *The Rise of the Creative Class*. "I've been accused of having an arts and culture agenda. I was a pretty bad amateur guitarist in a rock 'n' roll band."

Kotkin's new *The City: A Global History* indicates concern about the strength of cities filled with transient, wealthy young technocrats and tourists. His previous books have explored the digital revolution and the global economy.

"People go somewhere, use it like a gas station, and then go somewhere else," said Kotkin.

The rise of a creative economy, based on Florida's tenets of techno-logy, talent and tolerance, can only go so far, Florida said. It's no panacea for social and economic ills such as "growing income inequality and a housing affordability crisis." Those situations have grown so severe that Florida decried a "horrible Darwin-ian sorting process" that "exposes huge differences" in quality of life.

Kotkin, too, took on issues of affordable housing and the fact that the economy and bad schools have made it difficult for people to raise children.

"In many ways, Richard and I both are reaching toward the conclusive need for a new progressive era," said Kotkin, who grew up in San Francisco with parents

who owned a small bookstore there. "Richard may not have an arts agenda, and I am not a Philistine."

Kotkin's book lists three attributes that make a city great: sacred places, safety and being busy. "Commerce has to be lively commerce." In San Francisco, where housing prices have skyrocketed, "the economy has evaporated into tourism and a lot of rich people who could live anywhere."

When moderator Paul Teske, a professor at the University of Colorado's Graduate School of Public Affairs, pointed out that both writers referred to ideas in sets of threes, Florida said, "I'm always shocked by the level of agreement between us."

The conference continues today.