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Photo/Russ Olivo

U.S. Treasurer Rosa Rios tours Family Resources Community Action Program's Financial Opportunity Center in Woonsocket Monday with U.S. Rep. David Cicilline. In back is John C. Gregory, president of the Northern Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce.

## U.S. treasurer gets earful from Valley businesspeople

By RUSS OLIVO

### WOONSOCKET

Advocates for small business and economic development from around the region shared some blunt talk about what's missing from the federal government's job-growth policy yesterday with someone they hope can make a difference — U.S. Treasurer Rosa “Rosie” Rios.

A guest of U.S. Rep. David Cicilline (D-RI), the woman

whose signature appears on new paper money is a member of President Barack Obama's Business Council and a senior adviser to Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner.

Mid-way through stops at Slater Jr. High School in Pawtucket and Advanced Distribution & Warehousing in North Smithfield, Rios toured Family Resources Community Action Program's Financial Opportunity Center at 55 Main St. There, she toured classes

designed to help the unemployed snag jobs as certified nursing assistants and administrative health clerks, offering students words of encouragement.

“It's programs like these I'd like to see supported,” she said at one point. “Investment in human capital is still the best investment we can make.”

Rios' handlers allowed reporters to eavesdrop and snap photos while she ducked into

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# Rios

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classrooms, but she met privately with members of the business community for about a half-hour during her drop-in at the Financial Opportunities Center.

Later, participants emerged from the meeting saying one of the main topics was improving small businesses' access to the capital they need to expand and hire new workers.

Among those who participated were Leslie W. Taito, chief executive officer of the Rhode Island Manufacturing Extension Service, John C. Gregory, president of the Northern Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce; and Mark S. Hayward, district director of the U.S. Small Business Administration.

"We had a very frank and candid discussion," said Hayward.

Hayward and others who participated in the "business roundtable" all said they hoped Rios brings the message back to Washington. Rios pledged to do just that.

"These businesses are working very hard, as many are, to gain access to capital," she said, adding that she reports directly to Secretary Geithner. "I will be thrilled to report back to him on the needs of this community."

Gregory said it's vital that Washington policymakers take stock of how deeply the economic slump has trickled down to Main Street America. It's nice to talk about expansive job stimulus programs like rebuilding the nation's infrastructure, but new bridges and roads are meaningless to someone who can't afford a car to drive on them, he said.

Reworking a phrase about the nature of politics that he borrowed from the late House Speaker Tip O'Neill of Boston, Gregory said the money crunch has reached so far into the nation's grass-roots "we've almost reached a point where all economic development is local."

Other participants in the roundtable were Adrianna Dawson of the R.I. Small Business Development Center; State Director Miguelina Dominguez of RCM Cleaning Services; Carmen Diaz-Jusino of the R.I. Center for Women and

Enterprise; Juana Horton of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; Brian Hunter, CEO of Hunter Insurance; Ben Lux of NuLabel Technologies; Sandra McNamara, Context Consulting; Jose Mercano of JM Painting and Plastering; Deborah Ramos of the North Central Chamber of Commerce; Don Scarlata of Colonial Mills; Tim Cole of the R.I. Economic Development Corporation; Woonsocket Mayor Leo T. Fontaine and City Councilman Daniel Gendron.

A first-generation

Mexican-American, Rios is the 43rd treasurer of the United States and the sixth woman of Hispanic heritage to hold the position. As treasurer, her duties include oversight of the United States Mint and the United States Savings Bond Division. She and other representatives of Obama's business council, have been touring various cities in the nation in recent months for private meetings with job-growth and business-development advocates, on a mission to gather feedback for the president.

"On behalf of all the con-

stituents of the first district, how thrilled we are to have her back," said Cicilline, whom Rios has accompanied to the area at least once in the past.

Ben Lessing, the executive director of Family Resources, a leader in providing job training, education and financial supports for the poor and underemployed in Woonsocket, said he was honored to play host to Rios.

"Any attention that can be provided, particularly to these kinds of programs and the challenge we face is a plus," he said.