

A Currency More Valuable Than Money



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On Friday, December 19, 2008 President Bush did what the Senate was unwilling to do. He provided a much-needed bailout for Chrysler and General Motors. This was good news nationally and especially here at home. The loss of any of the three carmakers would cause unimaginable damage across the country, but especially to this city and state.

Now that the automotives have received a bailout Detroit needs a bailout. However, money alone will not solve our deeply rooted issues. Our bailout will require a currency more valuable than even money. We need courage - the courage to first admit that some of our most intractable problems have little to do money. And more courage to stand up and move forward after years of debilitating decisions by our elected officials on the local, state

and federal levels. We need courage to ask ourselves and our neighbors the hard questions like what measures are required to help a great city paralyzed by decades of disappointment. What measures are needed to rise again?

What measures are essential to rise above the high rate of unemployment, high rate of crime and severely low rate of performance in our schools? Let's stop looking outward and start to attack the problem by looking within.

In 1999 when Lansing took over our schools we were outraged. We called it racism and elitism. We shouted that our civil rights were being violated because our vote had been taken away. People marched and organized to get the vote back. We got the right to vote back in 2005 and I have not seen the same level of outrage since.

Is there no outrage because now that we've regained control of our school system student performance has improved? Is it because SAT and ACT scores have increased or the dropout rate has decreased? The fact is the school system is in worse shape today than it was when we regained control in 2005. The deficit at DPS continues to grow, student performance continues to decline and we are once again in search of a superintendent. Why aren't we outraged?

Back in October, I was struck by an incident that made the headlines of local and national media. Four teenagers were shot outside of Henry Ford High School and one died. One pastor, Reverend Gregory Kirby organized a march, and according to news reports about 30 people marched, including members of one additional church. We've had more than 30 people show up at ribbon cutting ceremonies. Have we become so impervious, so immune to violence that the thought of four young children being shot while leaving school is just passing news? If our babies' being shot down in the streets is not a time to march will there ever be a time? Why aren't we outraged? Why aren't our leaders outraged?

Many of us unfortunately have become too anaesthetized by the crude portrayals of this community and have embraced our role as victims. Reports state that Detroit Public Schools have less than 25 percent graduation rate, we blame the state for not providing enough funding instead of going to the schools to get involved. Our neighborhoods are deteriorating block by block and we blame the City instead of pitching in to keep our block clean. Our children are turning to gangs and violence; we blame television and music instead of spending quality time with our children or mentoring. The result is the appearance

of stagnation and apathy. I believe the reality is that people feel helpless and hopeless about their ability to effect change.

But there is still hope. There are many positives quietly occurring every day. There are children excelling and graduating from Detroit Public Schools. There are many neighbors who quietly cut the lawn and clean the lots where vacant homes used to be on their block.

Our leadership has also produced some positive results. During the Clinton/Archer years, for example, we began to see new development downtown and in some neighborhoods. Under the Kilpatrick Administration many developments continued and we saw some additional developments. However, while we were building new houses, condos and restaurants to attract people to the City there were far greater numbers leaving to head to the suburbs.

I'm tired of the one-step-forward-two-steps-backward dance that this city does. I say we commit ourselves to charging forward with a steady and sustained momentum. How do we do this?

We start with electing leaders who will have the courage and conviction to tell us the truth and make some tough decisions. Then the voters have to be willing to hear the

truth and make some sacrifices to help turn things around. Like the auto industry, this City has been in trouble for a very long time and we've pretended that with a little "triage" things would get better—and for a while they did or so it seemed.

Now that we're faced with the grim reality of a city whose major industry is shrinking, a housing market in trouble and unemployment rates that are double the national rates we need courage more than ever. We just experienced an election where the voters had the courage to elect the first African American President in the history of this country. It took two wars, a near collapse of the Mortgage Industry, Wall Street and the Big Three, record high gas prices and continuously rising unemployment rates, but the majority of us became outraged.

We were so passionate about our need for change that millions went to the polls and stood in line for hours just to cast our vote for change. That is truly democracy at work. At this point in Detroit's history it is do or die. We need to exercise our democratic duties more now than ever. In his book, *Where Have All the Leaders Gone*, Lee Iacocca asks everyone to do three things: Give something up; Put something back in; and Elect a leader. I'm asking more of Detroiters—we have to ask

for the truth from our leaders and our leaders have to be willing to give us the truth, and then ask us to give something back. We have to be willing to face the hard truths and work collectively to find real solutions that will work – even if they mean sacrifices. Then and only then will Detroit have a real "Bailout" plan.

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