

New Mayor, Same Council



Michigan Chronicle Article May 20, 2009

With Detroit's special Mayoral election now completed and Dave Bing seemingly secure in the Mayor's office for the next four and one half years, more focus will turn now to Detroit's City Council.

If the City is going to make the turnaround that we all hope for, Council has to be a part of that process. If the Mayor and Council cannot develop a common vision that is based on mutual respect and an abiding love for Detroit, progress becomes much more difficult.

That does not mean the Council just rolls over for our new Mayor. It means that the Mayor recognizes and respects the role of the legislative body and that the Council recognizes and respects the role of the

executive. And it means that Council must stay focused on the major challenges that confront it and not get side tracked by personal squabbles that have no real bearing on the future of Detroit other than to serve as a distraction.

Unfortunately, in recent years, the Council has become known more for its dysfunctional nature than as a deliberative body where public policy is developed in a way that improves the quality of life for Detroiters. Council members have made news more for bickering with one another and calling names, than for engaging in measured discussion of public policy issues.

With a new Mayor now in place, City Council members have a unique opportunity near the end of the current term to remake their image through a new start on a new relationship.

When we look at the issues that confront this city and this council, we can only hope that they are able to do that. The city's spiraling deficit, the desperate need for jobs and for investment in neighborhoods, the growing crime problem and other issues demand

the best from each council member.

It's up to each of us to let members of Council know what we expect from them. It's up to us to let them know we will not accept "business as usual," with conduct that would earn them a detention if they were in school and with personal feuds and vendettas that have nothing to do with the major issues that face this city.

We need a Council that is focused on creating jobs in Detroit and creating an atmosphere that will attract new jobs.

We need a Council that recognizes the serious financial crisis that our city faces and that is willing to make tough decisions to bring the deficit under control.

We need a Council that makes safety in our neighborhoods a priority and supports our Police Department in a way that will result in greater safety for all.

We need a Council that recognizes the tremendous changes being brought about in the Detroit Public Schools by Emergency Financial Manager Robert Bobb and will look for

ways to create partnerships to help him in his work.

We need a Council determined to make Detroit as vibrant a city at the start of the 21st Century as it was at the start of the 20th Century and focused on developing the public policies that will make that goal a reality.

The recent runoff election between Mayor Dave Bing and City Council President Ken Cockrel showed that it is possible for people to have political disputes and disagreements that do not become bitter personal confrontations. I believe both candidates conducted themselves in a manner that they could be proud of once the election was over.

I hope members of City Council were paying attention and decide to follow that example for the rest of this year.

You can reach Saunteel Jenkins by email at Saunteel@SaunteelJenkins.com.