



Get Ready For More of the Same... Only Different

BY MARK SEGRAVES

If the September Democratic primary were held today, Mayor Adrian Fenty and Council Chairman Vincent Gray would win reelection. It looks less and less likely that any viable challenger will take on either one. And I wouldn't bet on there being a Gray vs. Fenty race.

In fact, the only race in question right now is the race for the at-large seat currently held by Councilmember Phil Mendelson. (I'm not weighing in on that contest right now – soon, but not today.) Let's for argument's sake say the status quo remains for another four years – what will that mean for the legislative progress and fiscal recovery of the District of Columbia?

Whatever the future holds, it won't look like the past three years.

For much of his first term, Fenty has enjoyed the support of the majority of the DC Council. He has been able to get his appointees confirmed and his legislative and budget priorities passed. But now the mayor has lost some of his support on the council. It's harder for him to get things done. Just ask Ximena Hartsock, the mayor's failed nominee to head up the Department of Parks and Recreation.

The council sent a message to the mayor with the Hartsock vote.

The days of Fenty having 7 to 9 votes at his disposal and getting his way at the Wilson Building are over. Now Fenty will have to focus on holding on to six votes and blocking the council from doing things.

Things like changing the requirements to be attorney general, for example.

The current legislation calling for an elected attorney general has made it past one vote in the full council, but Fenty and his people are working to get six councilmembers to oppose it at the final reading. If Fenty succeeds, it would be a major victory for him but a far cry from the good ol' days when he could get the council to support al-

most anything, like giving the elected school board the boot.

One thing we have learned about the mayor is that he doesn't play well in the sandbox with the other kids. And that's catching up to him now. Back in the early days, Fenty and Gray could work together and find common ground. Then the relationship began to sour. In public, Gray calls their relationship "professional," and Fenty says of the council, "It's the best council we have ever had."

In private, the two rarely talk. They tried having regular meetings but disagreed on whose office to hold the meeting in or what restaurant to eat at. When they did agree on a location, neither one wanted to be the first to show up. Now they don't even bother. The mayor and the full council have a monthly breakfast meeting scheduled, but Fenty often is a no-show or cancels the meeting altogether.

The two just don't get along. The trouble is, in order for the legislative and the executive branches to get anything accomplished, they at least need to communicate with each other.

Case in point: the recent negotiations over the three Boys and Girls Clubs which the District recently bought. The deal needed council support and of course the support of the mayor. But the two never met or talked directly about the issue, according to sources who are familiar with the negotiations.

Fenty and Gray went through intermediaries, adding delay and at times confusion to the process. In the end, the 20 million dollar deal was done, so of course Fenty called a press conference. The Jan. 6 press advisory that went out listed three participants who would represent the District at the big announcement: Fenty, Attorney General Peter Nickles and Department of Parks and Recreation Interim Director Jesús Aguirre. Gray was not invited; he wasn't even told about the



Vincent Gray, chair of the DC Council, addresses a press conference announcing the agreement with the Boys & Girls Club. Photo: Vikrum Aiyer, District of Columbia

event by the mayor or his staff.

In the news release sent out by Fenty's office after the announcement, Fenty is quoted as saying, "This agreement was carried out with an abundance of support from neighbors, families and patrons of the Boys and Girls Clubs." No mention of Gray or the council's role.

This is nothing new for the mayor. Fenty rarely invites councilmembers to his carefully orchestrated daily photo ops, ribbon cuttings and groundbreakings. A big change from past mayors like Tony Williams who rarely held a press conference anywhere in the District without the ward councilmember being there.

But what makes this event more interesting is that despite not being invited, Gray did attend the press conference, and the mayor did acknowledge Gray's role. Much in the same way Tareq and Michael Salahi crashed the White House State Dinner and had their picture taken with President Obama, Gray showed up, walked in, acted like he belonged there, and got in front of the television cameras with the mayor.

Sources close to the mayor say Fenty isn't worried about the tension and thinks it will all go back to the

way it was once this political season is past them. Fenty thinks it's all just political posturing.

I've got news for him – it's not.

Many of the councilmembers take what they see as the mayor's arrogance as a personal attack. Their feelings are hurt. And it goes beyond that to a more substantive reason – many of the councilmembers don't like having their authority ignored.

The councilmembers have proven in the past they were willing to work with the mayor; now the mayor needs to prove that he can work with the council. Otherwise the two sides will be spending more time battling each other than making any real progress on important issues like, say, the District's double-digit unemployment rate.

One Toke Over The Line

The nation's capital is once again in the national spotlight because of a local debate. First, it was the District's tough gun laws and the Supreme Court decision, more recently the clash over same sex marriage, and now DC is going to legalize medical marijuana.

Before the end of 2010, the District could join 14 states that make marijuana available for ill patients. But before you go and change the

bong water, the DC Council is going to have to figure out a way to make this work.

In California it's the tale of two cities. In Los Angeles, it's a mess. The local district attorney wants to close all of the pot dispensaries; the city council just voted to impose new stricter guidelines, so hundreds of the now operating "clinics" will have to close. The city is bracing for lawsuits no matter what. Up north in Oakland, where the city has been regulating and taxing the sale of marijuana and only non-profits can operate a "clinic," everybody seems relatively happy.

But there are still problems – the same problems the DC Council will have to deal with. For instance, in California, a doctor can recommend medical marijuana for anything from headaches to AIDS. Doctors openly advertise their willingness to provide a quick fix to those suffering from anxiety.

The proposed legislation here would dictate for which illnesses doctors could prescribe marijuana. Councilmembers can expect stiff opposition to this. Another big issue will be where the "clinics" will be allowed to operate. Remember the District still hasn't had one gun store open since handguns were legalized.

And from where will all of the pot come? And it will be a lot of pot.

Last year, one of the top "clinics" in Oakland reported \$40 million in sales. Marijuana cannot be shipped in from across state lines, so it will have to be grown locally. In a city that is torn over where to allow residents to raise chickens, imagine the zoning debate over this.

And then there is the issue of who will sell it. The proposed legislation has nonprofits running the distribution centers. But once local entrepreneurs realize how much money is at stake, the council should expect pressure on this as well.

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Let's Solve the Unemployment Crisis in DC

BY KWAME BROWN, COUNCILMEMBER AT LARGE

Edson is a Ward 6 resident I met recently who's doing his best to put food on the table. "A lot of people need jobs out there," he said. "They're losing their job, their car, their house and they need to be able to support their families. They're struggling to get food and clothes for their kids and they can't." Nothing hurts me more than to hear a DC resident who's willing and able to work but can't find a job. That's why I'm passionate about solving the unemployment crisis in the District. But I can't do it alone; I need your help.

At 12.1%, the District is suffering from its highest unemployment rate ever. Within the past year, five wards had unemployment rates rise above 10%. This to me is a crime. To take action, I called for the declaration of a District-wide unemployment crisis. On the same day, I introduced a tool for creating new jobs for District residents called the "DC Job Growth Incentive Act of 2010."

The act would create new jobs for District residents like Edson by giving local businesses an incentive to hire them. It's more carrot and less stick. Specifically, local businesses would receive a franchise tax credit when they create at least 10 new District jobs over a five-year period. To ensure people don't game the system, businesses must prove they've hired District residents before they can claim the credit.

Economic growth for any city or state begins and ends with jobs. Whether it's about retaining jobs or creating jobs, every single economic development incentive is supposed to make sure that more DC residents are put to work. I'm chair of the Council's Committee on Economic Development because I believe social ills can't be solved without good economic policies. This bill would give us a comprehensive and uniform policy for job creation and sustainable economic growth.

My Council colleagues also understand the struggle that many residents are facing. All thirteen have co-introduced the "DC Job Growth Incentive Act." And in an unprecedented show of unity, the DC Jobs Council, the Board of Trade, the DC Chamber of Commerce, the Hotel Association, Washington Interfaith Network, ABC of Metropolitan Washington, LiUNA, Earth Aid and District residents came together to support the legislation.

I can't promise a job to the hundreds of residents who've emailed or talked to me looking for work, but I can promise to make it easier for businesses to hire them. More importantly, I can't do this alone. Collectively, we need to take responsibility for improving the economy. I want you to take action by giving me feedback, going to Council hearings and writing in support of making jobs a top priority. I encourage you visit my website at www.kwamebrownatlarge.com where your ideas are always welcome. Let's solve the unemployment crisis together by giving each other a hand up. ★