



chairman's update

the NEWSLETTER of
DC Council Chairman Phil Mendelson

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A FOCUS ON EDUCATION & AFFORDABILITY IN COUNCIL PERIOD 23

2018 marked the first time since 2002 that every incumbent was re-elected and there were no changes in government. This would suggest that citizens generally are comfortable with their government and like the direction in which the city is going. Certainly our city is booming. But to say that citizens are comfortable with the direction we're going in is only half-true. The feedback I took from last year's election was that citizens *aren't* comfortable with the city's direction on important issues like education and affordability.

There is enormous frustration over education. Only two-thirds of our 9th graders graduate from high school. And of those who do, it is unclear how many are worthy of a degree. Last school year only one-third of our high schoolers were proficient in English and only 14% were proficient in math. If this was a private sector corporation whose sole product is educated people, we would file for bankruptcy.

This challenge is not unique to the District. All large-city school systems are struggling just as we are. It is tough educating kids living in poverty and in violent neighborhoods.

But the achievement gap is embarrassing, and it is growing. For instance, last year only 25% of black students tested proficient in English compared to 82% of white students.

Education, public education, is supposed to be the great equalizer in our society. It enables the opportunity of America for everybody. It empowers people to help themselves. It is the best job training program. Poverty does not thrive among the well-educated. Nor does crime.

I used to think that solving our problems through better schooling was ~~so~~ long term as to be not relevant. But I've come to realize the opposite: we need a long-term strategy. As Frederick Douglass said: "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." Quality education is not solely about learning. It is the solution to our social justice ills.

We need to look at this with urgency. We need to think differently and work harder to uplift all children. In all grades.

To lay a foundation, we should laser-focus on grade schoolers, and stop social promotion because today's first graders are tomorrow's high schoolers. We need not take resources away from our middle and high schools, but we need to recognize that there is a pipeline. Some call it the school to prison pipeline. But that's only true if we are failing to educate our grade schoolers.

I'm not saying it is the role of the Council to be superintendent or micromanagers. It is not. But *it is* our role to bring oversight and to be an advocate for parents. The Council will be a partner with Mayor Bowser in our joint aspiration for both DCPS and the public charter schools.

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Constituent Services Corner

A Ward 6 mother called our Constituent Services team for assistance after her water was shut off a few days before the holiday season.

She described her financial hardships and our team was able to get her service restored with funding assistance from various resources.

While working on the situation, she mentioned that this Christmas would be especially difficult for her and her three children – all of whom are under the age of 6.

The Chairman's office does an annual Holiday toy giveaway to families across the District in need. So, on Christmas Eve, our team surprised the mother and her children with toys, and even had gifts for Mom.

Our Constituent Services team is available to support you all year, but their presents can be especially helpful during the Holiday season.

**Contact our Constituent
Services Team at
(202) 724-8032**



ChairmanPhilMendelson



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chairman's update

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The Chinese philosopher Lao Tsu said “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” In the District, just over a quarter of black residents have college degrees, compared to 92% of white residents, and the median income for black households is about \$38,000 while for white households it is 330% higher. The difference is education.

I’ve become impatient. The new Chancellor should bring forth a Marshall Plan for the first grade this year, for the first and second grades next year and so forth. No one moves to the next grade who is not at grade level. If we do this, truancy will drop, dropping out will decrease, more kids will graduate, and they’ll be worthy of their diploma. And in the District of Columbia, it will hold true that for *all* of our children, education is the great equalizer, and that every child has a shot at the American Dream.

Meanwhile, we are tying ourselves in knots over social justice issues that miss the fundamental problem. Let me start with this:

There is a lot about which we – our city – can be proud. Financially, we are very healthy, evidenced by last summer’s triple-A recognition from Wall Street. We are growing in population, jobs, and nightlife. We are a progressive leader in the country when it comes to workers: union-friendly, \$15 minimum wage, and the best Universal Paid Leave Program when it comes on line in 2020. We’re also an environmental leader: best in the world in number of LEED-certified buildings, and a new energy policy that will lead the country in fighting climate-change. To deal with affordability, our Housing Production Trust Fund is more than triple any other city.

We are undeniably progressive. And yet there are progressives who say we are not doing enough. That our Universal Paid Leave law could have been better. That our Clean Energy Omnibus bill could have been better. That we are not doing enough for social justice.

I agree, up to a point. Poverty, justice, the environment – these are the greatest challenges in our city, in our country. Their solution is not helped by divisiveness, whether it be the style of our president blaming Democrats, or the style of others who want to blame large corporations, restaurant owners, landlords, and developers. It’s essentially argument *ad hominem*. It is not about finding common ground but about ideological victory. As President Obama’s EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy wrote last month regarding our Clean Energy Omnibus bill: “don’t lose sight of the victory here.”

And victory is possible. There is very little that divides us; we are committed to the same ideals and vision. The business community *wants* to eradicate poverty. Our wealthy residents want to eradicate the achievement gap. Developers want to provide affordable housing. It’s hard to find anyone who embraces the theories of trickle-down, bootstraps, and unregulated markets. We are fortunate that our differences can be measured in degrees. We should celebrate that, and then seek common ground on the issues that bring us together. Compromise is not a four-letter word, literally or figuratively. We are blessed with elected leadership and broader civic leadership that are committed to equality and justice for all citizens, an inclusive and strong economy, a diverse population, and self-determination. In the end, resolution of most any issue through compromise and consensus actually leaves us stronger than zero-sum, winner-take-all approaches where initiatives are rarely sustainable.

Citizens want a government that works. That finds solutions. That makes our city better. While I am a firm believer in a strong legislature, I recognize that policies that have the support of both branches have the best chance of success.

I am honored and humbled that you have once again placed your trust in me to lead the Council for another term. Most of you have known me for years. I believe government should be an honest, efficient deliverer of services, and that the District should help those least able to help themselves to develop the skills to become self-sufficient and end the cycle of poverty. The District, as the nation’s capital, should be a model of service delivery in public education, public safety, public works, and public health.

I ask you to hold us accountable.

Upcoming Hearings
of the
Committee of the
Whole

**Public Oversight
Roundtable on the
Destruction of
Historic Elements in
the Franklin School
Renovation**

January 15, 2019
11:30 a.m. Room 412

**Regular Committee
of the Whole
Meeting**

January 22, 2019
10 a.m. Room 500

**Joint Public
Oversight Hearing –
Improving School
Attendance: Truancy,
Chronic**

**Absenteeism, and
the Implementation
of Reform Initiatives**

January 31, 2019
10 a.m. Room 412

**Joint Public
Oversight
Roundtable – At-Risk
Funding**

Transparency

February 1, 2019
9:30 a.m. Room 412

**Regular Legislative
Meeting**

February 5, 2019
10 a.m. Room 500

To Testify Contact
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