

# Opportunities Lost in Milwaukee

## Statement of Alderman Bob Donovan December 16, 2009

During its special session today in Madison, the Wisconsin Legislature chose to delay action on historic legislation that would give Milwaukee's mayor the power to appoint the superintendent of the Milwaukee Public Schools and authority over the MPS budget. Instead, legislators want to hold a hearing in Milwaukee in early January on a separate Senate bill that would give more power to the state superintendent of public instruction to supposedly help low-performing schools. I agree with critics that the Senate bill isn't as firm as the mayoral control legislation, and in Milwaukee it's not what's needed to bring about real, far-reaching changes.

I find it ironic that lawmakers are delaying an MPS reform measure that has been delayed (in arriving) for a decade or more. Does anyone really believe that more delay in making substantive changes in MPS is going to do anything to help our students? And, will the hearing in Milwaukee next month attract anyone other than the usual crowd of special interests on the MPS control issue?

Sure, I'm not thrilled about the delay, but for me the real outrage should be directed at the many opportunities we've lost in Milwaukee over the years. Let's face it, poor leadership in Milwaukee has left us behind so many other cities (Minneapolis, Portland, Seattle, Des Moines, and Denver, to name just a few) when it comes to economic growth, jobs, transit/transportation, and education. These are often the same cities that are cited as already having a program or an initiative up and running that we are only beginning to talk about or consider; why can't we be one of those cities?

The long list of missed opportunities, I believe, also stretches to the Milwaukee County Courthouse, where the pension scandal (brought about, in my opinion, by leadership that was not only poor, but also corrupt!) sparked recalls that forced out a county executive and some county supervisors. There was an opportunity to change the way county government does business; but in the end not much has changed there.

While other cities made dramatic changes to their public school systems 10 or 15 years ago, we have a mayor who had to be dragged kicking and screaming into this (mayoral control proposal), despite the obvious glaring mismanagement, deficiencies, dysfunction, mediocrity, and low expectations that have long plagued MPS. Our mayor seems more interested in being liked, rather than providing the bold, gutsy leadership this city needs so badly.

When will we see actual leadership in Milwaukee -- leadership that goes beyond just words, and is backed up by real actions?

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