



The Thomas Connection

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Building Bridges, Finding Solutions

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The Newsletter of Ward 5 Council Member Harry "Tommy" Thomas, Jr.

COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS QUESTIONS FENTY/RHEE SCHOOL REFORM PLAN

At a December 3, 2007 community meeting attended by more than 500 residents, Ward 5 Councilmember Harry "Tommy" Thomas, Jr. issued a formal statement questioning the Fenty/Rhee school reform plan (see shaded box below).

"The Mayor and Chancellor's school reform plan hits Ward 5 the hardest," said Councilmember Thomas. "With seven Ward 5 schools slated for closure, our residents must be active participants in shaping the future of the public school system in Ward 5. The purpose of the emergency community meeting was to start this very important dialogue," noted Thomas.

OFFICIAL POSITION OF COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS ON FENTY/RHEE SCHOOL REFORM PLAN

I question the Fenty/Rhee school reform plan in its current format. While the plan includes many innovative ideas and initiatives with regard to early childhood education, special education, and gifted and talented programs, among other things, it falls short in other areas.

All neighborhoods should have the same quality of schools, as well as school programs and services. Children should not have to go out-of-boundary to obtain a quality public school education. The trend of permitting students to attend out-of-boundary schools has aggravated low enrollment in many of the District's urban schools. The current plan does not address this.

Furthermore, the school reform plan hits Ward 5 the hardest. A careful assessment of the criteria for closing seven schools in our Ward is warranted. I have requested and will share with residents the

criteria used to select the schools slated for closure. I will examine whether the list of factors is comprehensive or if other key factors need to be included.

In addition, I have requested and will share with residents the analysis generated from the school closure criteria. I have also requested and will share the results of a status report of all DCPS properties in Ward 5, including short-and long-term plans for each property.

The Ward 5 community must have an opportunity to vet and provide input to the Fenty/Rhee school reform plan. School reform can not be based solely on numerical data. Quality of life factors—such as parental and community involvement in a school and students' enthusiasm for learning—are equally important and should be incorporated into the school reform plan.

I take seriously my oversight role in reforming D.C. Public Schools. Bringing meaningful change to the District's public school system is my paramount goal. I will continue to work with my Council colleagues to monitor, assess, and provide constructive input to Mayor Fenty and Chancellor Rhee's school reform proposals.



At the December 3, 2007 community meeting, parents and students from John Burroughs Elementary School protested the Fenty/Rhee reform plan, which calls for the closure of Burroughs.

THOMAS SERVES AS LOCAL CO-CHAIR OF NATIONAL MARCH FOR JUSTICE

Councilmember Thomas, along with Councilmember Marion Barry, were local co-chairs of the National March for Justice, which occurred on November 16, 2007. Civil rights and community leaders from across the country rallied that day at Freedom Plaza, and led a march to the U.S. Justice Department to demand federal intervention into the alarming number of local hate crimes occurring across the country. More than 20,000 people participated.

The National March for Justice was sponsored by the National Action Network, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and Realizing the Dream. Councilmember Thomas joined Reverend Al Sharpton, President of National Action Network; Martin Luther King III, President of Realizing the Dream; and Charles Steel of the Southern Christian Leadership Coalition in leading the march. Radio talk show hosts Steve Harvey, Tom Joyner, and Warren Ballantine provided live broadcast of the day's events.

The rally is a cornerstone of the Fall Campaign for Justice, which originated in response to the alarming number of hate crimes and instances of injustice occurring across the country. These incidences range from a noose hanging at Columbia University, swastikas appearing on synagogues in New York, the beating of a gay man leaving a bar near the D.C. Convention Center, an attack on a transgender youth in Gallery Place, to the Jena 6 in Louisiana.

“With the increase in hate crimes across the country, it is time for us to come together and ask the federal government to intervene,” stated Councilmember Thomas. “We have a responsibility in this country to take a strong stand against any form of social injustice,” noted Thomas.



Councilmember Thomas joined Rev. Al Sharpton and other civil rights leaders at a November 6, 2007 press conference announcing the National March for Justice.

THOMAS RIDES WITH DPW SANITATION TEAM

Councilmember Thomas accompanied the DPW crew that services his neighborhood on November 9, 2007. The DPW route the Councilmember traveled with DPW includes neighborhoods adjacent to Home Depot at Rhode Island Avenue Plaza, as well as the Brentwood Road trash transfer station. The purpose of the ride-a-long was to initiate an initiative to bring concentrated DPW services to areas of Ward 5 that suffer from high levels of litter, illegal dumping, and other types of solid waste issues.

“It is critical to address both public safety and sanitation in our neighborhoods—they go hand-in-hand,” stated Councilmember Thomas. “In Ward 5, we have been working closely with MPD. Now it is time to heighten our relationship with DPW with targeted clean-ups and other sanitation strategies,” said Thomas.



Councilmember Thomas rode with a sanitation team on November 9, 2007 to launch his initiative to bring concentrated DPW services to areas of Ward 5 with high levels of litter and illegal dumping.

THOMAS TURKEY GIVEAWAY AIDS MORE THAN 1,000 FAMILIES

On November 19, 2007, Councilmember Thomas continued a Ward 5 tradition initiated by his father—the Thanksgiving Turkey Giveaway to families in need. Thomas gave away more than 1,000 turkeys that day. Partnering with other organizations, Thomas ensured that nearly 5,000 families in need received assistance during the Thanksgiving Season.

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