



The Thomas Connection

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Building Bridges, Finding Solutions

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

THOMAS DELIVERS STATE OF THE WARD ADDRESS

Ward 5 Councilmember Harry "Tommy" Thomas, Jr. delivered his State of the Ward Address on June 15, 2009 at McKinley Technology High School. More than 300 residents attended.

Councilmember Thomas provided a progress report of his activities since being sworn into office in January 2007. He discussed the high level of constituent outreach his office provides, such as addressing the issues and concerns of more than 12,500 Ward 5 residents and businesses. He stated that during his tenure in office he has attended more than 2,200 community meetings, sponsored or co-sponsored at least 50 special events, participated in more than 35 graduations, and recognized 103 outstanding individuals or organizations with ceremonial resolutions.

The Councilmember described his duties as a legislator and oversight responsibilities as Chair of the Council's Committee on Libraries, Parks and Recreation. He noted his sponsorship or co-sponsorship of 178 bills and 103 resolutions to-date (some key bills are highlighted in the box to the right).

Councilmember Thomas reviewed his efforts to address residents' public safety concerns, bring economic development to all corners of the Ward, and create employment opportunities for Ward 5 residents. He also shared his roadmap for the future of Ward 5 and the District:

- Ensure legislative priorities meet the needs of Ward 5 and District residents.
- Connect Ward 5 residents to jobs and assist them in becoming job-ready.
- Continue rigorous oversight of Ward 5 economic development projects.
- Keep Ward 5 green through initiation of a Green Space Master Plan for the city.
- Ensure Ward 5 gets its appropriate share of city services and city dollars.

To download a summary of the Councilmember's State of the Ward Address, go to the home page of Councilmember Thomas' website at www.harrythomas5.com.



Councilmember Thomas delivered his State of the Ward Address on June 15, 2009.

KEY LEGISLATION SPONSORED OR CO-SPONSORED BY COUNCILMEMBER HARRY "TOMMY" THOMAS, JR.

- **Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Amendment Act of 2008:** Provides 2,000 new pre-kindergarten classroom slots within 6 years.
- **Pension or Other Retirement Income Exclusion from Income Tax Amendment Act of 2009:** Amends the DC Code to increase the amount of pension income excluded from taxation for seniors age 62 and older. Current law has a \$3,000 exemption; The bill raises it to a scale between \$10,000 and \$20,000.
- **Public Land Surplus Standards Amendment Act of 009:** Amends District law to create strict requirements before classifying public property as surplus.
- **AED Installation for Safe Recreation and Exercise Act of 2008:** Requires installation and maintenance of automated external defibrillators in Department of Parks and Recreation facilities and mandates defibrillator training for personnel.
- **Day Care and Senior Services Emergency Act of 2008:** Requires the Mayor to submit to the Council a comprehensive analysis of DPR child day care services and senior citizen programs prior to their closure, discontinuation, or relocation.

COUNCIL PASSES THOMAS AMENDMENTS TO CRIME BILL

At the Council's legislative session on June 30, 2009, Councilmember Thomas introduced three amendments to the "Omnibus Public Safety and Justice Amendment Act of 2009" during the bill's first reading. The amendments, each of which was approved by the Council, eliminate from the bill the jury requirement for simple assault prosecutions; create more stringent gun registry procedures for gun offenders; and preserve the District's disorderly conduct statute.

The "Omnibus Public Safety and Justice Amendment Act of 2009," as originally drafted, made simple assault a jury demandable offense by increasing the penalty from 180 days to one year. One of Councilmember Thomas' amendments strikes this change. "I am concerned that modification of the simple assault statute will overburden our judicial system," said Councilmember Thomas. "The DC Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) typically makes more than 4,000 simple assault arrests annually. If just half of those cases were to go to trial, hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars would be spent in court overtime." Thomas also expressed concern that the provision might draw out domestic violence cases, many of which are simple assault prosecutions, creating the potential to put victims in harms way.

Another amendment Councilmember Thomas introduced creates more stringent Gun Offender Registry requirements for gun offenders. This amendment also authorizes MPD to collect information on the offender's driver's license number, and his or her work and school address, where applicable, both of which are required by the Baltimore and New York City laws. "We should adopt best practices from other jurisdictions that have proven effective in combating crime," said Thomas.

The "Omnibus Public Safety and Justice Amendment Act of 2009," as originally written, repealed the District's unlawful assembly statute and significantly revised its disorderly conduct statute, both of which have served the District well for more than a century. The third Thomas amendment strikes this language, thereby preserving the city's disorderly conduct regulations. "In an urban environment like the District, our law enforcement officers need to enforce quality of life crimes that, if left unchecked, can unravel the peace and tranquility of a neighborhood," said Councilmember Thomas.



Councilmember Thomas introduced three amendments to the Crime Bill on June 30, 2009, all of which the Council approved.

THOMAS INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO ADDRESS NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Councilmember Thomas introduced a number of bills at the Council's legislative session on June 30, 2009 that advance his priority of providing more programs, services, and opportunities for District youth.

Councilmember Thomas introduced the "Youth and Young Adults Promise Act of 2009" to address youth gang and crime challenges. The bill requires the Executive to collect and analyze data on juvenile delinquency and criminal gang activity, and implement an action plan to intervene and assist at-risk youth and young adults. The bill also calls for the Executive to develop a Center for Youth-Oriented Policing using the DPR's Roving Leader Program to assist with training and outreach. The Center would be tasked with providing a comprehensive approach to curtailing juvenile delinquency and criminal gang activity, focusing on positive, early police intervention. "Research indicates that we must take a holistic approach built upon positive intervention to combat gang and other criminal problems associated with our young people," said Councilmember Thomas. "Fighting crime is important, but is most effective when part of a complete approach that includes addressing the root causes of crime."

Another bill the Councilmember introduced, the "Department of Parks and Recreation Sports Development Act of 2009," seeks to create a master plan for youth sports within the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). Specifically, the bill requires the Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) to develop a comprehensive program to provide new sports development, sports-based recreation, and competitive sports opportunities for District youth. The bill also requires the Executive to study the feasibility of financing the following 35 sports programs with a one-time funding of \$5 million from reserve funds and no more than \$2 million annually: archery, badminton, baseball, basketball, boxing, broom ball, canoeing, cheerleading, cycling, disc golf, dodge ball, fencing, football, flag football, golf, gymnastics, hockey, karate, kick ball, kick boxing, lacrosse, rock climbing, rowing, skiing, soccer, sailing, softball, swimming, tee ball, table tennis, tae kwon do, tennis, track and field, volleyball, and wrestling. It also requires the agency to focus on the inclusion of special needs participants.

The "School Athletics Support Fund Act of 2009" enables District of Columbia public school athletic programs to supplement traditional sources of funding and provide greater control over the funds they generate. Specifically, the bill requires the Executive to establish a fund within District of Columbia Public Schools using revenue generated by athletic programs to maintain athletic programs and the associated expenses of athletic teams. "Our children in public schools rely on these athletic programs, and a dedicated funding stream ensures that money will be available for uniforms and equipment, which often get cut during tight budget cycles."

COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS — SERVING THE RESIDENTS OF WARD 5



THOMAS HOSTS SCREENING AND PANEL DISCUSSION OF CNN'S *BLACK IN AMERICA 2*

Councilmember Thomas, along with Council Chairman Vincent Gray and the 5th District Citizens' Advisory Council, hosted an advance screening and panel discussion of CNN's *Black in America 2* at the Wilson Building on June 30, 2009. More than 150 people attended the event.

In addition to Chairman Gray and Councilmember Thomas, the panelists included:

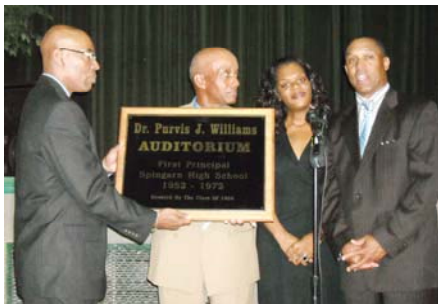
- Marion Barry, Councilmember, Ward 8;
- Colbert King, Columnist, The Washington Post;
- Justine Love, Director, Community and Public Affairs, WPGC;
- Lorraine Miller, Clerk, US House of Representatives and President, DC Chapter of NAACP; and
- Dr. Allen Sessoms, President, University of the District of Columbia.

The CNN documentary, which will be aired in its entirety on July 22 and 23, presents unique responses to issues that confront the African American community. Chris Lawrence, CNN's Pentagon correspondent, moderated the panel discussion. "It was a pleasure to work with CNN and host this event. We had a very lively discussion with a great deal of audience participation," said Thomas.

SPINGARN AUDITORIUM AND FIELD DEDICATED TO FIRST PRINCIPAL

On June 9, 2009, Councilmember Thomas dedicated the auditorium and field at Joel Elias Spingarn Senior High School as the Dr. Purvis J. Williams Auditorium and Dr. Purvis J. Williams Athletic Field. Dr. Purvis J. Williams was the first principal of Spingarn Senior High School, which opened its doors in 1952 during the era of segregation as a high school for African Americans. Dr. Williams served as the school's principal until he retired in 1972.

"I am pleased to recognize Dr. Purvis for his dedication and distinguished service to many generations of Spingarn students," said Thomas. "His commitment to excellence in education is unparalleled."



On June 9, 2009, Councilmember Thomas dedicated the auditorium and athletic field at Spingarn High School to its first principal, Dr. Purvis J. Williams.



Councilmember Thomas hosted a lively discussion of CNN's documentary *Black in America 2* on June 30, 2009.

THOMAS WELCOMES VARGAS FINE ARTS TO BROOKLAND

Councilmember Thomas recently announced the opening of a new business in the Brookland community—Vargas Fine Arts, Inc., located at 3217 12th Street, NE. At the gallery's grand opening on June 12, 2009, Councilmember Thomas presented Elba Vargas, the gallery's owner, with a ceremonial resolution commemorating the event. The grand opening featured works by world-acclaimed artist James Denmark (pictured below with Ms. Vargas and Councilmember Thomas). Vargas Fine Art, Inc. represents over 100 artists dealing in originals, serigraphs, etchings, woodcuts and limited edition prints. Its client base includes frame shops, movie sets, government agencies, hospitality, designers, Internet companies, as well as private and corporate collectors worldwide.

"I am enthusiastic that Vargas Fine Art, Inc. has chosen Brookland's Ward 5 neighborhood as its location," said Councilmember Thomas. "The gallery is a great addition to the already wonderful mix of stores and shops on 12th Street."



Councilmember Thomas attended the grand opening of Vargas Fine Arts on June 12, 2009.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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