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Face the Facts Milwaukee - An Action Plan

I will begin by simply saying this – **the City of Milwaukee desperately needs a megadose of tough love.**

In the aftermath of the chaos at State Fair and the joint statement released by Alderman Dudzik and myself entitled “We’re reaping the harvest we’ve sown,” the response from citizens has been most interesting. The overwhelming majority have been supportive, even complimentary, while others have been, shall I say, not so complimentary. In addition, a small number have stated their objections through veiled threats – “watch your back, Alderman – watch your back.”

Yet I will say it again: Milwaukee is facing some monumental challenges, and if we continue to ignore them, they will suck the very life out of this community.

Someone needs to inform my detractors that shooting the messenger doesn’t alter reality. So what is the reality facing Milwaukee? While I won’t go into specifics here, I’ve enclosed an appendix which clearly points out the bitter truth. I urge you to review it – but with a warning: it’s not pretty. These problems are not going away.

Simply put, a society cannot maintain the status quo, let alone prosper, given the level of consistent institutional failure and lack of personal responsibility that exists in our city.

In addition, there are a significant number of neighborhoods in Milwaukee that are simply hellish for people to live in. We are also experiencing a growing number of neighborhoods that are at the tipping point. If crime is indeed down in Milwaukee, then fear and disorder are way up. Crime may be down on paper, but it’s not down in the lives of many of our residents. If the Mayor and the Police Chief disagree with me, then I will simply and respectfully say that we subscribe to different standards!

While some in Milwaukee, both black and white, choose to ignore our most pressing problems, evidently Mayor Nutter of Philadelphia gets it (Google his name and you’ll see what I’m talking about!). When a crisis arises, no matter who is behind it, you must take swift, bold and decisive action. We could sure use that type of leadership here in Milwaukee.

-More-

I would also like to acknowledge the fact that because I am not a big believer in reinventing the wheel, much of what I am proposing for the City of Milwaukee comes from Mayor Nutter's playbook. The rest of my plan comes from previous proposals that I and others have been pushing for years.

- 1) Revamp the Juvenile Justice System –
Our juvenile justice system is ineffective, outdated and broken. We need reform and we need it now. Chief Flynn was absolutely correct when he stated “The juvenile justice system in the State of Wisconsin is irretrievably broken.” I agree, and I call upon the Mayor to meet with Governor Walker, the Attorney General and the Legislature to get this job done.
- 2) Continue and Increase Police Overtime –
An increased police presence is necessary in many parts of Milwaukee, especially in neighborhoods in transition. Without it we will lose these neighborhoods. It's already happening.
- 3) Begin the Process of Filling the over 150 Police Vacancies Now –
Given the level of fear and disorder impacting Milwaukee, filling these authorized positions remains critical. Their presence is needed on our streets now.
- 4) Strict Curfew Enforcement –
There are reasons why these laws exist. They must be enforced even to the point of holding parents accountable and including summary arrests.
- 5) Late Night Walks –
Even the best neighborhoods look awfully different at night. Elected officials, pastors, community and youth leaders and concerned citizens need to join our police in walking our neighborhoods late at night.
- 6) “I Pledge Milwaukee”
Modeled after the program launched in Philadelphia, it is absolutely critical that every concerned citizen pledge to “do what they can and start where you're at.” Allow me to be the first – I pledge to do whatever I can to ensure the success of this plan.
- 7) Operation SAFECAM
Surveillance cameras have proven most effective in helping police identify criminal activity and individuals involved in acts of disorder. They have also proven effective in curtailing criminal activity. They must be expanded engaging the private sector. The initiative launched in Philadelphia needs to expand here.

8) Orphanages –

Children have a right to grow up in a safe, secure nurturing environment. For a variety of reasons, that is simply not occurring in far too many homes in Milwaukee. Our foster care system is at best ineffective, and at its worst, broken. While the term “orphanage” may have negative connotations in some people’s minds, let’s not forget that Boys Town is an orphanage. When it comes to this issue, we need to go back to the future. A well run orphanage could provide a much more stable and suitable environment for kids that are currently in foster care. It would also keep siblings from being separated.

9) Boarding Schools –

Our community came very close to realizing the creation of a SEED School (boarding school) for “at-risk” children in our community. The benefits of this type of all-inclusive schooling shouldn’t be limited to the children of affluent families. Governor Walker, the Legislature and our private sector can make this initiative happen – and it’s critical to our future.

10) Drastic and Far Reaching Changes to MPS –

Once again, I am calling for what I and others have been calling for for years. We simply cannot continue to support a school system that is costly, ineffective and, with few exceptions, not meeting our needs.

Admittedly, many of these problems are not easily dealt with. While I applaud the Mayor and others for their mentoring and Fatherhood initiatives, given the severity of the problem, it’s simply not enough. We need to shake things up in Milwaukee and get this city moving again. Leadership is all about setting priorities, and if some can find the time, resources and money to advance a downtown trolley that at best remains questionable, we ought to be able to tackle some of the more pressing problems facing our city.

If anyone is offering a better plan, or any plan for that matter, I’m all ears. If not this plan, what’s the alternative? If not now, then when? These problems aren’t going away, they’re getting worse. The clock is ticking, Milwaukee.

Bob

Enclosures:

1-Key Statistics

2-What’s Wrong with Milwaukee Public Schools?

3-Letter to Elected Officials