



Councilmember Phil Mendelson's

At-Large Update

**Councilmember
Phil Mendelson
(At-Large)**

September 3, 2008

Fenty Appointments Strike Concern

The Mayor seems to be at war with boards and commissions throughout government. The administration has been making it known there are too many.

The Mayor opposed my bill to establish a Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Commission focusing on the reduction of motor vehicle theft. It passed anyway. This initiative is modeled after similar, successful programs in other states. Although established four months ago, no appointments have been made.

This spring the administration tried unsuccessfully to abolish the Homeland Security Commission, approved by the Council only 20 months ago. This seven-member board is intended to take advantage of the rich expertise in counter terrorism that resides in our region. The commission is a mechanism to tap this expertise, bring forward issues that are unrecognized, gain valuable perspectives, and to serve as a "fail safe" whenever the District is inattentive to security needs. There have yet to be any appointments to it.

In mid-June the Mayor submitted three controversial appointments to the Public Employee Relations Board (PERB). PERB is critical to resolving union employee grievances, disputes between unions and management, and even disputes between unions. The Mayor has allowed three of the five seats to become vacant, so currently the board is unable to function. Further, the Mayor broke with 30 years of tradition by refusing to discuss his nominees with the public employee unions. But of greatest concern is the nominees' apparent lack of expertise: one is an advertising sales

and marketing executive; the others are lawyers without expertise in labor law – one specializing in immigration, the other in corporate mergers and acquisitions.

Most troubling is the Mayor's decision to replace Agnes Yates, a widely respected member of the Public Service Commission (PSC), with an immigration lawyer who has no expertise in utilities. The PSC plays a critical role in setting utility rates and otherwise regulating the gas, electric, and telephone utilities.

And then there are the six nominees sent to the Council on June 30th for the Board of Trustees of the University of the District of Columbia. Typically, university trustees are appointed either for their national reputation, ability to raise money, or expertise in post-secondary education. Alas, the nominees exhibit none of these qualities. One is president of a waste services company, another was most recently a "library assistant," a third is a "recreation services manager" in the District government, and – well, you get the picture.

Finally, there is the Police Complaints Board, which works with the Office of Police Complaints handling citizen complaints regarding police conduct. The five-member board has two members whose terms expired eight months ago; one is the chairman. It is unclear whether these holdovers can even participate any longer.

It is also unclear why positions on these important boards are left vacant. Or why there isn't a "gold standard" to recruit people with relevant expertise. Nobody is served well by this.

Constituent Services Corner

A District resident called Councilmember Mendelson's office in a panic because the government sold his property for unpaid taxes. He reported that he indeed paid his taxes and an apparent reporting error by the District's electronic bill pay system did not post his payment before the District sold his property.

Our office immediately called the Office of Tax and Revenue (OTR) and requested an accounting of his tax bill and a review of the electronic bill pay system's operation.

The investigation found that the constituent's taxes had been paid. Further, the investigation uncovered an existing credit on the account. This investigation also allowed OTR to revisit the electronic bill pay process and make improvements to the reporting mechanisms.

As a result of our office's intervention, the constituent received a Certificate of Redemption and the return of his property.

Dealing with the District government can be taxing. Call Councilmember Mendelson's office – when the taxman cometh, we'll make sure you pay no more than your fair share.



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Upcoming Hearings of the Judiciary Committee

Bill 17-593, "Inoperable Pistol Amendment Act of 2008", Thursday, September 18, 2008, at 10:00 a.m., 5th Floor Council Chambers.
Followed by:

Bill 17-843, "Firearms Control Amendment Act of 2008", Thursday, September 18, 2008, at 11:00 a.m., 5th Floor Council Chambers.

Bill 17-325, "Fireworks Neighborhood Safety Act of 2008", Wednesday, September 24, 2008, at 11:00 a.m., in Hearing Room 412.

Follow Up on Capital Projects and Space Needs for Public Safety Agencies, Monday, September 29, 2008, at 11:00 a.m., in Hearing Room 123.

Bill 17-26, "Litter Control Administration Amendment Act of 2008", Tuesday, September 30, 2008, at 10:00 a.m., in Hearing Room 412.

All hearings will be held in the John A. Wilson Building, 1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW. Please contact the Committee to sign up to testify, or for more information (202) 724-7808.

Labor Management Partnership Must Continue

The following is a letter from Councilmember Mendelson to the mayor regarding the Office of Labor Management Partnership Council:

Dear Mayor Fenty:

I have received a copy of an e-mail from your administration which states that the Office of Labor Management Partnership (OLMPC) "will not be funded for FY 09 and September 30th will be the last day for Labor-Management Programs." This is a surprise since page A-54 of the FY 09 budget book (Volume 2) lists \$802,000 funding for this office. Further, earlier this year your administration converted all of the OLMPC employees from term appointments to permanent positions.

The EOM Chief of Budget Execution was not surprised by the news, informing my office that "union representatives have recently withdrawn from the partnership and refused to engage management on existing partnership projects." That spin does not hold up to the fact that the main Labor Management Partnership Council (which you co-chair) has not met even once since you took office. The annual LMPC awards ceremony - to honor the best agency partnerships - was cancelled last fall. Union leaders have repeatedly expressed their frustration over this deterioration, and Metro Council President Jos Williams told me that labor continues to want the LMPC program.

It is hard to believe that you would allow - or encourage - the demise of the labor-management partnership process. Established in 1997-98 with the encouragement of the Control Board and the US Department of Labor, the LMPC concept has always been considered cutting edge best practice. Under Mayor Williams the District had one of the best, if not the best, LMPC programs in the country. The LMPC program improves labor-management relations outside the collective bargaining process, and it improves service delivery with the agencies. The annual awards ceremony was proof of this success.

This government cannot succeed if its leaders are at war with its workers. I am sure that you agree that the working men and women in the District government are vital partners as we strive to be a world-class city. Disbanding the OLMPC, and the labor management partnership councils, is incongruent with this goal. Quite simply, alienating those workers on whom we rely is a serious mistake.

I urge you in the strongest terms to reconsider what is being done to the OLMPC and the labor-management partnership councils.

Sincerely,

Phil Mendelson