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**MILELE A. COGGS**

6th District Alderwoman

# Hands off Kwanzaa

## Statement of Alderwoman Milele A. Cogg

January 2, 2013

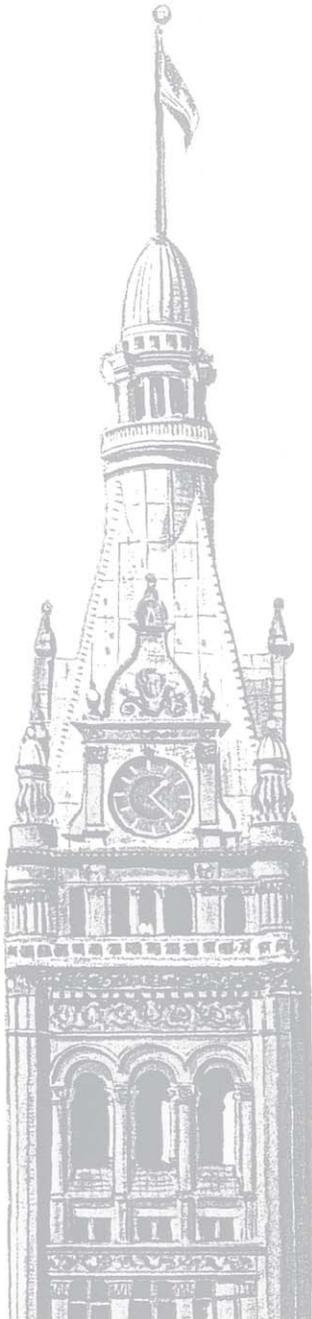
Wisconsinites this week were once again subjected to the misinformed statements of a state senator who used a press release to attack the African American tradition of the celebration of Kwanzaa. While his opinions and the motivations behind them are his own, I would like to correct some of the senator's factual misconceptions.

Kwanzaa is a week-long celebration that honors ancient and living cultural tradition, reflecting the best of African thought and practice in its reaffirmation of the dignity of the human person in community and culture, the well-being of family and community, the integrity of the environment and our kinship with it, and the rich resource and meaning of a people's culture. It is observed from December 26 to January 1. I personally was raised celebrating Kwanzaa, and now continue the tradition with my own family.

The values celebrated throughout Kwanzaa are values that can be embraced year-round by anyone, from any religion. These powerful principles include unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith.

The senator's assertion that Kwanzaa is "an effort to divide Americans" that came about because someone "thought Christmas was a white religion [sic] and was trying to draw black people from it" is simply wrong and ridiculous. Kwanzaa is not a religious holiday. In fact, people from all faiths are invited to celebrate it, and many choose to observe it in addition to their religious holidays. Kwanzaa's value and significance is not based on its founder or any one person's depiction of its history. That is not the intent of the celebration, as it is more about the principles (Nguzo Saba) and the practice and integration of those principles into daily living. Each person finds his or her own meaning in those principles, the same way that other holidays and celebrations have evolved over time.

(continued)



## **HANDS OFF KWANZAA/Add One**

Here at Milwaukee City Hall, we made history last week with the city's first ever Kwanzaa celebration and display. People from all races and faiths participated in what was, by its very nature, an inclusive event. I would invite anyone who would declare war on Kwanzaa to instead take part next time and become better informed with a factual understanding of the celebration. We certainly have more pressing issues facing Wisconsin than a state lawmaker's misguided focus on preventing the public from learning about and celebrating Kwanzaa.