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FOR INFORMATION CALL

February 12, 2018

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MEDIA ALERT

Council members respond to Chief Flynn's exit tour of local media

In a jointly signed response (**attached**) to recent comments made by retiring Milwaukee Police Chief Edward Flynn, **Alderman Nik Kovac, Alderman José G. Pérez and Alderman Russell W. Stamper, II** provide important perspective on the outgoing chief's views of Milwaukee, city government and police-community relations.

In part the response states: "We wish that Chief Flynn could have gracefully retired, providing ample notice to allow for a smooth transition from his tenure and reflecting positively on the Milwaukee community. But instead we have a departing Chief who seems ready to air every grievance on his way out of town, pointing out every perceived flaw with our community and dropping as many lit matches as possible for us to remember him by. We wonder what else will be said before he retires on the 16th? Those of us who remain behind, still serving our community and working towards making Milwaukee a better place will not sit back and let his criticisms go unanswered."

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CITY OF MILWAUKEE

City Hall, 200 E. Wells Street, Milwaukee, WI 53202 • www.city.milwaukee.gov

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Milwaukee Police Chief Ed Flynn is on a tour of local media reflecting on his tenure serving our community. Many common themes have arisen during these interviews, many of which merit response. What follows are a series of quotations from Chief Flynn's February 7th interview with Mitch Teich on WUWM's "Lake Effect" program and our responses.

"And the way of running a police department is oriented towards the solving of problems, not the validating of ideological templates."

Problem-oriented and community policing are philosophies that Chief Flynn has purported to support during his tenure. Problem solving involves working collaboratively with the community to address problems. But as is detailed in the draft United States Department of Justice Collaborative Reform report, Chief Flynn's approach to community policing was more a marketing template than a commitment to a collaborative process oriented towards the solving of problems. The Chief has expressed concerns about the details of this report. We note in passing that these details could have been addressed had he been willing to release it to the public. Whatever those concerns, however, the overall thrust of its critique is damning. He never created the reality of community policing, but only showed himself adept at using words to describe what the unfamiliar thought community policing should sound like. He touted "partnerships," placed the MPD logo next to the logos of community groups, authored grants, attended meetings, and so on, but the nature of his approach to collaboration was always "do it my way, I know best."

The Chief, on his farewell tour, is often heard bragging about all of the national awards and accolades he has received. He implies that these awards should be taken by the community as proof that his policies and practices are best. He shows himself an expert at putting words on paper and holding court at a microphone. It is undisputed that he can take any set of facts and figures and devise a way to make himself look great. But we remind him that Milwaukee is our home and will still be here after he moves away. If the Chief would have cared as much about what his neighbors thought as opposed to what out-of-town academics thought of him, he might have won fewer awards, but he certainly would have had more goodwill in the community.

"I can literally go to a committee meeting at City Hall in the morning and get berated for being ineffective in the fight against crime and being too soft on crime; and in the afternoon or evening, be berated by another committee because we're engaged in racial profiling and we have unconscious bias,"

This outrageous and often-repeated refrain from Chief Flynn only underscores his fundamental inability to understand that those two situations are not opposites. Engaging in racial profiling and leaving unconscious biases unchecked does not mean that the department is “tough on crime.” This statement implies that the public is not allowed to demand that the police department act within constitutional bounds or engage in self-examination without being accused of being “soft on crime.”

Later in this interview the Chief implies that the critics of the MPD are being unfair because the department is simply addressing the problem of violent crime where it exists. He parallels that work with the work of the health department or the fire department in disadvantaged communities. It is, again, insulting to act as if any criticism of the MPD’s approach under his leadership is the same as saying that the community doesn’t want the police to address issues of violence at all. The people living in these communities do indeed value the work of the police and want them to do what they are tasked to do. But is it wrong for them to also wish to not be pulled over in their vehicles again and again for minor infractions simply because they live in close proximity to crime? Surely it can be understood that numerical decreases in incidents do not necessarily equate to peace of mind for those living daily with crime? Are residents not allowed to question the Chief’s favorite crime prevention theories and wonder if the cost/benefit ratio is reasonable? Yes – we all understand that saturating police resources in small geographic areas can affect the crime rate. But is it really unreasonable to take a moment to listen to the people living there to ask “how is it going”?

He believes that the root cause of crime in the Milwaukee-area is "poverty and its many symptoms," but he says he's had issues getting people to have nuanced discussions on how to address these issues.

Flynn says, "My frustration as a civic leader is my inability to get this community to engage in adult conversation about the intersection of poverty, race, and crime. Nobody wants to talk about that. People want to point fingers and yell at the top of their lungs, and that's very frustrating."

It is true that the root cause of crime in the Milwaukee area is poverty and its many symptoms, but the idea that Chief Flynn spent the last ten years in a tireless quest to have a conversation about these root causes will not bear scrutiny. The only “big picture issue” Chief Flynn has given long-term attention to is the problem of the proliferation of firearms. And while it is clear that there are too many guns in American society and if we had fewer guns we would have less gun crime, that he wasted so much time on this single issue only served to take away from efforts on which he could have made progress. Did Chief Flynn’s disapproval of Wisconsin’s concealed carry law keep it from taking effect? Has the attitude of Milwaukee residents towards the proliferation of firearms changed one bit due to his efforts?

Chief Flynn could have used his platform and his authority to open up an honest conversation about race and poverty. Instead, we received soundbites and platitudes. Does anyone know what his ideas really were for reducing poverty and improving race relations? It is easy to call out the problem and falsely claim that nobody but you really wants to discuss it. It is easy, but insulting.

Chief Flynn speaks frequently of wanting to have “adult conversations” and criticizes many for their inability to have them. This is humorous to any close observer of the Chief. Anyone interacting with him quickly learns that his idea of an adult conversation is listening to him speak and agreeing with everything he says. If someone wishes to provide an alternative viewpoint or request supporting information he becomes insolent – sometimes going so far as to slam his fists and walk out of meetings. It is no secret that under any level of questioning the Chief has been fast to raise his voice to a shout to intimidate those he is meeting with. And it bears mention that he has not spared his nominal supervisors, the Board of Fire and Police Commissioners, his fist pounding.

When crime rates have gone down during his tenure has he ever pointed to any improvements in the underlying conditions of poverty that he purports cause crime? No, invariably he takes credit for himself and tells the community that it was his own initiatives that have made us safer. Whenever a crime statistic goes up, however, he will be the first to remind us all of the persistent poverty and racial issues that our community is dealing with.

We wish that we could just thank Chief Flynn for his service and for the work he has done for our community. We wish that Chief Flynn could have gracefully retired, providing ample notice to allow for a smooth transition and offering helpful parting advice for the Milwaukee community. Instead we have a departing Chief who seems ready to air every grievance on his way out of town, pointing out every perceived flaw with our community, and dropping as many lit matches as possible for us to remember him by. We wonder what else will be said before he retires on the 16th? Those of us who remain behind, still serving our community and working towards making Milwaukee a better place, will not sit back and let his criticisms go unanswered.

<http://wuum.com/post/wednesday-lake-effect-edward-flynn-climate-change-panama-ellis-cooperative-performance>

Sincerely,



Alderman José G. Pérez
12th District



Alderman Nik Kovac
3rd District



Alderman Russell W. Stamper, II
15th District