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Barrett administration public safety in disarray

**Statement from Alderman Bob Donovan
November 3, 2014**

Forgive me for the length of this statement, but I have a lot to say. Some will like what I have to say, while others, I'm certain, will not. But as my grandfather used to say, "The truth survives while the lies just die."

One scarcely knows where to begin. However, I'll do my best. This weekend, a forty year old constituent of mine was senselessly beaten to death just a few short blocks from my home of more than 30 years. Apparently this beating was done by six thugs. Thank God they're in custody.

Let's add to that my Town Hall meeting this last week in which, as always, the main topic of discussion revolved around Public Safety or the lack thereof. Let's face it – crime, fear and disorder are simply rampaging through an increasing number of Milwaukee neighborhoods.

Now let's take a moment to analyze the recent "no confidence" vote for Chief Flynn and its impact on our City. I have stated previously that the firing of Officer Manney was ill-conceived, unwarranted and politically motivated. That being said, don't kid yourself into believing that the firing of Officer Manney was the only reason for the "no confidence" vote. That was merely the last straw.

Think about it – officers know better than anyone what's really happening on the mean streets of Milwaukee, and they also know exactly what's really going on inside the MPD. Lastly, they are all well aware of this sad reality as well, and that is when Barrett says "jump," Ed Flynn asks "how high?"

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I take no pleasure in having to say this. I, like many, had high hopes for Chief Flynn early on. But sadly the passing years have revealed the truth.

Undoubtedly Chief Flynn is a very talented man. He possesses a sharp mind and a most eloquent tongue, but those gifts no longer mask the lack of courage and conviction now apparent in a Chief who cannot stand up to a man considered by many to be “a nice guy” yet acknowledged by most to be a failed leader, Mayor Tom Barrett.

Whether you agree with me or not, at the very least I think it’s fair to say it’s rather difficult to win a war when the soldiers have no confidence in their General, and we are at war. We’re at war with crime and the devastating toll crime has on our neighborhoods and our citizens.

With that in mind, I’m sure most people are aware by now that there is an effort underway by certain Council Members to reduce by 12 the number of new officers added to next year’s budget. Given Milwaukee’s public safety challenges, we ought to be discussing adding an additional 212 officers instead of a mere 50, but now we are discussing only adding 38?

What’s most revealing is the fact that this effort is being led by Barrett supporters. Apparently the Mayor can’t even count on his own allies on the Council.

Couple all this with the continued failure of our 911 call center, and we are facing some serious obstacles to our efforts to stabilize our neighborhoods. It’s been confirmed to me that all summer long the 911 system was adjusted in such a way that all land line calls were given an automatic low priority status with the priority status being given to 911 calls coming from cell phones. The cell phone calls were all answered first, regardless of the order they came in.

That, coupled with the fact that there are currently at least 20 vacancies among 911 dispatch positions, is unacceptable. These are the facts, despite testimony from the MPD in front of the Public Safety Committee insisting that all problems have been addressed.

Along with complaints about 911 and being put on hold, complaints continue in regard to police response. People feel that they get the runaround, get ignored and in many cases, get no police response at all to their legitimate calls for service.

The response from the Administration seems to be “nothing to see here folks, nothing to see.” Their goal seems to be to keep all these problems under wraps as best they can instead of dealing with them head on.

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Now let's talk about the Fire Department. I'm told by high ranking officials in that Dept. that there is increasing concern about firefighter safety and service to the public. Increasingly, firefighters are responding to emergency medical calls where the scene has not yet been secured by police (the perpetrator of a violent attack may still be on scene). Medical technicians and paramedics cannot administer aid until the police have deemed it safe to do so, and many times these EMTs have to wait for a police response at a time when the difference between life and death is a matter of minutes.

There has been at least one death attributed to this delayed police response and the City is currently facing a lawsuit as a result. How many more lawsuits are headed our way?

All this brings us back around to the ever increasing police vacancies. For years the Barrett Administration did little to address the problem, and now, in an effort to play "catch up" and bring as many recruits forward as possible and as soon as possible, significant corners are being cut in background investigations of new applicants to the MPD.

I should not have to point out that if the wrong people are brought on as officers, the ramifications could haunt this City for decades to come.

This brings us to the Fire & Police Commission and its Executive Director, who seemingly out of the clear blue decides he's leaving town for greener pastures. Given Milwaukee's current challenges, he couldn't have picked a worse time to leave this important position vacant.

In my view, providing public safety is one of the most important functions of local government, and in this responsibility, the Barrett Administration's dysfunctional approach is failing us.

If my comments give you the impression that I'm rather pessimistic, it's because I am. This Administration has offered me a great deal to be pessimistic about.

My only hope is that the sleeping giant within Milwaukee, its citizens, begins the slow process of waking up from the long bad dream known as the Barrett Administration.