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Milwaukee's poverty rate is unacceptable

Statement of Alderman Joe Davis, Sr. September 17, 2015

A report was released today that clarified what most of Milwaukee's minority communities have known for some time—that Milwaukee's poverty rate is unacceptable. I have raised this issue with the Barrett Administration, but it seems that the Mayor and his minions are stuck on stupid. Already, the Mayor has started with his excuses, citing downtown projects. But he will not acknowledge his failed initiatives, like executing a disparity study in Milwaukee that would have provided the additional tools needed to address this systemic problem.

While I was submitting data relevant to moving the study forward, his cabinet members hired consultants who couldn't defend their own work, resulting in a lawsuit that the City of Milwaukee lost with significant ramifications. But what the Mayor is not telling us is that he held no one accountable for this colossal blunder. Statistical data is available on the lack of minority business growth here in Milwaukee. But when people like me try to address the data with innovative initiatives, the usual opposition prevents progress from occurring because of the Mayor's lack of will.

The City of Milwaukee receives a large annual entitlement grant from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that is intended, specifically, to address poverty. But today's report raises questions of how effective and targeted the city's use of these resources has been in addressing Milwaukee's poverty rate. I have argued that the Mayor and his administration are improperly using these federally-funded Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) dollars to fund city services, which I believe is a potential violation of federal law. I will soon be formally requesting a clarification from the federal government on this issue.

But until then, I will reiterate that the Mayor has failed to address this urgent economic problem. His shell game strategy of producing a poverty task force in 2006 has produced no tangible results. It is evident that he left this critical issue for others to solve while he pursued a career in state government, twice running for higher office while serving as the sitting Mayor of the City of Milwaukee, and simply watched as the African American population's mass incarceration and homicide rates spiraled out of control. This type of madness is indefensible, and Mayor Barrett needs to accept responsibility. Instead of blaming it on the schools and parents, blaming it on Governor Walker and the Republicans, blaming it on guns and blaming it on the folks in poverty, he must look in the mirror.

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