

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

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ALDERMAN, 8TH DISTRICT

TO CURB RECKLESS DRIVERS, THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR POLICE OFFICERS

No plan can be considered comprehensive that neglects law enforcement

Statement from Alderman Bob Donovan July 2, 2019

I have watched for years as the budgets proposed by Mayor Barrett and adopted by the Common Council whittled away, bit by seemingly inconsequential bit, at the sworn strength of the Milwaukee Police Department. It was never one drastic cut, of course. That might have raised questions. Instead we were told this priority or that was more important and, with our dwindling revenues being what they are, the police department would have to make do.

Now, years down this road, officials including the Mayor stand back and wonder how reckless driving could ever have become such a problem in our community. To borrow from George Orwell, “to see what is in front of one’s nose needs a constant struggle.” The relationship between this problem and our collective failure to provide the resources necessary to address it is evident to all but those determined not to see it. And a solution that does not address this neglect cannot be taken seriously.

I understand that reckless driving, like most problems of this type, has many causes and can be met with many solutions. For example, I think it is long past time for the City to call the Office of the District Attorney and our circuit court judges to account for inadequately charging and sentencing repeat offenders. We should not tolerate individuals with a third, fourth, or fifth O.W.I. charge driving about on our streets.

The City should consider both red-light and speeding cameras. The Mayor is to be credited for his remarks, made recently, in which he said these should never be used solely as a source of revenue. I was again reminded, however, of his administration’s lack of basic preparation when he was asked about his position on these cameras and spent a fair amount of time wobbling about. Considering that the City has been asking the State Legislature to grant us the authority to install these cameras for over a decade, one might have thought he would have had a better-prepared response.

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I also think our schools could do a better job of educating young people about the dangers and consequences of reckless driving. For several years the Milwaukee Police Department, under Chief Flynn, adopted an ill-advised “no pursuit” policy, a policy, I might add, the Mayor wholeheartedly supported, that convinced many young people that they would not be chased if only they drove a stolen vehicle away at a dangerous rate of speed. It will take some time to undo the harm done.

All this, though, is of less consequence than making a real commitment to restoring the police officers lost to over a decade of neglect. Yes, they come with a cost, but if they are not our shared priority, what is? Even as I write this, the Mayor is putting together his 2020 budget. It will be the last on which I vote. This makes the urgency, for me, particularly great. I would ask Mayor Barrett and all of my colleagues to work together to restore at least a measure of the department’s sworn strength and identify the resources necessary to ensure it is maintained. If we do not, I fear reckless driving may prove the least of our worries.

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