

Big Hat, No Cattle

Written by

Wednesday, 09 January 2008 02:17

How does one stomach a city that can be characterized as 75 percent lousy Americans? A lousy American is one who is eligible to vote, but ignores the privilege that for centuries contributed mightily to make America the greatest nation on the planet.

Welcome to Davenport. That's right: 75 percent of Davenport's eligible voters did not cast ballots in the November 2007 elections. It is, therefore, amusing to observe the sudden swell in egos, especially evident in the persons of Mayor Bill Gluba and Alderman-at-Large Gene Meeker at Monday, January 7's work-session-turned-special-meeting-without-adequate-public-notice.

They have managed to delude themselves that they were elected by the Davenport populace instead of a paltry few organized voters who counted on most of the city's eligible voters to opt out on November 6. It was a dead-on-accurate political strategy, but hardly an overall popular endorsement. Gluba was elected with 10,551 votes out of 67,176 registered voters (16 percent); Meeker with 8,435 (13 percent), according to Scott County's Election Summary Report.

As such, without a perceived reversal of this sense of entitlement on the part of the newly elected, this council will find itself no differently immersed in the same conflicts, controversies, and "soap operas" that have defined Davenport politics since I can remember.

How can I make such a prediction so early? By observing the new council's first order of business - to collapse the traditional four standing committee meetings into little more than an hour's time during "recess" at the committee-of-the-whole meetings, to be held every other Wednesday evening beginning at 5:30 p.m., followed by the regular council meeting a week later.

Aldermen claim that such a schedule will give them, staff, and the public more time to deal with the agenda items (in that order). In theory, streamlining the process has merit. Holding committee meetings on Thursday afternoons does present attendance problems.

But there are better, smarter, and far more inclusive solutions than the clunky one presently

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on the table. Why not consider committee meetings the first Wednesday, committee of the whole the next Wednesday, and the regular council meeting the third Wednesday? That way, there is plenty of time to consider all the pros and cons and make intelligent, informed decisions.

The way it is proposed, an agenda item can be moved from committee to committee of the whole the same day, giving fast-tracking a whole new meaning, especially considering that the city administrator controls the agenda. (Committee agendas are set the previous Friday by the committee chairs and staff with final approval resting with City Administrator Craig Malin.)

In truth, there is really no net gain in time. But the real rub is moving the "public with business" portion of the meeting to the end of each proceeding and censoring all public comments by no longer airing them on television.

Finally, Roberts Rules of Order suffice not as actual rules to be followed but, to quote a popular pirate, "more as guidelines."

So much for Mayor Gluba's lofty induction speech aspiring to "good judgment to take the long view of the needs of the people." What we have obviously elected here is a big hat with no cattle.

This action was done with practically no public notice, disguised as a workshop, then suddenly changed to a special meeting to hijack the process and severely limit the public's access to its government. Nothing could be further from needs of the people, or demonstrate poorer judgment or visionless leadership.

But guess what? The majority of Davenport voters arguably deserve this lowly treatment. By ignoring the polls, they have allowed a seriously destructive force to prevail in Davenport's City Hall.

My advice is that this community wise up and get civically active, including fund-raising to finance legal issues that are most surely coming. Remember, evil wins when good people do

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nothing. The same holds true for abusive government, whose economic-growth policies promote any growth subsidized by taxpayers as good growth.

Residents should utilize some of the remarkably effective collaborative tools available through technology to communicate and manage a constructive watchdog effort. Otherwise, Davenport will be lost to a continued future of higher taxes, fewer services, poor management, and a glaring lack of respect for residents as evidenced in Monday's meeting. When noting the public's pending disapproval over being censored, Alderman-at-Large Gene Meeker snorted, "Write a letter to the editor." His is a signature attitude of DavenportOne, proving he is still nothing more than one of its minions.

I have never been more deadly serious. The level of incompetence, the control by DavenportOne (hence special interests), and the corruption will go unchecked with this council unless the level of scrutiny is ratcheted up high enough to bring an all new level of accountability to the council and city staff. Citizens are not powerless. We have resources, including legal channels, with the proper organization. The price of admission to the council last November was approximately \$37,000. That's the amount raised by the PAC that got most of DavenportOne's recruits elected.

Davenport is a microcosm of the country. Doing nothing, hoping it will work out in the end, is pure denial and civic cowardice. Citizens are responsible for their local government every bit as much as they are responsible for their own households. So deal with it!