SEP Detroit mayoral candidate D'Artagnan Collier rejects claim "there is no money" at forum

Bryan Dyne
27 June 2013

Presenting his platform at a mayoral forum Tuesday night, Socialist Equality Party candidate for Detroit Mayor, D'Artagnan Collier rejected the claim advanced by both Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr and the local Democratic Party establishment that "there is no money" to address the social crisis in Detroit.

Using the threat of Chapter 9 bankruptcy as a club, Orr last week outlined plans to union officials for unprecedented cuts to pensions and healthcare for retirees. His plans include freezing pensions for current workers, placing new workers onto defined contribution (401k) plans and forcing workers to seek health coverage under provisions of Obama's Affordable Healthcare Act.

"I am opposed to the emergency manager and call for his immediate ousting," declared Collier in his opening statement. "The claim that there is no money should be rejected with contempt by working people in Detroit. Orr's proposal to city workers to slash pensions and health care comes at the same time that the Detroit Development Authority has found $283 million in public money for the new 'Hockey Town'. This is part of a general attack on the living standards of workers across Detroit, nationally and internationally.

"There will be no 'equal sacrifice' between bondholders and workers. Bondholders are insured. When workers lose their jobs, they have nothing to fall back on. Workers must independently mobilize in defense of their inalienable social rights including the right to a job, education, health care, utilities, pensions and culture. "

Around 150 people attended this forum, hosted by the Dexter Elmhurst Community Center. Nearly every mayoral candidate was in attendance, including Wayne County Sheriff Benny Napoleon; state representative Fred Durhal; former Detroit corporation counsel Krystal Crittendon; former state representative Lisa Howze and others. Each candidate gave a two-minute opening statement, had a two-minute response to three questions from the moderator, responded to individual questions from the audience, and gave a one-minute closing statement.

When the candidates were asked the question about how they would deal with the emergency manager, the audience began to stir, some commenting, "That's what we want to hear," and "exactly, that's the real question." The sentiment reflected the general feeling of working people in Detroit, who want to see Orr go given his arbitrary and undemocratic actions including threats to sell art at the Detroit Institute of Arts and other city assets and plans to slash the pensions and healthcare of retired city workers.

In his response, Collier called for a break with the entire existing political establishment, not just the emergency manager, and for replacing the emergency manager and city council with "a council of workers—including city workers, retirees, students and youth. Its basic principle must be to the social needs of the working class—the vast majority of the population—and not the bankers and executives that have caused the crisis."

Outside of Collier, none of the candidates even suggested mobilizing the working class to fight for their rights. Rather, they promoted the illusion that the emergency manager could be curbed through the courts. For example, Krystal Crittendon declared, "The emergency manager is here illegally and I intend to see him gone. I will use every skill I gained as corporation

© World Socialist Web Site

counsel for Detroit to show that he is here illegally and have him thrown out."

She called the "real problem" Republican Governor Rick Snyder. "Orr was appointed to us by the state. What we really have to do is change the leadership in Lansing." In fact the Democratic Party is fully behind the assault on working people in Detroit. Orr is himself a Democrat and Democratic State Treasurer Andy Dillon has acted as Snyder's right hand man in imposing the emergency manager on the working people of Detroit.

Napoleon and Howze championed increased police repression in Detroit. Napoleon reiterated his "square mile initiative", which would flood police officers into Detroit responsible for each of the 139 square miles of the city. Howze proclaimed that the "real issue in Detroit is not the emergency manager, but public safety," and that to achieve her goals, she would have "eyes in the sky", a euphemism for drones spying on the citizens of Detroit. Jean Vortkamp, the candidate that focuses on "neighborhood communities", called for neighborhood police officers that people should turn to for leadership.

Candidates were also asked to comment on their plans for the 982 acre Belle Isle park in the Detroit River. Willie Lipscomb and Herman Griffin were openly for charging people to use Belle Isle. Napoleon evaded the question, calling for the re-opening of businesses to generate revenue to maintain the city. Other candidates, including Durhal and Crittendon, rejected the idea that Belle Isle should be leased or sold.

Collier spoke in defense not just of Belle Isle, but of all city assets as part of the right of the working class to have leisure and recreation. "The rich, those that make over $1 million, should be taxed 90 percent to pay for a public works program that would maintain Belle Isle, as well as upkeep current and build new recreation and cultural centers," Collier declared.

One question from the audience in particular provided an opportunity for Collier to sharply differentiate his program from that of the other candidates. All the candidates were asked their position on the "regionalization" of Detroit—the incorporation of certain services, like mass transit, into the surrounding municipalities. One after the other each of the establishment candidates denounced "regionalization" saying that they were defending "our Detroit" and demanding that to work in the city of Detroit, one must live in the city limits.

Against what were essentially calls to divide the working class of Detroit from the working class in the larger regional area, Collier stood up for the unity of workers in Michigan and across the country against attacks on living standards. "I am for placing all essential services under the democratic control of the working class in Detroit and the surrounding areas. The issue is not that city services are being used by others, but that corporations control how these resources are used. Only with a government of workers, by workers, and for workers can the organization of society be truly placed on a rational basis."

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site