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## Hope's future

BY NEWS HITS STAFF

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Riding the wave of community spirit launched by **Barack Obama's** victory last week, *News Hits* optimistically attended a discussion about the future of Detroit held at Sacred Heart Church near Eastern Market on Saturday.

"Look forward at what we can do instead of backward at what we used to do," moderator and *Detroit Free Press* columnist **Rochelle Riley** told the audience in her opening remarks. "We can get a lot done."

Right on, Rochelle.

With **Dennis Archer, Isaiah McKinnon, Hansen Clarke, Conrad Mallett Jr.** and **William Brooks** on the panel and an audience numbering in the hundreds, we had high expectations that the scheduled two hours would bring at least a few

feasible solutions for some of Detroit's problems.

And we did hear some good ideas. What we didn't hear much of were ways to pay for them, and concrete plans for putting them in place. There were some suggestions that required no money, but most of those had little practical hope of gaining any political traction.

For example, Brooks — head honcho at the for-profit United American Healthcare Corp. and chairman of the board of the nonprofit Detroit Economic Growth Corporation — insisted that the floundering Detroit Public Schools would best be helped by hiring a superintendent with a background in business, not education.

We have a lot of respect for Brooks — in fact, this paper endorsed him for mayor during the primary back in 2001, even though he's a Republican — but does he really think that, even if it is a good idea, a school board as dysfunctional as Detroit's would ever make that bold a leap?

Clarke, a Democratic state senator whose district stretches from southwest Detroit to the city's east side, advocated establishing a nonprofit corporation to sell car insurance to Detroiters as a way to combat price gouging. For that to happen though, the Republican-controlled state Senate would have to go along (don't hold your breath) or there'd have to be funding for a statewide ballot measure (like we said ...). However, at least Clarke will be in there pitching, trying to make things happen.

McKinnon, a former Detroit police chief who now teaches at **University of** Detroit Mercy, suggested a more regional approach to "Detroit *area*" problems and said the criminal justice system needs to work harder at rehabilitation along with punishment. Both are wonderful goals. But how many times have we heard the call for more regional cooperation? About a zillion, we'd say, and still we're climbing uphill on that one. As for getting our "tough-on-crime" Legislature to commit more money to rehabilitating prisoners — well, even if the state's economy weren't circling the toilet bowl, that would still be a tough sell.

Mallett, the retired Michigan Supreme Court justice who's currently CEO of Sinai Grace Hospital, suggested instituting widespread classes to help get Detroiters to learn parenting skills, for example, and to help them access health care, education and other social services.

Archer, a former Detroit mayor and Michigan Supreme Court Justice, agreed that improving schools and increasing jobs were the keys to attracting and keeping middle-class families to the city. There's a news flash.

But the good news is that Obama's administration will have an actual urban agenda that will help Detroit in contrast to the Bush administration. But how much Obama can do while continuing to pay for two wars and dealing with an economic meltdown remains to be seen.

future, which presumably would be a run for the Michigan governorship in 2010.)

The audience didn't inspire much confidence either. The open-question portion became a series of agenda-laden speeches that veered from the main topics when some audience members got the microphone. One gave an endorsement of a relative running for City Council. A couple of Detroit teachers defended colleagues who must deal with a challenged student population.

So, we went in filled with hope and came out our same old cynical selves, wishing all those fine minds had provided actual, doable plans — and ways to fund them — rather than a bunch of high ideals and some possibly good ideas.

As our colleague **Larry Gabriel** pointed out in a recent column, there's no time to sit back and wait for our leaders to actually lead. Which is why News Hits was happy to see **Luther Keith** on our way out the door.

The former *Detroit News* public editor is now executive director of Arise Detroit Inc., a nonprofit coalition of community groups seeking to promote volunteerism in the city. Arise-affiliated programs are picking up the slack to provide tutoring, street cleanup, crime prevention, youth sports and vocational training that aren't coming from anywhere else. Find them at [arisedetroit.org](http://arisedetroit.org) and fill out the form on the "volunteer" link, why don't you?

Keith had stayed quiet in the back during the discussions but readily handed out his brochures afterward. Many people left clutching them. And as we watched, engaged in a personal struggle between hope and cynicism, hope took the upper hand.

At least for a moment.

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