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Detroit mayoral candidates talk crime, leadership

BY BEN SCHMITT AND NAOMI R. PATTON • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS • DECEMBER 12, 2008

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Ten Detroit mayoral candidates gathered Thursday night to continue their sales pitches to reinvigorate the city.

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The issues remained the same: crime, government corruption, blight and the economy. But with 10 candidates in the room, many in the audience questioned the effectiveness of the three-hour forum at the University of Detroit Mercy.

Participating were businessman Dave Bing; Mayor Ken Cockrel Jr.; Wayne County Sheriff Warren Evans; Freman Hendrix, deputy mayor to former Mayor Dennis Archer; the Rev. Nicholas Hood III; Joe Holt, a former Detroit high school teacher; Jerroll Sanders, a business consultant; Stanley [Christmas](#), a community activist; publisher D. Etta Wilcoxon, and self-employed engineer Duane Montgomery.

More than 250 people gathered at the university's Fountain Lounge and were given questionnaire cards with six subjects -- [education](#), economic development, safety and crime, health care, transportation and other -- to pass to candidates.

Former Detroit City Councilwoman Sharon McPhail and state Rep. Coleman A. Young II missed the event because of scheduling conflicts.

The format presented the same question to three candidates at a time before moving on to the next question, so not every candidate could address each issue.

Charles Pugh of WJBK-TV (Fox 2 Detroit) moderated the event.

It was mainly cordial, but Cockrel and Hendrix traded jabs as Hendrix questioned whether the mayor is effectively deploying police officers.

While Cockrel touted his plan of reopening police mini stations, Hendrix said he is wasting resources by filling them with sworn officers. Hendrix said volunteer reserve officers should be used.

"We cannot have sworn officers sitting behind desks 10 hours a day," Hendrix said.

Cockrel countered that there were sworn officers in mini stations when Hendrix worked for Archer.



Photos by ROB WIDDIS/Special to the Free Press

Current Mayor Ken Cockrel Jr., center, says he offers a chance to stabilize Detroit's government: "I think it's important that we have some continuity," he said. Dave Bing, left, countered: "I think I am qualified from a business perspective." With them are D. Etta Wilcoxon and Warren Evans.



The audience hears answers to questions some of them asked. Some who left early said the responses weren't that helpful.

"Why wasn't he raising Cain then?" Cockrel said.

Hendrix said there were 3,000 police officers 10 years ago, and now there are less than 1,900.

One question that prompted a spirited discussion was who the candidates would support if they lost in the primary.

Evans said: "The first part of the question assumes that losing is possible."

But Hendrix said: "The real question is, will the person who wins be willing to reach out to the losers and enlist their skills? If I win, every single person sitting at this table will be tapped to do all they can do."

Though lively at the beginning of the debate, the crowd thinned out during the forum's last hour.

Lisa Hardy, 34, of Detroit left early and said she thought the forum was too drawn out.

"It didn't really hold my interest," she said. "Every answer piggy-backed off the previous one, and I didn't get to hear the candidates' platforms."

Glenn Wash, a Detroit developer, was disappointed that no candidate firmly addressed the budget deficit.

"They didn't really get into all of the issues," Wash said. "It wasn't a real debate."

But Wayne County Commissioner Keith Williams, who helped organize the forum, said his goal was to avoid canned, repetitive answers from candidates.

"We wanted to have the candidates think on their feet," said Williams, who acknowledged that any format will be a challenge with so many candidates.

Montgomery applauded the format and said it gave him and other lesser-known candidates access to the front-runners.


Evans said there is no easy way to hold public discussion with such a large field of candidates.

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 **starchamber** wrote:




Freman Hendrix, with Pugh, tells the group that volunteers -- not sworn officers -- should work at police mini stations.



Ten of the 15 candidates prepare to share their ideas about issues facing the city at the University of Detroit Mercy on Thursday. Audience members received cards they could use to ask the candidates about education, economic development, safety and crime, health care and transportation. Charles Pugh of WJBK-TV (Fox 2 Detroit) moderated.

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 Detroit Mayoral Candidate Forum

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shoreline wrote:

When the mayor no needs an army for a "security detail"... then perhaps, people will consider moving back into Detroit! ;-) Fix crime, reduce the outlandish taxes, eliminate DPS.... and watch how fast the city begins to grow!

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