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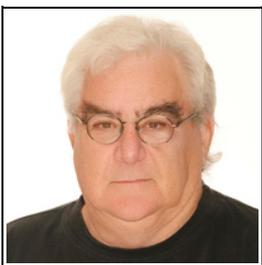


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The proposed streetcar is a step toward attracting the best and the brightest.

The streetcar isn't everything, but it's a big step in the right direction



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Very few rules in my life are completely inviolate as I lean toward deciding things based on merits, rather than some rule I've adopted.

However there is one rule that I obey, no matter what the circumstances.

If Ald. Bob Donovan is in favor of something, I oppose it. I don't have statistics to back this up but I truly believe that rule has proven to be correct over time.

Donovan, who thinks he is running for mayor, of all things, has teamed up with Ald. Joe Davis, who also thinks he is running for mayor, of all things, to propose a binding referendum on the proposed streetcar for Downtown Milwaukee.

Donovan joined with Davis and Ald. Tony Zielinski to announce that they are going to try and get 31,000 signatures on a petition before the Common Council is going to vote on the streetcar Jan. 21. Joining them in this last ditch, talk radio-fueled effort is the nuthouse of Citizens for Responsible Government, a group that sounds good but is really just a bunch of conservatives getting together and thinking they are way more important than they are.

In some ways it's easy to dismiss this whole thing as a gathering of the helpless, hopeless and heartless. But in some ways it's also another indication of the stranglehold this axis of evil has on the city of Milwaukee.

A week ago Donovan appeared on Mike Gousha's show on Channel 12 to discuss the streetcar.

"I don't know what problem the streetcar is solving," he uttered during the show. And that's the biggest problem facing this city, right there.

Donovan, and the rest of his cronies, don't understand the concept that a rising tide lifts all boats. We have lots of problems in this city, many of them a direct or indirect result of the changes in Milwaukee over the last decades. Big companies have moved out, manufacturing is gone and Milwaukee has lost the vibrancy it once had. There are more people without jobs, meaning more poor people. We have a ghetto in Milwaukee with little or no hope of changing it with yet another social program.

The thing that needs to happen in Milwaukee is that we need to find a way to get some zip back in Milwaukee. Make this a city where smart and energetic people want to live and work.

Bob Donovan isn't going to fix what needs fixing in this city. Neither is Joe Davis or Tony Zielinski, or for that matter, me.

Milwaukee is going to be fixed by new blood, smart people with fresh ideas and the energy to turn those ideas into a reality.

Is a streetcar going to be the thing that draws people to live here? Of course not. Not all by itself.

But the streetcar is a thing. It can spur development and create a climate and carry people around town. If it expands it can help bring parts of this city under the same umbrella. It's a thing that can help. There is no downside to this.

The only downside is if these guys who are stuck in the mud manage to somehow derail this project. Let's hope that the people who want to help make Milwaukee grow into something special don't fall for this load of bull these guys are delivering.

Their big argument is the either or argument. They keep shouting that if we do this, we can't do that. That's the painful attitude about Milwaukee. It's like we can't make choice A if we want to do choice B.

In some respects it's about having a belief in our city, in our ability to do things. There are older lions who have had the attitude that we can get stuff done. People like Frank Gimbel and Gary Grunau and Michael Cudahy. Tom Barrett, though a low key mayor, has helped foster a climate that's warm to innovation and ideas.

But the days of the lions are passing. Unless we want an empty space in that leadership , this city needs to find ways to change.

Part of the change – part of it – is welcoming something as simple as a streetcar.

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