

## Our Town

### Council Follies

## When the Cat's Away

*With Daley out of the room, Joe Moore and Rick Munoz scrounged up a majority to disagree with the administration.*

By Mick Dumke

The first City Council meeting after Mayor Daley's long, hot summer began with a prayer. And not just any clergyman was brought in for the job. It was the Reverend B. Herbert Martin Sr., once chair of the CHA and president of the Chicago NAACP, pastor to Mayor Harold Washington, and the controversial racial "healer" who in 1998 testified in court on behalf of one of the white teenagers who beat 13-year-old Lenard Clark nearly to death for biking in their neighborhood while black. This time Reverend Martin asked for the Lord's beneficence on the citizens of Chicago—a few of them in particular. "We pray a special prayer for Mayor

Richard M. Daley and the members of this council, and all of their support staffs," Martin intoned as the subjects of his appeals stood around him with their heads bowed. "Keep them from selfishness and crime, hatred, and any vice that will lead to their inability to serve our city."

The prayer came too late, of course, for the more than two dozen city officials indicted over the last year by the federal government. The question, as the council prepared to resume official business for the first time since July, was whether it was too late for the mayor.

A couple weeks ago Noelle Brennan, appointed by a federal judge to monitor city hiring, announced that she'd found serious violations of the Shakman decree, the 30-year-old court order that is supposed to ban political hiring and firing in Chicago. For the next few months, she said, she alone will sign off on all hires and promotions, which city officials must swear, under oath, are free of clout.

In response, the city's top lawyer, corporation counsel Mara Georges, voiced her boss's shock and outrage at the corruption and declared that she would cooperate with Brennan. Yet Georges added that she would also fight to have the Shakman decree vacated since, apparently, it's

kind of a nuisance.

Still, summers are slow at City Hall. And at the September 14 meeting even the council's attempt to grapple with a hot-button issue seemed irrelevant. Forty-ninth Ward alderman Joe Moore and others introduced a resolution asking President Bush to withdraw troops from Iraq, but aldermen on both sides of the often bizarre hours-long debate that ensued—which culminated in Alderman Burton Natarus collapsing and the measure passing—had to admit that the Chicago City Council has little influence on White House foreign policy. The council passed a resolution against the invasion of Iraq back in 2003.

But for all that, anyone who's been to a council meeting in the last 16 years would've noticed something different about this one. That's because, upon receiving the opening blessing, Daley excused himself to attend a friend's funeral, turning the gavel over to 50th Ward alderman Berry Stone. For the old independents it was like a weekend with the parents gone. As their colleagues praised a *Wedding Crashers*-inspired prohibition on wearing unearned military medals, Moore and ally Rick Munoz of the 22nd Ward were in the lounge area behind the council chambers carrying out a bold and

rare act: lobbying for votes.

Moore wants the city to drop its attempt to vacate Shakman. When he introduced an order requiring this in late July, only 11 aldermen signed on. But he was going to try again. He and Munoz had formed what Moore later called "an opposition bloc of two." It didn't hurt that the mayor wasn't around.

Munoz took a copy of the proposed order and showed it to Tom Allen. The 38th Ward alderman had skipped the July vote, but this time he listened to Munoz, pulled out his reading glasses, read over the order's language, then signed his name.

Within a few minutes Munoz had 16 signatures. When asked if he thought the necessary 26 was possible, a "You've got to be shitting me" look flashed across his face. But he said, "I'm trying. I'm an optimist."

His caution was understandable. Standing to the side, Alderman Dick Mell seemed unmoved as he watched Munoz bump around the lounge. The longtime 33rd Ward boss pulled a mint out of his pocket and popped it into his mouth, then threw the wrapper toward a nearby planter. It ended up on the floor. "I haven't seen what they're passing around," he said. "I'm going to go in and, uh, uh, and look and see what Alderman Moore is doing." He drifted toward

[snip] **College: burger or banquet?** "One constant seems to survive the crises of every generation," reflects Gerald Graff of the University of Illinois at Chicago: "A small percentage of college students 'get' the intellectual culture of academia and do well in college while the majority remain

more or less oblivious to that culture and pass through it largely unchanged. Changing these conditions, creating a truly democratic higher education system that liberally educates more than a small minority, has always been and still is the main challenge of liberal education." —HH

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**DETOUR**

[snip] **Was Jimmy Carter really a loser?** Matthew Yglesias argues on the *American Prospect* "Tapped" blog that the former president got his bad reputation mainly because the "late 1970s were a very bad time in America to be a middle-class professional. Journalists, academics, economists, stock analysts, etc.—all suffered a lot from inflation. Lots of people—union members, poor people, retirees—did very well in the '70s, but they don't get to shape opinion and popular memory." —HH

the door to the council chambers.

Then there was Patrick LeVar, the 45th Ward alderman and chairman of the aviation committee, slouching in a chair along the wall until questions about the Shakman order drove him to his feet. "I haven't made up my mind yet," he said, then wheeled around and admitted that he had. "I started off working a curb-and-gutter job when I was in college," he said. "I believe in the patronage system. By giving jobs to your neighbors and people in your ward you're helping people. You have to work hard. Only qualified, hardworking people get

hired that way."

Moore and Munoz went back to the council chambers, and as committee chairs gave reports, they took their order from alderman to alderman, quietly making their pitch. Ginger Rugai, of the clout-heavy 19th Ward, had voted against the measure in July, but she listened as Munoz whispered to her for several minutes. She nodded. She nodded some more, and then she signed.

The next time Munoz returned to the lounge he looked stunned. "We're up to 26," he said. They would finish with 27—enough for passage. But the

afternoon was full, with debate on Iraq, foie gras, and uniforms for cab-drivers, a stretcher for Natarus, and a vote from the aldermen—over the administration's objection—to settle the lawsuit of the boy wrongly charged with the 1998 murder of Ryan Harris. In the end Moore and Munoz had to be content with Mell's promise that his rules committee would take their measure up before the next full council meeting on October 6.

It was a victory, to be sure. Yet evidence was ample that the council hadn't been overrun by independents when Seventh Ward alderman

William Beavers gave his budget committee report—and left out an item the committee had approved earlier in the summer sounding off against Daley's talk of privatizing more city services. Beavers finished his report and took his seat, acting as if the earlier vote simply hadn't happened.

Moore wondered aloud if Beavers was violating council rules. "If it was voted on in committee, doesn't it have to be brought up? I don't have the rule book handy."

Others did, and the answer was no. Beavers's expression didn't change. Moore sat down. ■



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