

DR. KING AND THE RACE FOR MAYOR

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With the largest number of serious candidates running for mayor in Dallas history and an unprecedented effort by them to get the Black vote, the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. will play a larger role than ever. Dr. King's teachings have not only influenced the Black electorate, they have also had profound effects on how white politicians pursue the Black vote. The candidate that can best articulate Dr. King's dream of equality for all Dallasites might find himself in the mayor's seat this summer.

Every candidate in the race for mayor will certainly promote views reflective of Dr. King's dream where race would not be a factor in achieving success in America. Some conservative pundits, both Black and white, have chosen to interpret Dr. King's view that people should be judged by the "content of their character not the color of their skin" as a knock on affirmative action or any measure that would award Black folks based on the color of our skin. Of course, the vast majority of African-Americans don't see affirmative action measures as being inconsistent with Dr. King's urging that people be judged by the "content of their character not the color of their skin." Placed in the proper historical context, one could easily see that Dr. King was speaking about a time when extreme racism accompanied by racial violence prevented Black people from getting the rights guaranteed to us under the constitution. Thus, the "content of one's character" speech was specifically designed to urge the country to not condone discrimination against Black Americans based on the color of our skin. Many who feel as I do, believe affirmative action measures are in keeping with the goals outlined in Dr. King's "I Have A Dream Speech."

Mayoral candidates will have a chance to demonstrate to the African-American electorate their desire to make Dr. King's dream a reality in Dallas. Most political observers expect Mayor Pro Tem Don Hill to shine brightest when Dr. King's dream is woven into the mayoral debates. However, Ed Oakley has a legislative record at city hall that shows he is committed to make Dr. King's dream a reality as well. Several sources tell me that Tom Leppert is working extremely hard to get up to speed on the needs of the southern sector. Mr. Leppert is expected to make his impact with Black voters based on a strong economic development position that will feature much needed Black business development. Darrell Jordan has already made Dr. King's dream a reality for many young struggling Black attorneys in the city. His work on enhancing Fair Park and the Cotton Bowl has demonstrated his intentions to make the southern sector economically viable. Max Wells, in my opinion, will have the most difficult time convincing the Black electorate that he understands the merits of Dr. King's teachings. Unfortunately for Mr. Wells, he has a public record as a city council man that does not make him an attractive candidate to the southern sector.

Dr. King's "I Have A Dream Speech" that featured the "content of their character" statement has taken on biblical significance for politicians of all stripes in recent years. But those who use the speech to spout off good sounding political rhetoric without promoting meaningful political change will find themselves not only not voted for, but even ostracized in the Black community and I don't care who their political consultants are. All of the mayoral candidates vying for the job must be sincere in their efforts to improve the economic disparity that exists between the northern and southern sectors of our city. No candidate is going to be able to tell north Dallas voters one thing and southern sector voters another. No candidate is going to be able to promise the "status quo" and expect for Black voters to go along because some high profile Black consultants have advised the candidate that he can get away with that strategy. The next mayor of Dallas must convince the southern sector that we, the city of Dallas, will be marching towards fulfillment of Dr. King's dream. At least that is how I see it from South of the Trinity.