

Remarks
Cathy Scott, President AFSCME District Council 47
Union Rally – June 18, 2009

My name is Cathy Scott and I am President of AFSCME District Council 47.

Good evening and welcome. Thank you Mr. Saidel.

I can't tell you how sorry I am that I have to address you as Mister Saidel. If only I things had worked out differently, I would be calling you Mr. Mayor.

And, if it were Mayor Saidel, I doubt any of us would be standing here today.

But here we are.

While the Mayor has shown no interest in being partners with us, he has accomplished a historic task of uniting us all as partners.

The Mayor's contract proposals, his tactics, his deceits, his New Day being the Wrong Way, has brought us together in unity as I have never seen in my 16 years as a union President. This has never happened before.

This meeting is truly historic. We are united in public. We are united in private.

This can be our New Day. Standing together in this new way, we are a force that must be reckoned with.

But, the reality is we are in a very tough fight. And, worse for us, the Mayor and his people still don't understand how to put together a plan for all of Philadelphia – much less a professional approach to the budget.

You know these little cards they carry with them? It says the City's mission is to provide quality leadership, partnership and

services to improve public health and safety, economic vitality, education, neighborhood livability and civic engagement. Currently they are failing on virtually every front.

The Mayor has had the whole process of funding city services wrong from the beginning. And, District Council 47 told him so.

At the beginning of this budget process, all the Mayor proposed was cuts, cuts and more cuts.

We called it, "the more rats and fewer libraries" budget.

We stated that the budget question shouldn't be, "What cuts do we make to address the budget crunch?"

We said, the questions should be, "How do we run the best possible city with the current level of services? How much will it cost? And, where do we find the revenue?"

Those are still the questions. The city budget still doesn't address them.

For months, we and others offered solutions and ideas that didn't require service cuts first. Build up income, we said. Streamline spending, we said. Collect uncollected revenues. Make those who get a free ride pay their fair share. Collect some taxes from Penn and other tax exempts that continue to gobble up property that used to pay taxes. Ask those who benefit more to pay more. We called for the naming of a Revenue Tsar to get the job done since the Mayor wasn't up to the task. Nor were any of Nutter's new overpriced Deputy Mayor's up to the task.

Our ideas, and those of the City Controller, the newspapers and civic activists were all cynically ridiculed or dismissed by the Mayor.

And, while, now, there is some talk about actually doing the things we suggested that would save money and collect more

revenue, the Mayor has proposed a new idea to balance his budget. Cuts and more cuts all targeted at a small group of city residents – city workers.

Just this week, he said again, union members will have to sacrifice in order to lessen service cuts on the taxpayers.

In a city of 1.4 million people, our unions comprise about 30,000 workers or about 2 percent of the city population.

The unions have to sacrifice more, he says.

Last year, the Mayor got sacrifice. My members and those of our brothers and sisters in DC 33, got no raise. These 10,000 service providers saw the payment to their health and welfare Funds reduced. The Mayor got the one year contract he wanted.

Now he wants to balance his newest budget on the backs of 2 percent of the population, who all pay taxes for the services they receive.

We, like every other group of citizens, are willing to bear our portion of the burden – just like every other taxpayer will.

Our 2 percent will be paying the same increased fees, the same increased sales tax, suffer the same service cuts at closed libraries, rec centers and pools and watch as the city adds to the pension deficit it alone has created.

The Mayor's current contract proposals, which we have costed out, will result in a 27 to 33 percent cut in members' current wages -- above and beyond what other resident's "sacrifice."

And, that 27 to 33 percent reduction doesn't reflect the newest benefit cuts the Mayor is proposing to City Council and Harrisburg that have never once been discussed across the negotiating table.

What is becoming increasingly clear is that the Mayor wants to make permanent cuts to member's work day, to their work pay, to their health care and to drastically reduce their retirement health care and pension to address what the Mayor admits is a temporary economic crisis.

The Mayor says flat out that the crisis is temporary, that's why he called for only temporary tax hikes.

But he wants to permanently cripple a tiny minority of city resident workers rather than undertaking the core task of any city government – the collection of taxes and fees which, when collected, provide for the common good.

Acceptable solutions to the budget crisis still exist. There are still millions that could be collected.

And, the Mayor touts the millions the city will receive in federal stimulus dollars. But not one penny of it is included in the Mayor's most recent budget.

We're not fighting for the status quo. We're not whining.

So, for the time being, we will continue to offer solutions and press management to do its job which is to manage with what it has or to go get what it is owed.

But don't forget, we have real power and we can exercise it against those who would unfairly target a small group. Don't underestimate yourselves.

When the Mayor tried to close the libraries, he was confident he'd win that fight against a small group too. But, people from disparate groups banded together to fight back.

District Council 47 was at the forefront of defeating the Mayor then.

Today, we join all of these unions in saying we are not afraid of the fight the city is forcing upon us now.

We've never backed down from a fight. We won't back down now.

I ask today, are you going to back down?

What do we want? A fair contract.

When do we want it? Now.