

THE RACE FOR CITY COUNCIL



ROMAIN BLANQUART/Detroit Free Press

Detroit City Council President Ken Cockrel Jr. poses with Jennifer Heckmann, 35, of Detroit as Majid Fakhouri, 32, of Royal Oak takes a photo Friday. "You have to refine your approach, and I have," Cockrel said of his run.

'I'm not looking to give up ... without a fight'

Cockrel says it's tough to be an incumbent, but he's determined to keep presidency

By NAOMI R. PATTON
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

There was the look on Detroit City Council President Ken Cockrel Jr.'s face, and then he said it.

"I'd be lying if I didn't say I had mixed feelings about this," Cockrel said the day he returned to the City Council after losing to Dave Bing in a special mayoral election in May. "You got to play the cards you're dealt, and I play to win."

In the four months since, Cockrel has focused on doing just that, but this time winning means returning to the City Council for another full term.

But as he battles with 17 other candidates, Cockrel, 43, finds himself perilously close to losing the council presidency to former broadcaster Charles Pugh, who bested Cockrel in the August primary by a 7,000-vote margin.

"I'm not looking to give up the council president seat without a fight," Cockrel said.

That desire wasn't as apparent in July, when Cockrel waited until the final day to file his petitions for re-election.

The delay, Cockrel said, was caused in part by having an infrastructure geared "to keeping me in the mayor's office," instead of one that would get him re-elected to the council. And, he admits, he thought about walking away from city politics altogether.

But after discussing a council campaign with his wife, Kimberly Cockrel, his staff and supporters, he decided to run again. "I guess because I'm a sucker for punishment," he said, laughing.

Lost ground

Steve Hood, a political consultant, said Cockrel's stutter start in his campaign caused him to lose ground and votes to candidate Gary Brown, who came in third in the August primary but won the most votes in northwest Detroit.

"Gary Brown will take him out if he doesn't get moving," Hood said.

Some aren't so sure.

"He very well can win northwest Detroit," Ron Scott, a community activist, said of his friend. Scott worked with Ken Cockrel Sr., an attorney and former councilman, in the 1970s to battle police misconduct.

"To his credit, a lot of people in the city of Detroit came to Ken and said 'We want you to be on council,'" Scott said.

The experience of three terms on the council — one as council president — is marked by reorganizing the council's committee structure; ushering in legislation that includes pushing for demolishing abandoned buildings; getting through an anti-police profiling ordinance, and trying to ensure timely payment of city

Ken Cockrel Jr.

Age: 43

Family: Married to Kimberly Cockrel; sons Kenneth III and Kyle; daughters Kennedy, Kendall and Kayla.

Education: Graduated from St. Florian High in Hamtramck; bachelor's degree in journalism, Wayne State University.

Political experience: Detroit City Council, May-present; mayor of Detroit, September 2008-May 2009; Detroit City Council, 1998-2008; Wayne County commissioner, 1995-97.

Endorsements: AFL-CIO, AFCSME Council 25

vendors.

"There's a difference between saying you want to do stuff and saying you've actually done it, and that's what I bring to the table," Cockrel said.

Cockrel also has union support, despite some who think he leans too favorably toward privatizing city services.

Cockrel's brief stint as mayor came with former Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick's resignation. After serving as mayor for seven months, Cockrel says he has a "perspective that no

other council member has."

The biggest revelation of his tenure as mayor was "how severe the city's financial situation was ... how badly the books had been kept."

'Refine your approach'

The Rev. Steve Archer, parish pastor at Trinity St. Mark's United Church of Christ in southwest Detroit, has known Cockrel for 11 years.

"He genuinely puts the service of the people first," Archer said. "He's absolutely honest and ethical. ... There are no backroom deals with him."

Furthermore, Archer said, Cockrel has been an asset to social services in southwest Detroit.

"He doesn't need a map to get here," Archer said. "It's not during election season, when we see everyone else. We see him all the time."

Cockrel said it's a tough time to run as an incumbent. He said he's dedicated to working with Bing to get the city through its budget crisis, and he is campaigning now with a renewed focus on reaching out to Detroiters of all ages, classes and races to remind them of the value of his institutional knowledge.

"You have to refine your approach, and I have," he said.

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News Quiz

1) During Ernie Harwell's stately address Wednesday night at Comerica Park, he praised a group of people for "their grit." Who was he referring to?

- A. The Ilitch family.
- B. Magglio Ordoñez and Nate Robertson.
- C. Tiger fans.
- D. Michiganders.

2) After a spate of incidents, Detroit police and federal agents held a news conference Thursday to warn a certain class of perpetrators that law enforcement would be coming after them. Who should have taken notice?

- A. Bank robbers.
- B. Burglars who toss kitties in washing machines.
- C. People who use firebombs and other incendiary devices.
- D. Teens with guns.

3) Detroit got some good news for a change this past week in which of the following categories?

- A. The occupancy rate is up for downtown office buildings.
- B. The booking rate is improving for conventions.
- C. A survey showed there are fewer trees growing on the roofs of vacant buildings.
- D. Research from the National Institute of Drinking Water said the Detroit River contains fewer toxins than it did in 1989.

4) Who said this: "I don't have all the answers. If I did, I'd be a cab driver."

- A. Former Lions Coach Monte Clark, who died Wednesday at age 72.
- B. Michigan quarterback Tate Forcier.
- C. Detroit Mayor Dave Bing.
- D. Lame-duck City Councilwoman Martha Reeves.

5) Which four-legged creature now calls Brighton home after surviving the war in Iraq, the death of its owner and an amputation?

- A. Blanquart, the three-legged goat.
- B. Benjie, the limping chicken.
- C. Laia, the 9-month-old puppy.
- D. Suzette, the graceful gazelle who responds only to Arabic.


Answers: 1) D; 2) C; 3) B; 4) A; 5) C

By BILL MCGRAW



KIRTHMON F. DOZIER/Detroit Free Press

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