

# Record Shows Fair Editorial Treatment of Sanders

Today we deflate a myth.

It's the myth that the Free Board has been sniping at Burlington Mayor Bernard Sanders since he was elected in 1981. That simply is not true. We have supported him when we thought he was right. And we have opposed him when we felt he was wrong. And we have on several occasions had our doubts about his integrity and his credibility, particularly in keeping his promises to the constituency that adopted him in 1981. But at the same time we cannot be accused of making a series of spiteful attacks on him because he is who he is.

That's what he and his allies would like you to believe. Let's examine the record.

We acknowledge that we were not in Sanders' corner when he unseated five-term incumbent Gordon Paquette in 1981. Our endorsement went to Paquette "with qualifications." Indeed we opposed Paquette's proposed 65-cent tax rate increase that year.

When Sanders shocked the state with his upset victory, however, we shed no bitter tears and in an April 6, 1981, editorial said, "...city aldermen have an obligation to cooperate with Sanders in his efforts to run the city. Little purpose will be served if they block his appointments and balk at his proposals for no other reason than their dislike of his philosophy...."

When later that month the aldermen delayed discussion of Sanders' tax increase proposal, we scolded them in an April 30 editorial. And on June 7 we announced our support for the proposal. A similar endorsement of the 25-cent tax rate increase appeared June 15, the day of the special election.

Meanwhile, we sharply criticized the aldermen for refusing to consider Sanders' appointees. In a May 20 editorial under the headline, "Sanders Should Have Right To Choose His City Officials," we said: "...the board should strew no more road-

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blocks in the way of Sanders' efforts to select members of his administration."

On June 1, 1981, following rejection by the board of Sanders' list of nominees, we said: "The people of the city should demand that the board reconsider its action...Sanders shouldn't be forced to go to court to insure that the case for his appointees is given a fair hearing by the board."

The theme was repeated in editorials on June 10, June 18, June 24, July 2, and, following an unfavorable court decision, on Sept. 2 when we urged the mayor to appeal the decision. And again on Oct. 15. In fact, our position remains that qualified candidates must be considered by the board. Only for cause is there reason for the aldermen to reject a mayor's choices.

There you have it. The record shows we were open-minded about the mayor and his populist ideas. During that time, of course, there were editorials criticizing the mayor but, for the most part, we were hopeful Sanders would prove he was worthy of the city's highest office.

Interestingly, it was something we learned following another supportive editorial that caused us to begin to wonder whether the Democrats and Republicans might have been right about Sanders all along. On Dec. 28, 1981, we wrote in support of a Sanders' plan to convert Memorial Auditorium into a day care center for children and a drop-in center for the elderly. The plan seemed simple enough: the city would rent the basement to the Ethan Allen Child Care Center and the Visiting Nurses Association. The same editorial criticized the Finance Board for "being more concerned with trivialities than with solving the auditorium's fiscal problems."

A week later, however, we withdrew our support. The plan, we learned, wasn't quite as simple as we had been led to believe. First, it would have put the auditorium basement in the hands of a private group which, after receiving \$45,000 in city funds to put itself in business and asking for the facility rent-free for six months, would negotiate its own deal with the two groups seeking to use the facility. And, according to the proposal, only 20

percent of revenue generated by renting the facility would find its way into the city's general fund. Control would rest with neither the aldermen nor any city commission but rather this private group whose membership was not known.

So much for open government, the commission form of government. Instead cronyism, a pet theme of Sanders' in the early days of his first term, was welcomed back to City Hall. Cronyism, of course, is what the other person is guilty of when he hires — or favors — friends. When you do it, it is not cronyism. So Sanders went on the defensive when eyebrows were raised about the plan's principal architect, Jane Driscoll, who already was serving as the mayor's youth coordinator. Later, of course, she would be put on the city payroll in a job that was never advertised and was created for her. Sanders would deny the cronyism charge but what would he have called it if any former mayor had put a close friend on the city payroll? And, of course, it wasn't cronyism when, following his re-election in 1983, the mayor created a job for his campaign manager. For a mayor who lashed out at his predecessor for his use of political patronage, Sanders has done a remarkable job in taking care of his friends.

What many residents may fail to understand is that Sanders has managed to erode the city's commission form of government. Never, of course, did he seek voter approval, for he learned early that taking proposals to the voters was a mistake. Twice, he took initiatives to the voters, and twice they said no. After that, he used double talk and intimidation to silence his critics.

Regardless of what he says, Sanders knows one way to stay in office is to acquire as much power as he can. The more power a politician has over the lives of citizens, the less likely he is to be turned out of office. The commission form of government makes it almost impossible for one person to establish a true "political machine" because the power is diluted rather than centralized. If, as Sanders would have you believe, the Democrats under Paquette had a true "political machine," it would have been impossible for Sand-

ers to have scored his stunning upset in 1981. That doesn't mean the commission form of government under Paquette was perfect. It wasn't. For one thing, too many appointees were reappointed when other qualified persons might have been offered a chance to serve. Women were underrepresented on the boards and the responsibilities of some boards needed to be redefined. They still do. But it was the success of the commission form of government that shaped this city.

Precious little in a meaningful way has changed since Sanders took office. The street problems are worse. So are the housing problems. The mayor has managed to delay the much-needed Southern Connector although the debate over its alignment has been going on for almost 20 years. His promise of more police to patrol high crime areas in the city remains unfulfilled. And despite Sanders' rhetoric about being a fiscal conservative, there is some doubt whether the city ended the fiscal year with a deficit.

Yes, it's time for a change in city hall. Or it will be in March when city residents vote for mayor. Already former Sanders' ally Richard Sartielle is a candidate to take Sanders' job. At least two other persons are said to be ready to enter the race.

The ideal candidate will be someone who will respect and preserve the best of the city's past, the hope of the city's present and the dream of the city's future. A person who can unite the old and the new in a consolidated effort to address the city's problems. A person who will understand the needs of the city's poor and the elderly, not using them as pawns in a selfish battle for power but working towards the goal of making their lives more comfortable. A person who understands the importance of a healthy economy, not for the selfish interests of a few but for the betterment of every city resident. A person who will exchange the politics of confrontation for the politics of accomplishment.

Is there such a person? Yes, we think so and we'll tell you about her tomorrow.