

“In The Best Interest of the Community”

**By: Gary Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson
Wednesday, November 11, 2015**

Recently, I signaled my support for the consideration of an immigration processing center on property near the Gary/Chicago International Airport. My support was intended to communicate to the Board of Zoning Appeals and Gary Common Council that the company pursuing this project, if successful in its bid to U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, would bring development that would increase the tax base in Gary and provide jobs for Gary citizens. I was comfortable making this request because I concluded that the benefits to our community outweighed the costs associated with public perception and philosophical opposition.

But every time I made these arguments over the course of the past few weeks, I was confronted with the body of my life's work. Whether it is my experience as an advocate for civil and human rights, my long history as a proponent of criminal justice reform, or even a staunch supporter of President Obama's immigration reform policy, I could not align my record with my support of this project.

With every project, there are considerations that must be weighed. My focus on the GEO project was jobs and the increase in tax revenue as well as investments in roads and job training. Those are important concerns for a community that boasts one of the highest unemployment rates in the state. However, the considerations cannot end there. I have to consider whether the development partner is a good fit for our community.

While I wholeheartedly support the 1st amendment, my faith is an integral part of who I am. It is no secret that it also influences why I have accepted one of the biggest challenges of my professional life and how I govern. While attracting development to this city has been a herculean task, we have experienced successes and anticipate many more. For these reasons, I believe it is wholly appropriate to pass on the opportunity to partner with GEO and pursue other relationships that will be more suitable for the city and consistent with our collective values.

I appreciate the passion and sentiments expressed by the citizens of this community and challenge you to bring that same energy to the opportunities for service that are presented in the community every day. Whether it is Gary for Life, our Thanksgiving Give Away, support of a local charity or our ongoing efforts to approve the appearance of our city, we need your help. Feel free to join us by calling us at 219-881-1302.

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