

Councilwoman kicks off run for mayor, seeks open government

By Harry Minium The Virginian-Pilot

Councilwoman Daun S. Hester kicked off her campaign for mayor on Saturday by taking indirect swipes at incumbent Mayor Paul Fraim and the way he has managed the City Council.

Saying the council has "lost its purpose," she implied that wards represented by politically favored council members garner more funding than others, that too much city business is conducted behind closed doors and that some council members hold grudges against those who voice dissent.

"I am breaking free of that suffocating culture," she said to a cheering audience of about 250 at the Holiday Inn Express. "I have decided the best way to change that culture ... is to change the culture of the City Council. That means changing the leader of the council."

Hester, who has been on the council since 1996, is seeking to become the city's first African American mayor. She has been most active in issues involving education, children and neighborhoods .

Fraim has been on the council since 1986 and has been mayor since 1994. He has led efforts to revitalize downtown, played an active role in courting economic development and serves on many regional boards.

Hester acknowledges Fraim will have a huge advantage in campaign cash and endorsements. All six other council members have endorsed Fraim, as have most of the constitutional officers and state delegates and senators. No elected officials attended Hester's campaign kickoff.

"The only support I need is the support of the people," she said.

Fraim said it "sounds like she's running against the entire city government that she's been a part of for 16 years. It's undeniable the city has made a great deal of progress the last several years. I intend to run on a platform of results. This has happened because a lot of people have worked hard to make the city a better place, and no one has worked harder than me."

Hester called for "more transparency" in city government and wants all council meetings, including the informal work sessions where decisions on key issues are made, to be televised. Norfolk televises two formal sessions per month and none of the informal sessions. Virginia Beach televises all council meetings, formal and informal.

She told WVEC-TV that the closing of Waterside's Bar Norfolk and Have a Nice Day Cafe last year by the city smacked of "Gestapo tactics" and is typical of the way the council does too much business - behind closed doors.

"There should have been a better solution so we didn't lose all" of the tax revenue from the business, she said.

"There should have been better communication. We do too much telling people what to do rather than listening to them."

Harry Minium, (757) 446-2371,

harry.minium@pilotonline.com



Daun S. Hester is seeking to become Norfolk's first African American mayor.

Print