

# THE NORTHWEST CURRENT

Davis Kennedy/Publisher & Editor

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## Calling all candidates

If the District is to succeed in reforming the D.C. Public Schools so it can offer a quality education to all of its students, the city must have top-notch principals and teachers in every school.

The District's longstanding personnel rules often run counter to that goal by limiting the number of qualified applicants for principal and teacher vacancies.

To be a District principal, the applicant must have a specific type of advanced degree in education administration or have completed a District-approved licensure program: Applicants with a master's in education policy or planning need not apply.

That bit of ridiculous bureaucratic balderdash apparently rules out Jason Kamras, the recipient of the prestigious National Teacher of the Year award in 2005 for his work at Sousa Middle School. He has a bachelor's from Princeton and a master's from Harvard — but not in the specific type of education degree favored by the author of the D.C. Public Schools personnel rules.

An even more bizarre case is that of Charles Abelmann, the well-regarded principal at Janney Elementary for three years. Though he was hired at Janney, an official told him a few years later that he was ineligible to apply for a vacancy at Deal Middle School because he did not hold the proper degree.

Thankfully, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education and the State Board of Education are in the midst of throwing out these unduly restrictive rules. The state superintendent, Deborah Gist, is preparing to implement new rules for licensing school administrators, which will allow advanced degrees in any subject area or a degree from a state-approved program, as well as two years of school-based experience.

We commend Ms. Gist and the members of the state board for their work in streamlining overly rigid regulations. Board member Laura McGiffert Slover is right that loosening the requirements will allow a broader pool of applicants — and the opportunity to be far more selective.

## Wilson in waiting

Interviews began last week for teachers and other instructional staff at Wilson High School, but that does not end the uncertainty for employees who hope to stay at the Tenleytown school.

As in past years, Wilson High will send off many of its graduates to top-tier colleges and universities. But its inability to meet all of the testing benchmarks established by the federal No Child Left Behind Act means that it is undergoing restructuring — as are other D.C. schools that have fallen short for five consecutive years.

In Wilson's case, Chancellor Michelle Rhee chose to replace up to 20 percent of the instructional staff to meet the federal requirement.

If having the teaching staff at Wilson go through a rehiring process results in a stronger educational environment, it will prove wise in the long run. But we believe strongly that the process is occurring far too late.

Summer vacation may just have started, but the reality is that school will resume in only about two-and-a-half months. The D.C. Public Schools system in the past has suffered in its recruiting efforts because so much of its hiring did not occur until the summer. Now the timing of the restructuring process is exacerbating the problem. We fear that some of Wilson's best teachers will consider other offers given the uncertainty of continued employment. And we fear that many stellar teachers from outside the District, who might relish the opportunity to teach in the nation's capital, have already made their decisions.

The hiring of a new Wilson principal adds to this summer of uncertainty. The new appointee, Peter Cahall, is not due to start his new position until July 10 — which would leave him precious little planning time under any circumstances.

## Of roadblocks and Metro routes ...

Public safety and individual civil rights share an uneasy place in America. The one is always pushing against the other. People of good will are on opposite sides of this essential tension in our society.

And that brings us to the Trinidad neighborhood in Northeast Washington.

At a D.C. Council hearing Monday, Judiciary and Public Safety

Committee chair Phil Mendelson said he sees a disturbing tendency of police to more than nibble away at individual rights.



### TOM SHERWOOD'S NOTEBOOK

Mendelson cited the recent roadblock in the violence-plagued Trinidad neighborhood, as well as the mayor's intent to link 5,200 surveillance cameras around the city and a police plan to knock on doors and ask if they can search homes for guns.

He and Ward 3 Council member Mary Cheh said such actions are expensive and not that effective and they tend to alienate the very people they're intended to serve.

On the flip side, Ward 4 Council member Muriel Bowser noted that the council had recently hotly debated a noise ordinance. She said residents have a right to be free from both excessive noise and the murderous crime occurring near their homes.

And the roadblock critics are not swaying interim Attorney General Peter Nickles. He told NBC4 that the narrowly focused roadblock was properly handled and would pass muster with any court. Tellingly, none of the legal groups challenging the roadblock has headed to court, at least not yet.

■ **Tom Davis' legacy.** Virginia Republican Rep. Tom Davis won't leave Congress until the end of this year. Whether you're a Republican, a Democrat, an independent or even a non-voter, you may rue his retirement, especially if you ride Metro.

Davis was the key player in getting the House last week to approve a 10-year, \$1.5 billion maintenance plan for Metro as long as Maryland, D.C. and Virginia match that amount among themselves.

If the measure becomes law, the rebuilding and maintenance of Metro will be a fine part of Davis' nonpartisan legacy.

Davis and other area members of Congress repeatedly pointed out that the federal government's workers depend on Metro, with 50 federal agencies within walking distance of one Metro stop or another. The bill also would put four federal representatives on Metro's board.

■ **Empty school buildings.** The news got lost in the rush of other matters last week, but Mayor Adrian Fenty says his administration is aware that closed school buildings may become magnets for anything from local mischief to murder.

He told NBC4 on Friday that his administration intends to secure the closed buildings and provide regular police patrols in the neighborhoods so criminals, vagrants and others don't turn the schools into nuisance properties.

"The real goal is to convert them into a very pos-

itive, community-minded use," Fenty said. "The facilities director is making sure they're secured."

■ **Downtown flub?** At that same news event, Mayor Fenty acknowledged that the city did not respond quickly enough to the power outage that disrupted downtown on Friday.

The Notebook traveled one-way north on 12th Street, dodging cars that rushed through intersections with dead lights.

It took too long for police and the Transportation Department to respond to critical intersections. Potomac Electric

Power Co., the police and the Transportation Department did not appear to be communicating all that well. And the Notebook did not see any police squad cars voluntarily jumping into the fray. A review of all this is under way.

As we asked the mayor last week, "The city has spent tens of millions of dollars on Homeland Security ... but couldn't respond to a power outage?"

■ **Vetting a veep.** Former U.S. Attorney Eric Holder, who briefly served as U.S. attorney general at the end of the second Clinton term, is a well-respected lawyer who, wisely or not, passed up several opportunities (and importuning) to run for mayor of Washington.

Your Notebook has high regard for Holder but was never sure he wanted to play, or would play, in the rough-and-tumble of daily city politics. He remains for many a wise and thoughtful counsel on the edges of city politics.

Yet now he's been thrust into the intense world of vetting potential running mates for Barack Obama. That decision — who Obama picks — is among the most important Obama will make as the Democratic nominee. It will be read a thousand different ways as the fall campaign takes shape.

Should Obama win, Holder could help the new president become an ally of the city, something President Bush has resisted, despite determined help the city has received from White House chief of staff Josh Bolton. It would be nice to have a president who would truly recognize the people of the District, something even Bill Clinton failed to do.

■ **A final word.** There's been a deluge of remembrances for NBC's Tim Russert, who died last week of a heart attack. But the public at large didn't get to hear one of the best. It came from Russert's long-time doctor and friend Michael Newman.

In a brief interview with your Notebook, Newman said those who really want to honor Tim Russert should not put off dealing with their health.

"Tim was like all of us, always trying to do better, particularly with respect to diet, staying in shape, and, as all of us say to ourselves, 'I'm going to start my diet tomorrow,'" Newman said with a rueful smile. "And perhaps those of us that need to, let's all start tomorrow as we think about Tim."

Tom Sherwood, a Southwest resident, is a political reporter for News 4.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### City needs to repair uneven sidewalks

I was pleased to note The Current's recent article on pedestrian safety ["Transportation Department study outlines pedestrian goals for District," June 4].

This is an effort that is long overdue and needs to be expanded to include the repair of D.C. sidewalks. I know several people

who have suffered serious falls (myself included) due to the cracks and irregularities in the surfaces of the sidewalks.

All it takes for the fall to occur is catching a toe in a rise of about half an inch in the sidewalk. One dare not look up for fear of losing the battle with these irregularities.

Caroline Browne  
Cathedral Heights

### Sculpture's location would pose danger

I enjoyed your June 11 article

"Plan for latest bust stirs traffic worries," but I must point out that the proposed George Washington bust at 19th and E streets NW will sit atop a 5-foot-8-inch "pedestal," which creates a much larger structure than depicted in the article.

These structures, while perhaps handsome, total 9 feet tall (or even taller if placed within flower beds) and 3 1/2 feet wide.

For my part, I just want the new one moved over for safety reasons.

Eric Malinen  
Commissioner, ANC 2A05