



Celebrating the voice of the community for



Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder

## Mountaintops and mean streets: from joy for Obama to pain of everyday struggle

by Don Samuels

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You should have been in Denver to witness democracy's most glorious expression. Hillary, Michelle, Bill and Barack were all peaks on America's mountain range of ideas. Barack's speech was a magnificent cocktail of lofty ideas, pragmatic proposals and strident challenges for change. It was a great privilege to see our daughters standing with the enthusiastic cheering crowd at Mile-High Stadium, waving signs and shouting, "O-Baa-Ma! O-Baa-Ma!"

Eventually, we came down from that Mile-High Mountain and drove back to Minneapolis. The next day we checked our phone messages. One caller jolted me back to reality. The message went something like this:

"Good evening Council Member Samuels. It is now 11 pm, and I am unable to sleep because of the very loud music coming from a party being held in the front yard of a house near mine. This party has been going on since early evening, and I figure if I can't sleep you shouldn't either. The noise is beyond acceptable. I have called the police, and nothing has changed. Something must be done to address this as soon as possible."

My knee-jerk reaction was to feel defensive. But I quickly realized this constituent was doing exactly what is needed. If you hurt someone, the government should feel the pain. That goes for your council member, your mayor, your state and national representatives.

When we fail to communicate with leaders about issues that affect our quality of life, the result is the neglect of our community and the gradual downgrading of community life. Our inaction says that the behavior is acceptable, that politicians don't care and that the police can't bother.

Often things will then degrade into routine disturbances, violent behavior, drunkenness and drug use, and crime. It is our apathy that created the values of a young man, who, when I chided him for selling drugs in our community, confidently responded, "What do you expect — this is the ghetto, and it will always be the ghetto!"

This caller quickly brought me down from my mile-high mountain to deal with community realities. After all, it makes no difference how thrilling our rhetoric or how lofty our ideals are if you are not safe, your neighbors are out of control, you have to live in fear, and you have to sell your house to get away from terror.

No noisy party house should be accommodated without challenge, no crime should go unreported, and no garbage house or yard should go unabated. Neighbors who perpetrate those behaviors can only change their behavior with the interventional help of the community.

How many times have you chaffed at the conditions you live around and not called your council member? How many times have you contemplated the massive failure of our K-12 education system to educate the children in our community and not called a school board member or your state and federal representatives?

People often call it a conspiracy that richer communities get all the good stuff and the poor communities get promises. The truth is that richer people have a stronger sense that they deserve good service, so they engage their public officials to that end. But we should do the same.

When your quality of life slips below par, call your public servants. If every single incident of outrage is followed by a well-placed call, we would expedite the transformation of our community.

The list of elected servants below have made a commitment to help deliver a sane and safe community for you. If the quality of community life is feeling like a Third World experience, call the appropriate leader below and tell them what you want changed. [Editor's note: Many of these public servants specifically are in charge of North Minneapolis affairs, as noted by what districts, wards, or precincts they work for.]

- Minneapolis Fifth Ward Council Member Don Samuels: safety, economic development — 612-673-2205
- Minneapolis School Superintendent Bill Green: K-12 education, graduation rates — 612-668-0200
- Minneapolis Fourth Precinct Inspector Mike Martin: crime patterns and police conduct — 612-673-5727
- District 2 Hennepin Co. Commissioner Mark Stenglein: social services, courts, incarceration — 612-348-7882
- MPHA-Cheryl Borden: Section 8 housing resident behaviors — 612-342-1420
- Met Council Commissioner Peter Bell: transportation — 651-602-1453
- District 58 State Senator Linda Higgins: public safety, local government aid (LGA) — 651-296-9246
- District 58B State Representative Willie Dominguez: education, LGA — 651-297-9001
- U.S. Representative Keith Ellison: poverty, homelessness, environment, education, national issues. — 612-522-1212

Let's all work together for the day when "every mountain is made low, every valley is lifted up, and crooked paths are made straight."

*Don Samuels is the Minneapolis Fifth Ward city council member. He welcomes reader responses to [Don.Samuels@ci.minneapolis.mn.us](mailto:Don.Samuels@ci.minneapolis.mn.us).*

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