

Hodges vows to close gaps

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr., Contributing Writer
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When Betsy Hodges emerged the victor of an absurdly crowded field in the contest to become Minneapolis' next mayor, she said it sent a clear message that the city would no longer be divided.

"I want to grow Minneapolis and I want to close the gaps between white people and people of color," said Hodges, who takes office Jan. 2. "I want to close the gap between the haves and the have nots. The people of Minneapolis very clearly said they wanted me to do that. The results of that election made it pretty clear that the message I carried resonated with the people of Minneapolis."

The incoming mayor made it a point to reach out to *Insight News* to begin her official dialogue with the city's African-American community, requesting a one-on-one interview with an Insight reporter. She said she has also reached out to various other African-American civic, religious and business leaders to let it be known that her campaign platform was more than just lip service. Hodges said she has a vested interest in all of Minneapolis achieving, and discussed how to improve quality of life for the city's Northside residents.

"If north Minneapolis is not doing well, all of Minneapolis is not doing well," said Hodges. "There are lots of possibilities (for improvements in north Minneapolis) as we grow our transportation system. We need to examine how do we physically reconnect north Minneapolis from the divides that were made when the highways were put in."

A couple of divides have little or nothing to do with geography. Minneapolis – and the region as a whole – has staggering gaps in education and employment. As mayor, Hodges said she is committed to eradicating those gaps during her term.

"One of the first things that we will put in motion is my Cradle to K cabinet," said Hodges, who said the program will coordinate directly with the city's health department and other departments to work with pregnant women to give them and their newborns the healthiest start possible.

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“Brain development and physical health are the first opportunity gaps a child faces. As mayor I have one of the biggest platforms in the city and I will use it to pull people together around our achievement gap. This is good for us as human beings but it’s also crucial for the development of our city.”

The incoming mayor said she is not blind to the fact that Minneapolis – and other cities throughout the nation – has prospered as a whole while leaving a large segment of minorities behind.

“Discrimination over time led to many different opportunities and this city grew around those opportunities, but now we are working to change things,” said Hodges. “I ran on a platform that we are building and growing Minneapolis by everybody, with everybody, for everybody,” said Hodges.

When Hodges takes office on Jan. 2, another challenge she plans to tackle is the rift between the city’s police force and many of its African-American citizens. Hodges said she plans to address the issue by employing both high-tech and low-tech methods.

“Just (recently) we found money in the budget for the body-cam program (that outfits officers with cameras as a part of their uniforms), which in other cities has reduced (citizen) complaints tremendously,” said Hodges. “But it’s also a question of how do we police. We also need to be high touch. We need police officers to be building relationships in the community and we need folks to know police officers.”

On the same day that Minneapolis chose Hodges to be its next mayor – taking over for departing mayor, R.T. Rybak, who held the office for more than a decade – in New York City, a big hoopla was being made over the victor in that race for mayor. But the hoopla had less to do with the victor, Bill de Blasio, and more to do with his interracial family.

But here in Minneapolis we will also have an interracial First Family. Hodges is married to Metropolitan Council Dist. 7 representative, Gary Cunningham, who is African-American. Hodges said her blended family has opened her eyes to certain hurdles faced by African-Americans and other ethnic groups.

“When I married Gary I became grandmother to four great kids and two of them are African-American boys in the Minneapolis Public Schools,” said Hodges. “Nothing has brought home to me more than that how crucial it is that our schools serve all children.”

Hodges said time will tell, but two things should measure her performance.

“It should be measured by are we doing what we need to do to grow this city (Hodges said she seeks to grow the city by 107,000 residents) and are we doing what we need to do to move the dial on that gaps that we face between white people and people of color,” said Hodges.