



Richard Florida: Toronto needs a muscular mayor

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Rob Ford's downfall is stunning – and it opens up a bigger can of worms for Toronto's future than even his contentious mayoralty did. In the short term, there are some daunting questions: Will he leave office in two weeks as ordered for violating conflict-of-interest rules? His lawyers have filed a request for a stay pending an appeal. If Mr. Ford does step down, will city council appoint his successor or will there be a by-election? If there's an election, will Mr. Ford's name be "the first one on the ballot"?

I've been anything but diffident about Rob Ford. I've called him the worst mayor in the modern history of cities and the most anti-urban mayor ever to preside over a large global city.

In 2010, long before he insulted Margaret Atwood and Toronto's gay community, before the Ferris wheel fiasco, the destruction of the city's bike lanes, and the proposed mega-casino, back before he was even elected, I argued on this page that he was a product of the same class divides that gave birth to the Tea Party. But in the U.S., I noted, "that political divide is also a jurisdictional divide, pitting city against suburb." Thanks to the amalgamation of 1998, Toronto's conflict is "taking place inside the city itself."

Avatar for all that is small-bore and destructive of the urban fabric that he has been, Mr. Ford is best understood as a symptom rather than a cause of Toronto's problems, which amount to a broader leadership vacuum. His departure – if depart he does – won't be enough on its own to change the city's trajectory.

This might sound ironic, considering all the damage Mr. Ford was able to do in just two years, but what Toronto needs is a more powerful mayor, not a less powerful one. Cities have become the key economic, political and social organizing units of our time. It's vital that their leadership be appropriately empowered.

Unlike the nations they're located in, whose governments are as often as not paralyzed by ideological gridlock, many of our great global cities are becoming virtual laboratories of democracy, developing pragmatic, non-ideological policy approaches to everything from crime and education to infrastructure development and job creation.

This is why world-class figures such as Ken Livingstone and Boris Johnson in London, Michael Bloomberg in New York, Rahm Emanuel in Chicago, and up-and-comers such as San Antonio's Julian Castro, Newark's Cory Booker, and Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley (a former Baltimore mayor) have been drawn to city politics – because it's an arena filled with possibility.

Liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican, these mayors devised and implemented a host of bold initiatives on everything from crime and education to sustainability and carbon reduction – hence the title of the political theorist Benjamin Barber's coming book, *If Mayors Ruled the World*.

But not in Toronto – which might be why no one of the stature of a Bloomberg or an Emanuel has come forward as a counterweight (or now a potential replacement) for Mr. Ford.

This isn't to say that Canada doesn't have energetic and effective mayors. But for all the heroic efforts that Vancouver's Gregor Robertson and Calgary's Naheed Nenshi have made, they have much less autonomy than their peers in the U.S. and Europe. Although Canada is as urbanized a country as any (81 per cent of its people live in a tiny fraction of its land area, with 18 per cent of them in Toronto, where 20 per cent of the nation's economic output comes from), its federal and provincial governments exert more control over its cities than their mayors do. Urban Canada is the proverbial dog, wagged by the provincial tail.

Toronto's Balkanization only adds to its challenges. The city faces a gaping class divide between its core and its suburbs. Downtown is more and more the domain of the creative class – those highly educated, well-compensated workers in technology, management, finance, science and academia, as well as students, artists, musicians and other bohemians associated with economic growth.

Toronto's suburbs, in contrast, are increasingly peopled by less-skilled, lower-income service-class workers and the city's declining working class. Mr. Ford rode their resentment and sense of disenfranchisement to the mayoralty. Post-Ford, Toronto needs not just to reboot its development

efforts; it must also bridge those divides. The city can't afford to squander any more of its political and real capital on an unwinnable culture war with itself.

And Toronto's business leadership needs to step up. They have been radio silent, even as Mr. Ford damaged their ability to attract global talent and devastated Toronto's brand of progressive, inclusive urbanism. If Toronto truly wants to join the ranks of great global cities, it needs a business community fully engaged in the project.

The Commercial Club of Chicago provided a singular force in that city's growth at the beginning of the last century, as World Business Chicago still does today. Joint Venture-Silicon Valley is a consortium of business, political, labour and civic leaders that has acted as a force for change in that region.

Before Toronto can realize its full potential, it must address the leadership crisis of which Mr. Ford is but a symptom and develop a new model of business, civic and political collaboration – one that has the capacity and heft to chart its own course.

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