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Urban scrawl: Bill Marshall on David Miller



The following commentary by Bill Marshall, the founder of the Toronto International Film Festival and former chief of staff to two Toronto mayors, was published in today's National Post:

July has been a month of pain and problems for Toronto Mayor David Miller — and there's still another week to go. The good news for the Mayor is that his job is safe until the snow falls in 2010. But maybe it's time to start printing brochures, buttons and lawn signs for Richard Florida — a new mayor for a better Toronto. You don't know Richard Florida? Oh, you soon will. He's an American city planning expert who has been lured to Toronto by the brilliant Roger Martin, dean of the Rotman School of Management. Every university in the world with ambitions to plan a great city has offered him a job. But he chose Toronto. He wrote the best-selling book *The Rise of the Creative Class* in 2002 and has been lecturing ever

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since.

Mayor Miller should embrace him because Florida is widely quoted saying, "My work is inspired by Toronto."

Florida loves Toronto's diversity, arts and openness. The condensed elevator pitch for his work is that in the information age, companies have to hire the best and brightest employees — and they won't work in a boring city.

His Bo-Ho Index says that cities that have flourishing Bohemian artistic communities and cities that are open to homosexual acceptance will attract the best employees. That's San Francisco, London — and Toronto.

Mayor Miller often talks about our arts and gay communities, but only when it suits him. I've only met the man three times and I consider him smart, honest and hard-working (he knows I worked on John Tory's mayoral campaign, so he probably doesn't trust my judgment).

But his judgment and timing are dreadful these days; I don't blame him — I blame his staff. I ran the mayor's office for David Crombie and Art Eggleton under the old "weak mayor" system without the benefit of a new City of Toronto Act.

We never lost a vote we cared about.

I've talked with people who ran mayor Mel Lastman's office. They never lost a vote either.

So how come Mayor Miller brings the most important vote in his career (to add two taxes) to city council last week and loses?

It wasn't the car dealers and real estate agents that did him in; it was the people in his office who can't count votes in advance.

The Mayor doesn't have a chief of staff; he has a coterie of special interest advisors and spokegobblers. Hint to Mayor: You need a knuckle-dragger who visits councillors and carefully dispenses carrots and sticks until the votes are bought and stay bought.

Brian Ashton is on the Mayor's hand-picked executive committee. According to press reports, no one called him to check on his vote. Galloping gargoyles!

My guess is that this is the defining moment in Mayor Miller's career.

Unless he turns things around, the voter's view is going to be: Great Hair, Bad Mayor. Can he fix it?

Sure. But somebody else has to be in charge of the Book. That's the Mayor's daily schedule and all summer he's been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Florida arrives in Toronto in September to be the academic head of the Centre for Jurisdictional Advantage and Prosperity, a \$120-million think/act brain-box funded by Premier Dalton McGuinty at the urging of Roger Martin, who insists that Toronto can be a global destination city.

Florida will drive a team of economists, marketers, accountants and strategists to push Toronto to the top of the list of the world's most desirable magnet cities.

Doesn't that sound like more fun than trying to keep the raccoons out of your green bin? Wouldn't you like a mayor that could do that?

On the cosmetic front, Florida is as tall as Mayor Miller, has excellent hair and is a great public speaker — and so far hasn't screwed anything up.

In the meantime, nobody at Queen's Park or Ottawa wants a lecture from a mayor who needed three tries to get the official city council portrait taken. They want to see grown-ups who demonstrate value for money to taxpayers. Not constant plundering of the reserve funds.

In the big casino of running cities, Mayor Miller is down to his last few chips. He has to change his bets soon. Or Mayor Florida looms.

Photo of Bill Marshall by Peter Redman / National Post



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