

Sterling, Andrew

From: Gary Votes [garyvotes@yahoo.com]
Sent: Monday, January 31, 2011 8:08 AM
To: Sterling, Andrew
Subject: What BBC Reports about Gary, Indiana

To: DUAB Members
Re: Life in the City of Gary

Many of you have not visited the City of Gary. But photographers from BBC have and they have posted this video on what they have found.

Before you vote on another round of tax cap exemptions for the City of Gary, thus placing another 50 percent tax burden on one of the poorest cities in Indiana, view this video. See our city the way others see it around the world...

You will be glad you did.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/newsnight/paulmason/2010/10/gary_indiana_unbroken_spirit_a.html

Richard Barnes, Ph.D.

Gary, IN

Gary, Indiana: Unbroken spirit amid the ruins of the 20th Century

Paul Mason | 10:47 UK time, Tuesday, 12 October 2010

I'd been to Gary, Indiana before. **In April 2009, when the Obama fiscal stimulus had just begun, the city's mayor had told me that all the city needed was \$400m of stimulus money in order to "fly like an eagle and make our country proud".**

To put this in context you have to know that Gary, home to what is still US Steel Corp's biggest plant, is suffering from one of the most advanced cases of urban blight in the developed world. Its city centre is near-deserted by day. The texture of the urban landscape is cracked stone, grass, crumbled brick and buddleia.

Gary is one third poor, 84% African American, and has seen its population halve over the past three decades. If crime, as the official figures suggest, has recently dropped off then - say the critics - that is because population flight from the city is bigger than the census figures show.

Gary in the end got \$266m of stimulus money and has, according to the federal "recipient reported data" created a grand total of 327 jobs. That's \$800,000 per job.

I went back determined to find out how the stimulus dollars had been spent; to get beyond the ideology and recriminations and see why President Barack Obama's stimulus has failed to turn the country around.

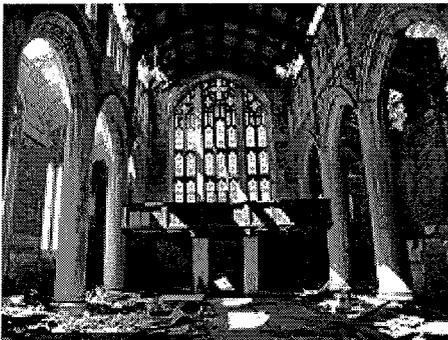
Because - if anywhere needs a stimulus it is Gary. If there were ever an easy win to be gained from state spending you would think it might be here.

David Tribby, professional photographer and son of a local steelworker, specialises in exploring urban decay. I persuaded Mr Tribby to take me into some of Gary's wrecked architectural masterpieces.

The striking thing is that they are all structurally dangerous and yet totally accessible. I did not have to cross a single piece of wire, tape or fencing to get in, nor did I encounter a security guard or dog patrol. The city seems to have given up even securing these ruins.

Urban dereliction

We toured the City Methodist Church - built in the 1920s with local stone. We stood on the once-sprung floor of the ballet studio in the Methodist School. We tramped through the remains of the post office, opened by Henry Morgenthau in 1936 as a New Deal reconstruction project, its wood-block floor coming apart; the peep-holes in the overhead walkway showing where Depression-era managers would check on the work-rate of the postal workers below.



The City Methodist Church was built in 1926 at a cost of \$1m but now stands derelict

I sat on the back row of the Seaman Hall, its seats creaking dustily, and imagined the young steelworkers and their girlfriends in the 1950s, playing Big Daddy and Maggie the Cat in an am-dram production of *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*, whose playbill is still peeling off the stage door amid the crumbling stonework of the proscenium arch.

I stood where Frank Sinatra stood on the day he came to Gary in 1945.

It was a feisty occasion because hundreds of white Gary school kids had gone on strike against the right of black kids to swim one day a week in the same swimming pool, and share the instruments in the band room.

Ol' Blue Eyes cancelled a \$10,000 gig, rushed to the Gary Memorial Auditorium, told the audience this was the most shameful event in the history of education, warned them he could "lick any S.O.B in the room" and then sang.

He did not, as in this 1945 propaganda film accuse them of being no better than a bunch of Nazis, but he did sing the song from that film - "The House I Live In" - a schmaltzy paean to what were then seen as core American values: religious tolerance and anti-racism. It was a film that would win Sinatra an Oscar, shortly followed, as the political climate changed, by a hounding from Senator Joe McCarthy.

What Sinatra fought against, three decades of industrial decline managed to complete. There has been "white flight" from Gary. More precisely there has been "middle class flight" - ie the salariat, including many of the steelworkers, has moved out, or moved into landscaped and patrolled communities on the edge of town.

Brink of bankruptcy?

So what's the story with Gary and the stimulus? The mayor believes the city is "last in line" when it comes to federal money - because the money is dispensed via the state of Indiana, which is Republican controlled. Mayor Rudy Clay tells me:

"I guess they thought, well, Gary voted in large numbers for the president, enabling him to take the state of Indiana, so he will look after them."

But it is more complex - Gary's public finances are a mess. It owes tens of millions of dollars to other entities. Its great get-out-of-jail card - tax revenue from casinos - turned out to be a busted flush. Its convention centre is dark most of the time. The one-time Sheraton Hotel, right next to the City Hall, is derelict.

With no ability to raise a local income tax it is reliant on property tax. But the State of Indiana passed laws capping tax raising powers, so by 2012 Gary's tax income from property will halve.

At that point, according to the fiscal monitor appointed by the city, it will lack the revenue to fund even its police, fire and ambulance services. The monitor calls for much of the rest of Gary's services to be privatised - but as city officials point out, once privatised they cannot enforce job guarantees that allow the city to employ local people. Says the monitor, bluntly:

"The city will simply have to give up some long-standing - and often important - services that are the responsibility of other governments, even when it is likely that those governments will not provide the same level of service."

In summary, Gary is about two years away from bankruptcy and is being forced to cut taxes and cut spending even as the federal government tries to pump money through.

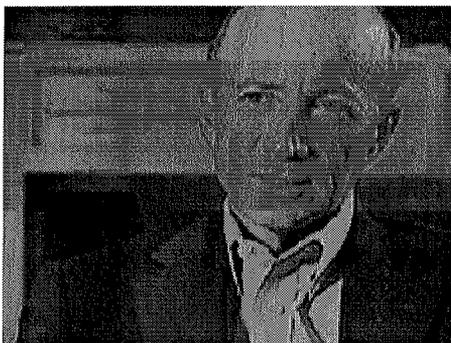
In this context, with the stimulus money not available to fix the core financial problem, the results were always going to be patchy.

In the event the stimulus dollars have mainly gone to a one-off schools re-organisation project - you can see some of the results of that in my report tonight - and to street renovation, and beefing up the arsenal of the local police. Gary's police have to combine *The Wire* style policing with a kind of armed social work amid a Gary's night-time chaos of "recreational shooting" and domestic disputes.

Philosophical divide

When I speak to the Republican governor of Indiana, Mitch Daniels, about Gary's plight, he is blunt. He blames Congress for micromanagement of where the stimulus could be spent. Could nothing more have been done?

"If there been more flexibility about the funds [from the US Congress], it could have, but I think it's important to be charitable here - Gary has been a disaster for many, many years. It is a tragedy what has occurred there and in some other cities here in the US. There wasn't going to be an immediate turn around, no matter how many borrowed dollars you showered on the place. "



Mitch Daniels is tipped to challenge Barack Obama for the US presidency in 2012

But, how can you enforce fiscal austerity on a place like Gary, at the same time as the official policy of the federal government is to reflate the economy? Surely, I ask Mr Daniels, something has to give? He says:

"Gary's the most extreme case that you could find in our state, but there are many others that are a lesser version of that same story, and as I say to those communities - their leaders - all the time: people aren't leaving here because you didn't tax them enough, because you didn't spend enough money on this or that public service - they left because you taxed them too much or you simply did not create the conditions for a private sector to flourish."

And that brings you right back up against the philosophical divide in American politics.

Large parts of the Indiana population believe all taxpayer dollars spent on Gary are wasted. Some Republican candidates in the 2 November election are standing on the explicit message that there has been no positive impact at all from the stimulus.

Whereas in Europe, and even parts of Asia, the national government would have taken charge of vectoring regeneration money to a place like Gary, the US does not seem in a mood to do public regeneration.

Uncertain future

Gary's city officials are well aware that there are templates for resurrecting their city, and they've got the basic first steps defined - demolishing 3,000 derelict homes, installing new street lights. The stimulus money applied for in each case has been slow in coming and less than asked for. Beyond the ideology, the American public sector seems very poorly geared to spending money, full stop, despite being in charge of quite a lot of it.

Gary's uncertain future fascinates economists and urban planning experts - along with cities like Detroit and Flint in Michigan it is in danger of just being reclaimed by nature. One of the black community leaders I met in Gary was passionately advocating that they simply raze whole blocks to the ground and set up urban farms.

When you go into the wreck of the Palace Theatre on Gary's Broadway - just across from the wreck of VJ Records, which released the Beatles' first ever single in the US - you get a sense of the splendour of an industrial community at its height.

When it opened, the theatre - like so much of Gary's architecture, built in the "Mission Revival" style - contained blue fountains and crushed velvet, each seat arm moulded into a Moroccan-style arch.

In the orchestra pit there is a squashed grand piano, made in Chicago by Adam Schaff, surely the original one installed there in 1927. I banged its grime encrusted keys and discovered to my astonishment that, amid the clunks and groans, a clear D-sharp three octaves above Middle C.

It took just a single century for Gary to rise and fall. Its people still carry that relaxed pride you find in black communities across the industrial mid-West. It's a developed and quite mature urban culture - where everybody seems to know each other, an edgy community but not really a broken one, despite the night-time drug and gun antics of some young men. Go into the schools and you can feel that its spirit is not broken. What is broken is the landscape.

If it is ever one day fixed we will know that America has found a way to cope with the urban collapse that comes with industrial decline. Conversely Gary may be just the first leafy oasis of a post-industrial dystopia that awaits, maybe a century down the line.

Watch my report from Gary on Newsnight at 2230 on Tuesday 12 October 2010. Or catch it afterwards on the BBC iPlayer. On Wednesday I explore the new penury of America's middle class - and the political discontent it is stoking up.

Sterling, Andrew

From: AYoung7550@aol.com
Sent: Monday, January 31, 2011 9:21 AM
To: Sterling, Andrew
Subject: Two must-read articles for DUAB members considering "relief" for the GSD

Below are two must-read articles for members of the DUAB that are considering awarding "relief" to the Gary Sanitary District and/or the City of Gary.

Is this the type of behavior and performance that is deserving of reward?

Is GSD turning lake into sewer?

Comments

January 30, 2011
BY GITTE LAASBY, (219) 648-2183

GARY -- Over the past three years, the Gary Sanitary District has discharged at least 6.8 billion gallons of raw and partially treated sewage to the bacteria-impaired Grand Calumet River and the flood-prone Little Calumet River, according to a Post-Tribune analysis of state data.

And there's no end in sight. Neither the state or federal government has set a deadline for Gary to reduce its overflows and treatment bypasses.

» [Click to enlarge image](#)



Don Smales, plant superintendent, looks out where the final effluent discharges from Gary Sanitary District into the Grand Calumet River in Gary.
(Stephanie Dowell/Post-Tribune)

Gary combined sewer overflows

Here's how much raw sewage combined with stormwater the Gary Sanitary District discharged to the Little and Grand Calumet rivers, according to state records:

2010 (May through July) 186,882,000 gallons, 40 overflows over 20 days

2009 1,297,600,000 gallons, 187 overflows over 60 days

Gary treatment Bypasses

Here's how much partially treated sewage Gary Sanitary District discharged into the Grand Calumet River the past six years, according to state records.

2010: 1,891,924,200 gallons, 65 bypasses.

2009: 1,496,120,201 gallons, 130 bypasses.

2008: 2,022,398,000 gallons, 98 bypasses.

2007: 5,200 gallons, 4 overflows.

2006: 660,000 gallons, 3 overflows.

2005: 0 gallons, 0 overflows.

Total to Grand Calumet River, 2008-2010: 5.35 billion gallons

GARY SANITARY OVERFLOWS AND BASEMENT BACKUPS

Here's how many times Gary Sanitary District overflows led to backups into buildings including basements, according to state records. The number includes only complaints about backups that the district investigated.

2010: 29

2009: 31

Source: Gary Sanitary District reports to Indiana Department of Environmental Management

The federal government says it's negotiating a legal agreement with Gary, but hasn't reached one since it started trying five years ago. The Indiana Department of Environmental Management hasn't issued a single fine against the district for its more than 600 combined sewer overflows and bypasses since 2008.

Henry Henderson, Midwest director for the Natural Resources Defense Council, said the system "seems set up to allow perpetual overflows."

"This is astonishing," he said. "This seems to me like you've got basically a third of the year, you've got overflows, which are cumulative to an extraordinary degree. The system seems to be poised ... to allow overflows and violations. ... It ends up contaminating our beaches. It's just something that seems to me straightforward that we need to fix. Is it the fate of our waters to be sewers? It looks like a number of our leaders think so."

According to the Post-Tribune analysis, the Gary Sanitary District dumped nearly 1.3 billion gallons of raw, untreated, sewage combined with stormwater to the Little Calumet and Grand Calumet rivers in 2009 alone. The overflows spread across 60 days.

The Grand Calumet River discharges to Lake Michigan, the source of drinking water for millions of people, including residents of Northwest Indiana and Chicago.

"We might have years where there's more precipitation but I think the fact that it's so consistent is frightening," said Jennifer Nebe, water program manager at Save the Dunes. "I think people would be pretty shocked if they knew how often that happens in Northwest Indiana and across the nation. Pretty much raw sewage is discharged into our waters regularly."

The diluted sewage discharges, known as combined sewer overflows, generally happen during heavy rains when the treatment plant doesn't have the capacity to process all the sewage. So the district discharges the untreated sewage before it reaches the plant. That's allowed during heavy rains.

More than half of the sewage, about 707 million gallons, went to the Grand Calumet. The remaining 590 million gallons went to the Little Calumet.

The Grand Calumet River is impaired for E. coli from Gary to the Illinois state line. That means the river exceeds federal water quality standards for bacteria. E. coli is typically found in human waste. When the bacteria reach a beach, it can lead to beach closures.

No deadline for resolution

Treatment plant superintendent Don Smales said Gary cleans out its sewers and invests in upgrades at its treatment plant. Smales said the district is not separating storm and sanitary sewers, which is a common way for districts to stop overflows.

Municipalities are supposed to have a long-term control plan to reduce their overflows, but Gary is waiting for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to approve a computer model used by the city's consultants before the district can submit its plan, he said.

"They have to have the model so they can run the simulation," Smales said. "They simulate different storm events to determine how the sewer system reacts to where the problems are, and they will make a recommendation on how we can reduce those combined sewer overflows over the long term."

Sewer overflows weren't part of the deal when the federal government entered into a legal agreement with the Sanitary District in 2002 regarding other environmental issues. EPA spokesman Pete Cassell said the EPA, the U.S. Department of Justice and the city of Gary have been negotiating a new deal since 2005. It could contain a deadline for reducing overflows.

"The terms are still being negotiated. The time lines are still confidential," he said.

Smales said the last meeting was "well over a year" ago.

"I haven't heard anything officially that we're negotiating a new consent decree. We've had some meetings and they've talked about some things they want to incorporate in that," he said.

Partially treated sewage

Discharges of diluted, raw sewage are not the only problems at Gary Sanitary District, which serves Gary, Hobart, Merrillville and Lake Station.

Every year for the past three years, the district has also discharged more than 1.5 billion gallons of partially treated sanitary sewage into the Grand Calumet River, according to the Post-Tribune analysis. The nearly 300 overflows totaled 5.35 billion gallons over three years.

During a bypass, not all sewage goes through all stages of treatment. In many instances, the third and final step of treatment, where small particles settle, was left out.

"What it tells me is that not only do they have a failed infrastructure, but it's not sized properly and there's a significant need for a radical recalculation of how they manage water resources in the city," NRDC's Henderson said.

Despite the bypasses, Gary has not violated its wastewater permit since 2008. In 2009 and 2010, the district met all limits in its wastewater permit, which were set to protect human health and the environment, Smales said.

"We're meeting our permit. It's all a matter of what you consider to be OK. It'd be great if we got tertiary treatment ... (but) we're not violating the permit," he said. "It's equipment failures or it gets hydraulically overwhelmed. Sometimes, the equipment needs to be maintained and it needs to be taken out to be cleaned. There is a lot of redundancy here in the treatment plant."

Maintenance issues

Records examined by the Post-Tribune show the plant had serious maintenance problems in 2009. Plant superintendent's reports for 2009 show nearly 10,000 work orders were generated for maintenance at the treatment plant and sewer system that year. Half of the sand filters responsible for the third stage of treatment were out for 3.5 months in the first half of 2009, reports show. That allowed overflows and bypasses to happen 40 percent of the days that year.

At the time, United Water was contracted to manage the treatment plant. A United Water spokesman did not return a call for comment. United Water is facing federal indictment for violating the Clean Water Act. Employees allegedly increased the amount of chlorination used to kill E. coli just before water samples were taken.

Gary ended its contract with United Water in July 2010 to save money.

Smales said the district plans to upgrade the third stage of its treatment plant, but needs money to do so.

'Integrated approach'

Municipalities traditionally stop sewer overflows by separating storm and sanitary sewers. That increases capacity and avoids releasing untreated sanitary sewage. But the cost to do so is in the tens of millions of dollars, and the incentive can be small if enforcement is limited. The city of Hobart recently accepted a fine of \$1,000 from IDEM for a 3-million-gallon overflow.

"That \$1,000 pales in comparison. So if you're under a tight budget versus millions of dollars to make these improvements, maybe a little more enforcement is in order," said Nebe from Save the Dunes. "These upgrades are so costly ... and nobody likes to hear about taxes being raised or new fees on their bills, but this money has to come from somewhere. When people hear about sewage being discharged, I think they might start to understand the need for these fees."

Henderson said many other cities on the Great Lakes, including Chicago, Milwaukee and Detroit are facing issues to similar Gary. Researchers estimate 24 billion gallons of sewage get dumped into the Great Lakes each year. Some communities are now finding money to reduce that by simultaneously addressing sanitary infrastructure needs, transportation needs and energy costs.

When roads are built or existing vacant lots and dilapidated buildings are turned into green space, that reduces runoff, so less water runs to the sewers, he explained. In turn, the city saves energy at the treatment plant.

"If you're able to keep a whole lot of water out of contamination, you don't have to treat it and it reduces drastically your energy demand at the treatment plant. You look at it in a much more integrated way," he said.

Reducing overflows also reduces basement backups and flood risks to downstream communities, such as Hammond and East Chicago. It's about seeing the opportunities to revamp a community, Henderson said.

"This is an alarm clock like a lot of other a clocks," he said. "We have means to fix this and returns in terms of increased values. It's not depressing. It's 'Wake up and start moving! The helicopters are coming.'"

Union leaders blast Gary officials

Comments

January 31, 2011

BY MICHAEL GONZALEZ, POST-TRIBUNE CORRESPONDENT

GARY -- During a recent news conference in a small, crowded union meeting room, AFSCME leaders leveled angry charges at city officials, accusing them of running up legal expenses by dishonoring contracts, holding back workers' pay and often creating an unfriendly work environment.

Leaders of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees have been especially difficult to work with, are failing to communicate with members and are costing their charges work and opportunities, city officials countered.

With under 100 rank-and-file members caught somewhere in the middle, both sides continued to allege "bad faith" on the officials sitting across from each other at the bargaining table.

There was a laundry list of complaints by union officials, most of which were answered by city attorney Susan Severtson, who, along with attorney Carl Jones, represents the city in arbitrations and other city-union matters.

"It's a waste of the taxpayers' money for the mayor to act this way," said David Warrick, AFSCME Council 62's executive director. "The city and mayor continue to disregard the fact that AFSCME represents employee, and they are actually costing the city more money due to more arbitrations."

Severtson said she is at a loss to explain why AFSCME-city relationships have been so acrimonious, but the city has been above the board and compliant with contracts, she said.

"I'm sure the economy has some part to play in this dispute, but it seems to be unique to this union," Severtson said. "We would prefer to have union and worker harmony."

Union leaders complained of more than 18 union-city disputes that still must go to arbitration. They also accused city department heads and supervisors of engaging in illegal "bumps," or inappropriately handling seniority moves among represented employees.

In particular, AFSCME officials said the city ignored terms of the collective bargaining agreement that laid out how bumps should've been handled last November.

AFSCME leader Willie Wallace, who represents workers at the Gary Sanitary District, also insisted GSD denied his members their Dec. 31st paycheck among other charges.

"We hope this will get (Clay) out of his chair and do what's right and get the city back on track or get someone else to run the city," AFSCME staff member Cassandra Stigger said of the press conference.

But the city has been acting in good faith with all the unions, including AFSCME, despite some difficult discussions, Severtson said, adding she hoped the recent spate of complaints wasn't politically motivated.

The collective bargaining agreement with AFSCME members does not lay out a bumping procedure, but the city wanted to work with union officials on last November's changes, Severtson said.

"Our opinion was let's move forward with a bumping process since those who were out of work could actually get back to work," she said, adding the city tries to work out disagreements directly with union officials.

"We know that arbitration is the most expensive and least effective method of resolving disputes."

As for charges GSD withheld money from employees, all employees got the pay they had coming in a rare year that saw an extra pay period, said GSD Director Rinzer Williams.

He said nine employees did not get a check on Dec. 31 because they weren't entitled to it.

Williams said there has not been a collective bargaining agreement in place since he took the helm of GSD last year.

The employees could've joined the rest of the city in taking slightly smaller checks throughout the year to be sure they received checks on Dec. 31 or taken their normal paychecks and foregone the last period of the year, he said.

"Surely I understand the hardship that would be put on them, but it was not my doing," Williams said. "By the end, I had exhausted every known rational remedy to demonstrate they hadn't been shorted a check, but by then, it was clear (AFSCME members and leaders) were no longer acting in good faith."

During an AFSCME news conference airing a list of complaints against Gary and Gary Sanitary District officials, union leader Willie Wallace accused GSD Director Rinzer Williams of requiring 11 new hires to gather the names and addresses of four residents who would be willing to post signs in their yards supporting Mayor Rudy Clay's re-election campaign.

Several of those employees, all refusing to provide their names, verified Wallace's claim.

One man said he was told by Williams "a vote for Rudy is a vote for me."

Williams said nothing else to the employees, but a clerical worker followed up the requests with a memo to the workers with a deadline for turning in the sign-up sheets.

"I felt pressured to turn that sheet back in," said one worker. "I basically did it so (Williams) would stop asking me about it."

Williams said he asked nine employees -- all of whom were either his personal friends or listed Clay as a reference on their job applications -- for help with recruiting Clay supporters at the end of their work shifts and in his office, but he believed he did nothing wrong.

"I didn't see these people at that time as my employees," Williams said. "I saw them as friends or supporters of the mayor."

"In retrospect, maybe I should've done it away from the office, but it wouldn't have changed the story."

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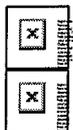
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ter wrote:

These actions perpetrated by Rinzer Williams, that have been exposed and written about in this story, represent indictable offenses. There is clearly a quid pro quo involved here: a job for promised votes.

Both the Union and this reporter have done a great job bringing this to light. Now, it is incumbent upon them both to make sure it stays exposed and gets the attention of the proper investigative authorities that it deserves!

 I don't think that anyone needs to look too much farther than stuff like this when they wonder why the Gary Sanitary District continuously violates environmental laws and pollutes the source of all of our drinking water as a matter of course. Maybe if they instead of hiring people based solely on their political affiliations, and instead hired people based on their skills and experience, it would seem altogether likely that we might not have quite so many operational problems at the plant.

Every citizen and public official of Gary and all of the surrounding communities should be enraged! They should all muster the courage and devote the time to calling either the State Attorney general and/or the US Attorney and demand an immediate investigation into this despicable situation.

1/31/2011