



Ballard, Kennedy short on specifics

by Steve Hammer

With just a few weeks to go until the mayoral election, both incumbent [Mayor Greg Ballard](#) and his challenger, [Melina Kennedy](#), are outdoing themselves running attack ads against each other.

Taken side by side, they represent two mutually exclusive views of the city. Ballard's ads tell us that crime is down and the city has never been more safe, thanks to the mayor's firm action to control crime.

Kennedy's response is that crime is up and the city is one of the most dangerous in the country; therefore, we need the kind of strong leadership and rapport with law enforcement that only she can provide.

And so on and so on. This campaign is not, by a long shot, the dirtiest one in city history but it's been one of the most cynical and misleading. Neither candidate offers much more of a vision for the city than that their opponent would screw up everything. Neither has detailed any kind of progressive agenda that would help Indianapolis create jobs, rebuild infrastructure and move us forward as a community.

It's a good thing hardly anyone paid attention to their recent debate, in which they reinforced those talking points, took polite jabs at each other and, despite prodding by the debate's moderators, continued to be specific only on the point that their opponent is unworthy of the office.

Indianapolis deserves better than this campaign and these candidates. The only thing the debate affirmed decisively is that the [Libertarian Party](#) has just as many, if not more, good ideas as the two major parties.

I was kidding, kind of, that either of the candidates could buy my endorsement for some cash and booze. Wisely, neither took me up on the offer. But I was hoping the frustrations expressed about the tone and generic blandness of the campaign would spur at least one of them into being more specific and visionary in their statements.

Their TV ads are disgraceful; even their soft and fuzzy biographical ads make the candidates seem weak and unfit for office.

Meanwhile, the city is chock-full of issues awaiting bold leadership. Public transportation is one of those issues both candidates discuss in great detail without saying very much. It's a disgrace that our city's transit system is not even in the top 100 nationwide.

The mayoral candidates agree this is disgraceful and something needs to be done about it. That's pretty much where they stop. Neither gives any credible explanation as to why the situation is so dire or what they'd do to fix it other than to set up study committees.

The subject has been studied to death over the past 40 years and every time the conclusion is the same: Taxpayers are unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary to improve the situation and our leaders are equally as unwilling to petition the General Assembly to allow modernized ways of funding public transportation.

As a consequence, each year IndyGo passes a budget that kicks the can down the road for 12 months in hope that help is on the way. The service suffers as a result and we continue to have a well-intentioned but woefully inadequate transit system that underserves the city.

And on every other major civic issue, the mayoral candidates offer a choice between "more of the same" and "meaningless gestures towards improvement." That is no choice at all and is something about which we, as citizens, should express outrage.

Fortunately for the candidates, few people pay attention to the mayoral campaign at all and even fewer examine the

backgrounds, qualifications and views of the candidates. If they did, they'd be pissed off at the choices they've been given for mayor.

For more than a generation, Indianapolis was governed by Richard Lugar and Bill Hudnut, two progressive Republicans who not only kept the streets cleared of snow but helped design a blueprint of a thriving city that attracted conventions, sporting events and tourists. They oversaw a complete renovation of downtown and helped execute those plans.

During the last generation, we've had Stephen Goldsmith, Bart Peterson and Greg Ballard, none of whom possessed even a fraction of that willingness to lead and make tough decisions.

Where does that leave us as the election approaches? With an incumbent who says he has done the best he could despite being dealt a difficult hand and a challenger who says we could have done better over the past four years.

Actually, both of them are right. But that doesn't help us, the people of Indianapolis, who pay for and expect world-class leadership. We deserve better. One can only hope the next mayor's term will be more effective than the pitiful campaigns we have seen this year.

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