

Milwaukee Police Officers Deserve a Fair Shake.

There can be no doubt that race is still a predominant aspect of our identity in America. Although we have made considerable progress since the equal rights movement in the 1960's, race continues to play a large role in socioeconomic discussions and political dialog.

One would be hard pressed to find a more prevalent example of racial relevance than in the relationship between urban police officers and members of the African-American community. There is an undeniable animosity and distrust that has weakened the ability of city leaders and police departments to provide the level of safety that instills confidence in investors and citizens in general.

Here in Milwaukee, riots occurred within hours of a police shooting, long before real information could be attained and disseminated. In fact, leaders of the African-American community were suggesting the riots might move to the downtown area even while the mayor was on TV begging people to remain calm until we at least knew what happened.

Police find themselves in the middle of a culture war between hardened criminals who have essentially taken over parts of the city and law-abiding citizens who fully expect the police to do their job.

When a police officer in Milwaukee is involved in an "officer-involved" shooting or if there is a complaint about how a police officer's on the job performance, the case goes before the Milwaukee Fire and Police Commission. It is the commission that, in a very large degree, decides the fate of that police officer.

Would anyone argue that those police officers deserve a fair hearing by a non-partisan board that would take into consideration all aspects of the situation and have multiple layers of experience and knowledge to draw from? We have over the years viewed diversity as a way to combat singlemindedness and avoid group think. We have learned to value alternative experiences as something that expands our perspectives.

Why then, would we deny our the men and women who serve put themselves in harm's way on a daily basis in Milwaukee the opportunity to have their job performances be reviewed by a diverse board? Those we hire to do a very difficult job deserve as much. This board consists of people who impact the careers and livelihoods of those who stand in judgement before them. The current make-up of the board falls short of that goal.

Not only is there nobody currently on the board who has any experience as a police officer or fire fighter, there is not one member who even might be remotely be considered conservative. Also lacking from the board is a victim's advocate.

The current board is made up a former democrat staffer, a gun control advocate, a lawyer for Voices de la Frontera, a past-president of African-American Lawyers Association, a life-time member of the NAACP, the secretary for "Friends of Housing", and the founder of the Latino Entrepreneurial Network. To be clear, all of these individuals would be reasonable additions to any board. Collectively they represent a very one-sided board. Every one of these members belong to or led a group that is very closely aligned with the Democratic Party.

It literally would be offensive to suggest that the make-up of this board is diverse, non-partisan or unbiased. A fact by the way that has not gone unnoticed by police officers, police officer candidates or by any other impartial observer.

Is there any wonder Milwaukee is experiencing a shortage of police officers?