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CURT HUDSON

Mayoral candidate Dwight Evans on Market Street.

On the stump for mayor, Evans stresses public safety

ATHENA D. MERRITT
STAFF WRITER

New York has a title Pennsylvania Rep. Dwight Evans would like to take as the next mayor of Philadelphia.

The city was ranked as the safest big city in an FBI report released last year. Public safety is the first place Evans said he would start in fixing Philadelphia's own problems during a meeting with reporters and editors at the Philadelphia Business Journal to outline his objectives as mayor.

For jobs to return, for people to return, for opportunity to return, Philadelphia must stem the tide of violence, said Evans, one of five declared candidates in the city's mayoral race. For that reason, Evans efforts would include some faces not normally associated with economic development, he said.

"The people who would be a part of my economic development force are the police chief," Evans said.

His top priority as mayor (he ran unsuccessfully in the 1999 Democratic primary) would be to add 500 police officers to the city's ranks, Evans said. Evans would also like to see the establishment of an entity similar to New Jersey's Office of Economic Growth, which would coordinate economic development efforts across the city's departments and agencies.

For Philadelphia to succeed, everyone in government from management on down must become ambassadors who are accountable and contributing to the city's growth and development, he said.

"There has to be receptivity that no idea is a bad idea," said Evans, adding that city employees should be encouraged to ask themselves what they have done to grow the city at the end of every day.

Fiscal health is also important, which is why he would look to control costs by riding the city of unnecessary departments, he said.

"I believe in fiscal health because

through fiscal health other things will happen," said Evans, who as chairman of the Appropriations Committee oversees the state's \$26.1 billion general fund spending plan.

Evans would not identify what departments the city should eliminate, although he does back the idea of privatizing the Philadelphia Gas Works and is proposing state legislation to begin that process. He said recommendations that would improve the city exist in reports that had been compiled over the years and he would seek to comb through those in search of good ideas that had not been enacted, rather than conduct a new study.

The once-struggling community of West Oak Lane, in Northwest Philadelphia, could serve as a blueprint for revitalizing other areas of the city, Evans said. Plagued by graffiti, abandoned homes and crime, the area rebounded, addressing the ills through the nonprofit community development organization Ogontz Avenue Revitalization Corp., which was started by Evans in 1983.

The city's community colleges and tech schools are both assets, that could be better used to strengthen its work force, Evans said. Evans is also open to looking into public/private partnerships as a means of solving the city's transportation and infrastructure funding woes, he said.

"I don't think it's an all-or-nothing approach," Evans said.

Evans talked about a need to restructure city taxes but would not be specific.

In addition to Evans, former City Councilman Michael A. Nutter, businessman Tom Knox, U.S. Rep. Chaka Fattah and U.S. Rep. Bob Brady are vying for the Democratic nomination in the primary on May 15. Union leader John Dougherty, who had considered a candidacy, cited family health issues when he pulled himself out of the running this week.

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