

Fattah stresses anti-poverty and small business programs

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When his second term ended former Philadelphia Mayor Ed Rendell left behind a more fiscally healthy city. Mayor John F. Street intends to leave behind cleaner neighborhoods.

If he becomes mayor, U.S. Rep. Chaka Fattah sees his legacy to be a city of greater opportunity, he said while laying out his plans to editors and reporters of the Business Journal this week.

At the heart of his agenda is a plan to lease Philadelphia International Airport to generate funds to give opportunities to the city's poor, which make up a quarter of the population.

Small businesses, the primary drivers of the economy, would also become a top priority, said Fattah. He intends to create a senior position within the Mayor's Office focused solely on them.

While big deals make for great headlines, Fattah said he would veer from that past course to benefit the many and not the few. In doing so, he would change the economic infrastructure of the city's Commerce Department, the Philadelphia Industrial Development Corp., a nonprofit founded by the city in 1958 to spur economic development, and the Philadelphia Commercial Development Corp., he said.

"The city is not the new Comcast

tower or the Cira Centre or the historical sites that attract interest in us," Fattah said. "The city is the people who live here, who work here, who own businesses here."

Among Fattah's proposed changes for businesses would be the elimination of the business-privilege tax that imposes a levy on a business whether it makes a profit or not. Fattah would replace the tax with a net profits charge, which would broaden the tax base to those escaping taxation under the current structure, such as banks and insurance companies, he said.

Fattah would also usher in loan programs aimed at supporting small businesses, including disaster funding and relocation funding for intra-city moves, as well as a one-stop shop approach by the city in providing assistance. City businesses would also be given preference in city contracting, Fattah said.

"My first priority is I want to protect the jobs we have," Fattah said.

In addressing work force development, Fattah would create job clubs throughout the city that would serve as points of contact for both job training and hiring. He favors less customized job training that, he said, would better provide the skills to stay in the work force longer.

"I'd like to focus more on raising general educational abilities," Fattah said.

Philadelphia would also benefit if it regained control of the Philadelphia Parking Authority and leased out assets, such as the airport. Leasing the airport for 30 years could generate more than \$3 billion in gross proceeds for the city, Fattah projected, which would be paid upfront by the entity leasing it. After debt payment, \$1.9 billion would be left over for the city to invest, providing proceeds of \$150 million to \$160 million annually toward his plan to bolster education across all levels to increase opportunities for the poor.

In moving forward, Philadelphia must also focus on the region and involve the city's major stakeholders in shaping its future, Fattah said. Increased representation is needed on the SEPTA board to ensure the city's best interests. The city has just two votes on the 15-member board. The city should also seek to improve regional rail transportation, he said.

"Our economic future is tied to the region," Fattah said. "People are interested in the Philadelphia region."

The other major candidates include: former City Councilman Michael A. Nutter, state Rep. Dwight Evans, U.S. Rep. Bob Brady and Al Taubenberger, president of the Greater Northeast Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce and the only Republican in the race. The Democratic primary will be May 15.

EYE ON CITY HALL

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