



# **High school students bring their concerns to Alton mayoral candidates through Youth Engagement Forum**

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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**ALTON** - A newly-formed Youth Engagement Program (YEP) hosted a mayoral forum, completely created by students from Alton High School.

The forum was held at the Alton YWCA on Saturday, March 18, 2017, and was moderated by Alton High School senior and National Honor Society President Marissa Whiteside. Questions were created by local high school students with assistance from their teachers, and were submitted to the candidates before the event, so they had time to prepare well thought-out answers.

Candidates were given two minutes per question, and time was kept by YEP students holding cards. Before the questions, they were given four minutes to introduce themselves. In order to ensure fairness, candidates were allowed to answer questions in a rotating order.

## **Introductions**

**Scott Dixon (SD):** "Our city's future is your future to create," Dixon said. "It's your job to hold us accountable. Sometimes we elect a politician who is slick and self-serving. It's like hiring a new manager without looking at their resume. Voting is not just a right, it's a possibility. Alton must do a lot better, and it can do a lot better."

Dixon said for 150 years, Alton was a good city with a river and industry based economy. He said Walker took office while the entire nation's economy was on an upswing. He said violent crime under Walker was at a five year high, and the city was suffering from a \$2 million deficit from decreased property values.

Dixon said Alton had a "great river with majestic hills and old architecture." He said it had "all the right ingredients," but can't do much without mixing them right. He said Alton needs a good leader to put city ahead of himself and have know-how for complex problems. He said he would be willing to work hard and put city ahead of self. He said he has already done it through decades of volunteer work. Dixon again agreed to work without a pension or health insurance.

He said he has studied former towns who have "pivoted to prosperity," despite closed factories.

**Dan Rauschkolb (DW):** "It shows great promise to have young voters in the room," Rauschkolb said. "As I get older, I will be in good hands."

Rauschkolb said he has served 22 years with the Alton Police Department, and has been in every neighborhood.

"I've seen Alton at best and worst," he said. "We need to get back to the basics. We need fresh leadership to revitalize business districts, we can no longer ignore crumbling roads and falling jobs. Alton should not stand on the sidelines while its best and brightest go elsewhere."

Rauschkolb said he would help create new technology and biotech districts to expand job base. He also promised to streamline business applications, reduce start-up fees and eliminate red tape. He said he would utilize city workers to pave roads to keep tax dollars local.

"We need to keep money in city," he said.

Rauschkolb also said he would work to create new housing opportunities, and work for affordable senior housing communities in Alton. He also promised he will create a Heroin Task Force by partnering with state and federal law enforcement agencies. One of the most important things for an administration he said is the creation of an indoor recreation center for the youth.

**Brant Walker (BW):** Walker promised to turn over a "much better city to you guys than we inherited." He said his administration has implemented integrated policies, giving every citizen the right to prosper without moving to another city. He again touted his expansion of Alton's innovative business retention program, which asks business owners what do they like or not like about doing business in Alton. He said as much as 80 percent of jobs in the future will come from small businesses as well as current business expansions.

He said the business retention program found a business ready to relocate, and was able to convince them to relocate inside of Alton. Walker said retail numbers are increasing, and 200 business licenses have been issued under his administration. Walker has also seen unemployment from 11.6-7.1 percent.

Walker said his administration also implemented community policing, which he described as a proactive instead of reactive measure. He said his administration has overseen a community policing model sponsored by former Police Chief Daniel Isom through the University of Missouri St. Louis, which engaged the police department with the community and community leaders.

He said he has seen infrastructure and quality of life issues raise under his administration, showcasing \$3 million in park grants his administration secured.

"Quality of life and green spaces are terribly important," Walker said. "With a very tight budget, we have been able to rework our public works department. We can continue the progress we made, or we can go backwards."

**Joshua Young (JW):** Young thanked fellow candidates for sharing the election cycle, saying it was making historic grounds for political engagement. He again spoke of his Progressive platform. Young said he was raised by an amount of social activism, saying he was born and raised in Alton where he attended school in the Alton School District.

Following school, Young went to join the U.S. Marine Corps before being honorably discharged. He said he wants inclusion, with a harmonious template.

"I want to allow everyone a chance to get involved in the city," he said. "This isn't a situation where you're going to inherit anything. We're living in real time. Things must be brought to the table and get done. You can create, you can be backed by a city with an advocacy policy."

Young said he wanted to bring the city's renter to homeowner ratio lowered, saying Alton would attract more businesses with more homeowners.

He said his administration would have no power or privilege.

"We're all to move this city in a Progressive state together," he said.

If elected, Young assured each of the four candidates would have a place in his administration.

**You have all public how important the youth in our community is. What will you do to engage area youth, including high school students and how does your vision for the city ensure our youth can return to alton possibly after college or training? Cite specific examples**

**DR:** "Engaging youth is one of my number one priorities.," Rauschkolb said.

He promised to make services attractive to all youths, which would make Alton a place where people work, enjoy themselves and live. Rauschkolb said he would focus on extracurriculars and sports.

"Time and time again the youth are the leaders," Rauschkolb said. "It's a matter of showing respect. We will invest in complexes and facilities. Our kids will want to return

for jobs and stable neighborhoods. We must make it attractive. I hate to see youth go because of lack of jobs. They graduate and have dreams. We need to offer our youth dreams in Alton."

**BW:** "One of the biggest reasons I chose to run is because I am a father of a daughter who is a senior in high school here. I want a place she can come back and live after graduating from SIUE. What we do now will affect our future. I will ensure youth have a voice and remain engaged to work with government."

Walker said he wanted a high school student engaged with park board following a Youth Speak Out event at the Riverbender.com Community Center, but lamented that no one "took him up on it." Walker said he would continue to work with the school district, citing his administration's decision to fix a sinkhole at middle school. He said his administration has reached out to trades classes at the high school, who did a lot of work fixing bathrooms at Killion Park. He said he was also working on an internship program for high school seniors and college students who could possibly start working at city hall.

"We will always partner with schools," he said.

**JY:** Young described himself as a "pretty innovative and visionary thinker," adding he was "true to cult of Progressive."

Young said students as young middle school can get involved in the community.

"I speak of champions, and YEP is full of potential champions," he said. They will influence their peer groups. You have brand new ideologies we don't have. We're not outside of the box thinkers to that degree. This is what a Progressive platform will open up to the youth. We will allow to get you engaged full-time."

Young showcased a boxing program, which had great support from the Alton Police Department. The grassroots movement was called Fists Up, Guns Down, and was working toward ending gun violence with boxing, until one of its organizers was arrested for drug and gun charges. Young has since vowed to revive the program with well-vetted trainers.

"Groups out there now are very much capable of providing more options," Young said. "Progressive platform gives a 'sky's the limit' potentiality."

Young showcased community initiatives including, My Brother's Keeper and Young Marines, which are sponsored by Greg Norris, who Young "considered a champion."

"People like that and individuals provide other opportunities for youth to be engaged," he said. "The door is wide open. As an advocacy style administrator, I will make sure we do all we can as an administrator to do what we can for youth."

**SD:** "Our youth must be engaged," Dixon said. "If they feel wanted and part of the process, they become part of the city. We need to see more high school students at council meetings, and high school and college students on committees."

Dixon said updating the city's plan will be good and informative, and promised it would be citizen-based to address the wants and needs of the city. He said the plan will include connected parks and trails with updated programs and attractions.

"We have not really updated the parks to reflect people's updated lifestyles," he said. "We need to support independent initiatives instead of reinventing the wheel."

Dixon also said he would like to see more youth trained in civic engagement.

"People move to or not away from a city, because it has a lot of things to do," he said. "I would support local management of amphitheater. Good schools also keep you here. When you grow up and have children, you want them to go to a good school."

Dixon also said he would work to bring more tourism to the area, saying tourism will create customers and more opportunities while creating more things to do and increased engagement.

**Since the members of YEP are area high school students, many of us are concerned about finances for the Alton School District, On April 4, 2017, our communities will have an opportunity to vote on a ballot question asking residents to consider the County Schools Facility Tax. What are your thoughts on this tax rate and what it can do for our schools and property tax rate?**

**BW:** "I took a long look at that, I hadn't looked at it before I was asked the question," he said. "I was quite shocked to discover the state has the worst funding platforms in the country, because it's based on property taxes, which automatically creates inequities. The state needs to create a more equitable program. State financial hardship has made city and school budgets tighter. It has forced school districts to look at this tax increase. I oppose the city increasing taxes."

If it passes, Walker said people living in the district will see property tax relief and allow school districts to get revenue from a greater amount of places.

"I am inclined to support this legislation," he said. "We need state leadership to redo school funding. It's time for elected officials in Springfield to set aside petty differences and make children and schools a priority."

**JY:** Young said the tax only covers "brick and mortar things."

"It will not influence student materials or give teachers more resources, it's strictly brick and mortar," Young said. "Corner stores and mom and pop stores will get it, and regular people who are getting regular things will get it too. I would agree with it if it went 100 percent to the schools. I believe the school deserves more. They deserve to keep 100 percent of the tax. It's not enough savings. I would vote yes, because it gives to schools and students, but I would vote yes to it at 100 percent."

**SD:** "I think that this is a good idea, but as an interim solution," he said. "We need to look at the school funding issue across state. The district budget is tight, and the economic situation is very, very tight as well. Property values are low. The state has so much debt, and those are all complicated factors."

Dixon said he wished the district could be less dependent on property taxes, and described the one percent tax as a "good thing overall." He said some of that money is from people outside the area as well.

"No one is in favor of increasing tax burden, but schools need to have support," Dixon said. "Anytime we give opportunities to vote on taxes such as these, it's good. We need to ensure property tax rates are adjusted with a mechanism to do so. I would like to take fresh look at property tax funding."

Dixon described the overall issue as "above mayor's office," but said the city could offer support.

"Many young families won't live in a place if schools aren't the very best," he said. "I will ensure the city partners with schools at every opportunity."

**DR:** "I'm not too sure this tax is what we need for our schools," Rauschkolb said. "I support schools 100 percent, but whenever government taxes you, you're not sure if it spends it properly. I think we need to hold legislators accountable for where money is going now. We need to find new ways to raise money to improve schools, good schools make better neighborhoods."



Rauschkolb said colleges get donations, and the culture need to emphasize donations at local school level. Across the nation, he said he sees colleges get millions, but local schools get nothing.

"We don't need to tax our local families more," he said. "I'm not for any new taxes. We need to find new ways to create revenue."

Rauschkolb said he believed all four candidates want schools to improve and want money to be there, but said he does not see this "cutting the mustard."

**What is your plan on decreasing the use of illegal drugs in the city, especially heroin?**

**JY:** "We should see it as a substance abuse issue as well as the criminal aspect, hand-in-hand," Young said. "We need more authority and compassion in families. and to pay attention a little bit more. We have to take our families back, and not be afraid to stand up and say there is a guy out there bringing something into our families and community. We have to work with the police department and the police department needs to work with the community."

Young agreed with Rauschkolb's proposed Heroin Task Force as well as adding community groups to eradicate that problem.

"It will take all of us, not just a police model, but a community model, working hand and hand together," he said.

**SD:** Dixon described the question as a "very critical important question."

"Illegal drugs are a much bigger problem than the mayor," Dixon said. "The city can make differences with policies."

Dixon said there was increasing evidence for more deaths from prescription pain killers than heroin and cocaine combined.

"Painkillers lead to heroin," he said.

To tackle the issue, Dixon said his administration would take a multi-faceted approach.

"We must fight against drug dealers with policies like Line in the Sand and crime free housing," he said. "We need to make it difficult for out-of-town drug dealers to come here."

He said he would make sure police have resources and training, adding youth need opportunity and jobs. He said his administration would work for safe streets and access to safe places day and night, adding the city "can't neglect any neighborhood."

Dixon said he also supports entrepreneurs and new businesses.

"Drug problems begin with no opportunities and having too much time on your hands," Dixon said "I'll work with schools and families. Drug offenders need treatment, not prison. This is not an easy problem, but we need to address it on front and back end."

**DR:** "We have a problem in Alton," Rauschkolb said.

He said Alton has highest crime rate in any city in the Riverbend.

"Crime has gone down, but compare felony rates, and we have the most dangerous city in the area," he said. "Ideally, you want to create strong neighborhoods. We need to have a neighborhood watch that knows neighbors. If the neighborhood doesn't want it, it won't be there."

Rauschkolb also promised to create a heroin task force if elected. He said, while it is not reflected in crime stats, Alton has about one overdose a week.

"With heroin comes other crimes," he said.

If elected, he said the police department will continue working with different state and federal organizations so Alton can get together and pool resources to fix crime. He said that fix needs to start with schools and churches to see who is having problems.

Rauschkolb said he supports the current community policing initiative.

"We need to increase the number of police officers," he said. "We need to continue doing what we're doing and pooling more resources, can combat this problem."

**BW:** "We do have a heroin problem, it's a nationwide problem," Walker said.

To remedy this, Walker said the Alton Police Department added third person to its drug force. He said the department will continue to work with different agencies to increase drug enforcement. Walker said the department has also added more confidential informants, and has seen results in recent months with house raids. Walker said the department will also continue to exchange information with other St. Louis area police departments.

Walker said he department is also working to educate kids with state's attorney and coroner.

"Please help us," Walker said. "You know who is selling and using. Don't think you're snitching or betraying a friendship. Look at it as you're saving a life or keeping someone from prison. Please reach out and contact us. If you reach out to us, we will help save your friends. They will die if they do heroin."

**How do you plan on decreasing crime in Alton and what is your stance on the new community policing initiative?**

**SD:** "Crime is definitely an issue in Alton, and I would like to congratulate the mayor on decreasing petty theft and property crime," Dixon said. "We must address growing violent crime. The mayor's focus on all crime is ok, but it's masking overall problem of violent crime, which is very much worse than petty crime. If we think crime is getting better, we won't put the right amount of resources behind it. The mayor is to be congratulated on new policing initiative. We must fund it and hold leaders accountable for it. I will work with stakeholders as mayor to hold teams accountable and on schedule. The best thing we can do is work together as a community and make sure we're all on the same page."

**DR:** "Decreasing crime is about jobs and communities.," Rauschkolb said. "The best thing a city can do is create jobs and community. Edwardsville and Bethalto have lower crime rates because of jobs. Our police department does a good job addressing crime. Decreasing crime is a national problem. Community policing is a must. That model has to be used. Everyone should do it, and I commend the mayor for that."

Rauschkolb said the problem with police is trying to fund what needs done.

"We need to get more officers on the street," he said. "We're bare bones. We need to be out of our cars and into the neighborhoods. Right now, the funding is hard, and no one wants to raise taxes. We need more revenue through better population and jobs. More population will make it better."

**BW:** "The number one job is public safety to our residents," Walker said.

Under his administration, he said the total crime index has decreased 5.8 percent. He said that number went from 5.8 to 11 percent, according to 2016's numbers, which are the numbers given to the FBI and Illinois State Police. Dixon said violent crime was at a five year high - an assertion Walker vehemently combated.

"Violent crime is not at a five year high and we have stats to back it up," Walker said.

Walker described the police department under his administration as "proactive and preventative."

"That's why we're doing the community policing model," he said. "My administration started it, so yeah, I like it a lot. Our first directive was to get bicycles out, and get officers out to build more bridges."

Walker showcased such initiatives as Ballin' with a Cop, Pizza with a Cop and the Summons of Joy during the holiday season.

"This program brings community together with police department," Walker said. "Over 1,300 residents from the community responded to the survey (the actual number was 1,264), and over 400 responses came from Alton School District. You did reach out, you did respond, and we did listen."

**JY:** "I believe that is a necessary component as far of the solution," Young said. "Another focus should be more grassroots movements. In addition to that model, we need to take charge of empowering citizen demographics and groups through educational methods. That can be employed throughout community services through sports and mentorship programs. They get people involved in citizenship through proper morals and practices."

Young said Greg Norris's Young Marines need to be sponsored more by the police department. He said youth involved in such activities will be less likely to commit crimes. He said he would help with new, innovative solutions sponsored by an administration to work with it.

He said he has worked with grassroots initiatives to lower crime at Belle Manor. Young said he worked with them to increase compassion. He said people were saying someone needs to be there to hold officers accountable, adding people need intrinsic justice. He said his administration would see better education and support from grassroots from the city working together.

**We have heard about several large stores closing in Alton and are concerned in particular about the future of Alton Square. What will you do to help existing local businesses to Alton and bring more businesses?**

**DR:** "Local businesses need help from the city with resources with training, tax breaks and infrastructures," Rauschkolb said. "Most businessmen invest their life savings into their business. They shouldn't be worried the city will cause problems. We need to recruit other businesses from other communities and make it profitable. It should be better than any other community in Madison County. We must foster that environment."

We have to be open and accessible. We need to get together best and brightest business leaders to recruit businesses. We need better infrastructure and more people in Alton. More people here will shop here. If you live in a community, you will shop in it. Population decline is less customers."

Rauschkolb also said he would create a Business Task Force as well, if elected.

**BW:**"Hall Group of Georgia purchased the mall a year ago," Walker said. "They have the foresight to see things coming. Macy's owned that property. Hall Group purchased it. Hall Group said JC Penny's is staying because it's profitable. Our retail numbers are as strong as they have been in 20 years, a \$35 million increase."

Walker said the Alton locations of Macy's and K-Mart were profitable, and described their closures as "not an Alton situation." He said St. Anthony's is also expanding and building a cancer campus. He said he would continue with the business retention program. He said that program brought another 50 jobs by having a business relocate inside city.

"We routinely work with business owners to maximize possibilities," Walker said.

He said anyone doubting more businesses are coming to Alton need only to look at the Beltline and Broadway Corridor. Walker said his administration would continue to work closely with county, state and federal organizations.

"We have a \$20 million multi-modal transportation system running in June-July," Walker said. High Speed rail starts and terminates in Alton, we don't even need St. Louis in the picture to get on a high speed rail to Chicago in under four hours."

He said his administration was excited to develop 30 "prime acres" on Beltline near the new station.

**JY:** Young described business retention as a full creative expression of the Progressive platform. He said businesses should have sustainable platforms so they can grow to be stakeholders for a long period of time. He said his administration would see new districts and businesses pop up for families from Downtown Alton to the McDonalds on Broadway as well as from Statehouse Square at Central all the way down to Broadway.

"We want our citizens to create businesses; old and young," Young said. "People can create it and put it here. An advocacy-style administration wants nothing but that. If you can dream it, you can do it, and we'll stand behind you 100 percent in my type of administration. Businesses will have purchasing power through renewable energy. Want to apply solar energy to the businesses. We can take that savings and apply it toward

better wages for employees. It's easier said than done, but the attempt is how we come together as a whole community."

Young said his administration will remove red tape and look for grants and help community businesses be supported and thrive for generations.

**SD:** "Our mall is obviously privately owned and will do whatever for success," Dixon said. "We have to prepare for the possibility down the road that it may close like so many other malls have."

Dixon said the office of the mayor has the responsibility to court them, but also to be prepared if anything does happen. He said he would hope for the best, but prepare for worst. He again promoted the growth of small businesses, saying they are the future.

"We do a fairly good job of local entrepreneurs come up with new ideas for businesses.." he said

Dixon said such entrepreneurs could connect with valuable resources from local colleges and building renovations, adding people could help each other save costs and connect with resources.

"We could also update our comprehensive plan, which is 15 years old."

He said community stakeholders should share ideas to improve the city while modernizing ordinances and codes, noting a lot of change in 15 years. Dixon assured an updated plan will help businesses see the future. He said such updated plans in Edwardsville, Galena and Belleville have paid for themselves. He said Alton should boost its appeal through a broad set of programs to bring businesses here and encourage future growth.

**Describe your vision for the City of Alton, and what you will accomplish as mayor. Tell us why you are suited to be mayor, including past accomplishments**

**BW:** "My vision is the same as it was when I took office four years ago," Walker said. "It is to create an environment for a safe prosperous city where everyone can live, start a family and start a business."

Walker said he would work to retain businesses while attracting new businesses. He again showcased 200 new businesses opening under his administration. He promised to continue infrastructure growth and increase code enforcement.

"I came to office as small business owner with history of investment," Walker said. "I chose to open my business in Alton. We started business with one employee, and grew to 300. Every dime I made in this city has come back to it. I ran thriving business, and wasn't afraid to invest in this city."

He said his administration would continue to work with a restrictive budget while still delivering public services. He said Dixon's dream of a new plan would cost \$100,000 update with a new plan being as much as \$200,000. He said the city was already stretched for resources.

"What taxes will be raised or services cut?" he asked. "Our administration has shown how to run on a tight budget."

Walker also said his administration had the ability to work with individuals from all background to address issues for community. He said the city had gone through some of its worst financial times while still getting a lot of work done.

**JY:** "I see innovative progression, socioeconomic harmony, and a cultural renaissance," Young said. "Alton has a great history rooted in abolitionism and cultural values across multiple ethnicities. It could be an example for Madison County and Southern Illinois. I believe this city deserves policy reforms through socioeconomic reformation. I envision a city where we can continue along without mitigating circumstances a power group administration would bring. There is no power group in Progressive. I believe in efficiency. Old buildings and standards don't work. Millennials will be educating us."

Young said he would utilize social media and technology in his administration. He said he would hold the municipality accountable with more involvement from representatives.

He said he was involved in politics because of injustice he perceives.

"Whether I win or lose, I will still fight for progression," he said. "I have a belief we need to work in a harmonic state. There is no economic issue we can't face if we look to help from our champions. Now is the time, and we are now, and everything will be open to all under my platform."

Young promised if voters took a "historic jump" by electing him, he will run a very progressive and inclusive administration.

**SD:** Dixon said his vision included a vibrant local economy within a clean and beautiful city with walkable and bicycle-friendly streets and shopping districts. He said Riverfront

Park "could and should be jewel of the region with outdoor activities and plenty of green space with an amphitheater used almost constantly for whatever you want." Dixon said his administration would support both local and nationwide acts at the amphitheater.

"I want it to be managed by local entities with a budget with oversight," he said.

Dixon also promised he would work toward a city with a balanced budget with revenue coming from growing tax base, including an updating of the city's comprehensive plan.

"It will pay for itself by prioritizing spending, spending only one what matters," Dixon said of the plan.

He described citizen input as most important when creating the new plan. He also said he would like to see more recreational opportunities with a city-wide parks and trails plan.

"All this will take money, and I do know how to manage budgets," Dixon said. "I have a masters degree in business."

He again pointed to his experience managing a business in this area constantly for 25 years as well as his two terms as president of PRIDE, Inc. and volunteer work with other non-profits.

"I'm running for mayor because I love this city," he said.

**DR:** "I want a movie theater," he said. "I want an ice skating rink at Riverfront Park. Those are two things everyone has asked for."

Rauschkolb also said he would like to see development at Clark properties across from police department, adding he had not seen single family housing in Alton for years.

"Other communities are building subdivisions, we aren't," he said.

He promised to work for senior housing as well as quality public transportation.

"We need to provide an environment for people to live here," Rauschkolb said. "I've been here 22 years with experience. Experience counts in every election. We need people with a vision. We need to think bigger, this city will never settle. If you try for the best, and don't get it, at least you get a little better."

Rauschkolb said Alton needs large businesses and small businesses, saying people from the 1960s could go out and get a job anywhere they wanted.



## Conclusions

Each candidate was given up to three minutes to give a concluding statement regarding their platforms and why each deserves a vote in the April 4, 2017, election.

**JY:** "I'm grassroots," Young said. "I stand for those that believe they cannot achieve their dreams."

Young said his administration would get people more involved both socially and politically.

"I want a referendum when I come in to give voter back guarantee," he said. "In two years, if my rating is not as such, my referendum will remove me. When a candidate is coming in promising to hold himself accountable, that says something. It will be built by the people and structured by the people."

**SD:** Dixon said "a lot was at stake" in the April 4, 2017, election.

"We have a real chance to control our future, and not only for four years."

Dixon said Mayor Walker presided over four years over good times, adding Alton has floated up on rising tides

"A lot of people think we can do much better," Dixon said.

Dixon said Walker was working on some good projects, but said Alton continues to fall despite success of areas around it. He worried what the status of Alton would be if the tide fell again, a truth he said was inevitable.

"If it was doing well, we would not have four candidates running for mayor right now," he said.

Dixon said he was happy with his current life, but wanted to run for mayor because he loves this city. He reiterated his promise not to take health care or pension if elected as well, a move he said would save the city hundreds of thousands of dollar.

"It's sad to see people suffering behind these statistics of stagnation and decline."

He told the youth to evaluate candidates, look at their platforms and go out and vote.

**DR:** "Every election year, politicians make promises," Rauschkolb said. "I promise I will listen to our youth. Your dreams will become my dreams. My best promise is to be open to youth."

Raushkolb said he wanted to see more youth engagement in civic matters saying, "city hall should be for the youth."

**BW:** "We're not where we want to be, but things are continuing to get better," he said. "That's why I am here, to continue that progress. We've come too far to turn the clock back."