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Conyers, Karmanos wrangle over issues

Participants bemoan lack of cooperation among suburbs, city

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The topic was "Economy, Regionalism and Race Relations," but in metro Detroit this morning, none was in very good shape.

The panelists at the Pancakes and Politics breakfast were an odd conglomeration of business and politics: Detroit City Council President Monica Conyers; Peter Karmanos, Compuware founder and new boss to Kwame Kilpatrick; think tank founder Phil Power and demographer Kurt Metzger.

They were all frustrated that better cooperation among regional leaders seems to be an elusive goal that is harming not only Detroit, but the rest of the region and the state.

"The Center for Michigan is holding a series of community conversations and we've talked to 3,500 people so far in the state," Power said. "Uniformly people tell us we have to recognize that this is an entire region. And if Detroit puts a moat around the city, it hurts everyone."

The dispute over ownership and operations of Cobo Hall was a tier one topic at the breakfast and Conyers said the blame for the death of the deal lies with Oakland County officials and Gov. Jennifer Granholm. She said the token \$20-million payment a regional authority would have paid the city for Cobo was unacceptable.

"We don't want any tokens, because I don't consider myself a token," she said. "Stimulus money is available for convention centers. The problem is the governor doesn't want to give us money to use for Cobo Hall."

Conyers also said she believes abandoned buildings in the city should be converted to outlet stores and that term limits should be instituted for the Detroit City Council, mayor and school board.

"If you continue to have the same people, you never get new people with creative ideas," she said.

Karmanos said the sorry state of the city's schools is one of the failures that is fueling the lack of regionalism in the metro area.

"When I went to school in Detroit, it was one of the best districts in the nation and the teachers weren't part of the union," he said. "Today, everyone is in the union and we uniformly have poor schools throughout the region."

The lack of progress being made on mass transit in metro Detroit is one of the biggest signs that regionalism has been unsuccessful, Metzger said.

"We've got to get light rail just up to West Grand Boulevard first," he said, but the economy is hampering many redevelopment efforts.

"Detroit can be the laboratory for radical redevelopment," he said. "But. we have suburbs against suburbs, nobody has any money and financially we're all suffering."

As for Kilpatrick, Karmanos said he's doing well and that coworkers have described him as "a breath of fresh air."

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that states cannot impose term limits on their members of Congress. In 1992, Michigan voters passed an amendment to the state Constitution to limit the terms of governor, secretary of state, attorney general and state legislators.
