

Business

## Politics slowing down regional revival efforts

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Petty politics are blocking the way to a regional revival.

"I just find that politics in this region are so divisive. No offense, but I would just love it if the politicians would get out of the way and let the people who want to solve the issues — solve the issues," said Kurt Metzger, director of the Detroit Area Community Information System, during a panel discussion on regionalism sponsored by the Michigan Chronicle newspaper and the Detroit Athletic Club.

"We just spend too much time on issues that don't matter," Metzger said.

"It's just a killer day in a day out. "People who are trying to do the work and make this region successful and make this city successful are just being pushed to the side," said Metzger, who is a long-time student of the region's development and demographics.

The lack of an effective regional organization only feeds the negative stereotypes about Detroit and its racial divisions and conflicts.

"It portrays us nationally as very divisive," he said.

Phil Power, the former publisher of the Hometown Newspapers who now heads a think tank called the Center For Michigan, also believes that while the divided local political structure benefits some local politicians, it has effectively blocked improvements such as investment in mass transit, and better education.

"This region has lost hundreds of millions of dollars over the years," noted Power, because of its inability to create a single regional transportation authority.

"It makes absolutely no sense to have separate bus systems," he said.

"They hinder you. They hinder your constituents. They hinder the region and makes everybody worse off," he said.

"This is one region and we ought to recognize that," said Peter Karmanos Jr., the chairman and chief executive officer of Compuware Inc., who expressed frustration over the fact the conversation about metropolitan area never seems to change or evolve.

Metzger, however, said divisions also mask the region's larger problems.

"We have a culture that doesn't value education," he said.

"That has to change for the region to revive."

The discussion was sparked in part by the recent conflict over Cobo Center, the home of the North American International Auto Show.

Monica Conyers, the president of the Detroit City Council, effectively blocked plans that would have turned over Cobo Center to a regional authority so it could be updated.

The plan had the support of Gov. Jennifer Granholm, Detroit Mayor Ken Cockerel Jr. and the top officials in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties.

Conyers, who was also on the "Pancake and Politics" panel, said she believed she did the right thing when she blocked the deal.

There are other ways to fix Cobo Center, she said. Granholm, however, has refused to commit federal stimulus money for Cobo.

"If any project is shovel-ready, this is it. It's been studied to death," she said.

The fate of the auto show, however, never came up.

Conyers, though, held out an olive branch to the suburbs, saying both sides of Eight Mile have

to work together and collaborate for projects to succeed.

She also said she respected Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson and didn't necessarily consider him a foe.

"At the end of the day, we both have the same thing in mind and that is he's fighting for what he thinks his residents need and I'm fighting for what my residents need," she said.

"But when I stick up for his residents, it's OK. But when I stick up for my residents, it's not OK," said Conyers.

"I don't accept what the media says about me," she said.

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