

Statement

February 18, 2009



Council President Clarkson Statement
Re: Mayor's Public Hearing
Concerning Professional Services Contracts and Take-Home Vehicles

New Orleans, LA - February 18, 2009 - Council President Jacquelyn Brechtel Clarkson has issued the following statement regarding the City's professional services contracting process addressed at the Mayor's public hearing today:

"At a public hearing this afternoon, Mayor Nagin outlined an executive order to suspend panel review of professional services contracts. I am strongly opposed to this executive order, which will have the effect of further excluding the public from a process that is already in need of greater transparency and accountability.

To paraphrase one public comment from today's hearing, the money that fuels city government does not belong to the Mayor. It does not belong to the City Council. It belongs to the people, and they have every right to see how it is spent.

On February 5, the Council voted unanimously to approve an ordinance that would open the professional services contracting process to greater public scrutiny. The Mayor vetoed this ordinance, saying it was an attempt by the legislative branch to take power from the executive branch. In fact, this legislation is an attempt to give greater power to the people. And I fully intend to vote to override the Mayor's veto at tomorrow's Council meeting to see that a more public process is etched into City law.

The public support for greater openness in the professional services contracting process today was overwhelming. In light of this, I urge the Mayor to consider rescinding his executive order, reinstate the selection review panel, and comply with the Council's ordinance."

Council President Jacquelyn Brechtel Clarkson also issued the following statement regarding city take-home vehicles addressed at the Mayor's public hearing today:

"On February 5, the City Council voted 7-0 to approve a motion requesting that the Mayor's Office adopt a plan to reduce the number of take-home vehicles used by city employees. This ordinance does not affect vehicles used by first responders or public safety officers. It affects only the "administrative fleet" of cars - those managed under the Mayor's Office, the Chief Administrator's Office, and the City Council.

Also during the February 5th Council meeting, a separate ordinance was introduced that would prevent city employees who live outside of Orleans Parish from possessing a take-home car. This ordinance is not expected to come up for vote before the full Council until March, after it has been thoroughly reviewed by the Governmental Affairs Committee.

Although I support considering policies that limit take-home car use for city workers domiciled outside of Orleans Parish, I believe an exemption should be given to public safety officers and first responders. I hope and expect that the Council will be able to work together in committee to arrive at legislation that is responsible, supports our first responders, and upholds our commitment to public safety."

New Orleans City Council

The New Orleans City Council is the legislative branch of New Orleans city government. The Council considers and enacts all local laws that govern the City of New Orleans. The Council also approves the operating and capital budgets for the City, as recommended by the mayor, and continually monitors revenues and expenditures for local government operations. The City Council is also the regulatory body for public utilities. It also reviews and has final say on many land use and zoning matters, as well as considers major economic development projects for the City. As a Board of Review for Orleans Parish, the Council examines appeals of property tax assessments for real estate taxes, and certifies tax rolls to the Louisiana Tax Commission. Other responsibilities of the Council include overseeing the operation of the public access television in Orleans Parish.

The City Council is comprised of five districts and two councilmembers-at-large. Council President and Councilmember-at-Large Jacquelyn Brechtel Clarkson; Council Vice-President and Councilmember-at-Large Arnie Fielkow ; District "A" Councilmember Shelley Midura; District "B" Councilmember Stacy S. Head; District "C" Councilmember James Carter; District "D" Councilmember Cynthia Hedge-Morrell; and District "E" Councilmember Cynthia Willard-Lewis.