

## **Tillman's Challenger Supports Big Box Living Wage Ordinance**

Mell Monroe, a candidate for Third Ward Alderman against the incumbent Dorothy Tillman, said today that he supports the Big Box Living Wage ordinance recently passed by Chicago's City Council.

"Many residents of the Third Ward need jobs," Monroe said. "But they need good jobs, not the low-paying, skimpy-benefit positions available at Wal-Mart and other billion-dollar merchants who seem to take pride in squeezing suppliers and exacting maximum work from employees while providing minimum pay."

Monroe criticized incumbent Third Ward Alderman Dorothy Tillman for voting to oppose the ordinance which passed City Council on July 26 by a vote of 35-14.

"Alderman Tillman has been in office for 22 years and has done nothing to attract even a grocery store to the ward," Monroe charged. "Now she thinks Chicago should allow highly-profitable giant retailers like Wal-Mart to come into the City and offer sub-par wages and little or no benefits. I think it's a bad decision on her part. I predict the voters will tell her so when they vote next February."

Monroe, the principal owner of an executive and professional job placement firm, said "large big-box retailers, like Wal-Mart, don't create any jobs, they replace jobs. They drive smaller local retailers out of business, kill off the jobs they provided, and then offer low paying positions at the big-box outlet. This 'race to the bottom' puts downward pressure on the wage level for all workers and in the long run will reduce spending power and sales tax in Chicago.

"We need real economic development in the inner city of Chicago," said Monroe who has more than 10 years experience in sales, marketing and management with Mobil Chemical, Coca Cola, General Electric and other Fortune 500 companies.

"We should encourage and support companies that not only offer good starting wages but also provide career opportunities and have a good record of retaining workers," Monroe said. "Because of their low wages and sparse benefits, many big-box retailers have high turnover rates in their work force.

"City and other government subsidies should go to manufacturing plants and builders of affordable housing. We also need small and medium-sized businesses that can be accessed in the neighborhoods on foot or by public transportation."

( more )

## **Monroe Supports Big Box Ordinance P 2.**

The recently passed big-box ordinance provides that beginning next July employees must be paid a minimum of \$9.25 per hour in wages and \$1.50 in health insurance or other benefits. By 2010, the per-hour figures will rise to \$10 in wages and benefits to \$3.00.

Chicago's ordinance only applies to retail stores of at least 90,000 square feet which are operated by companies whose annual sales exceed \$1 billion.

"That's my only quibble with the ordinance," Monroe said. "I think it should apply to all companies: retailers, manufacturers and service companies who have 25 or more employees and sales of more than \$1 million.

"If I had been in City Council for the vote, I would have fought for such an amendment. But even without that change, I would have supported the big-box ordinance as it stands," Monroe added.

In November 2002, Chicago's City Council voted to require large city contractors to pay their employees at least \$9.05 per hour. That wage rate increases by the rate of inflation, is now more than \$9.60 per hour and is set to increase again within a year.

Costco in Chicago pays its employees \$10 per hour to start plus health care benefits while starting pay at Wal-Mart and Target is about \$7.25 to \$7.50 per hour. Home Depot in San Francisco recently agreed to pay \$10.75 per hour. Wal-Mart and Target now offer starting pay of \$9.50 per hour in Santa Fe, New Mexico, which has a living wage law.

Wal-Mart, the primary force behind the campaign to defeat the ordinance, is the largest company in the World and last year had profits in excess of \$11 billion. Wal-Mart also paid its CEO more than \$8 million in salary.

"I see no reason why Chicago workers should accept sub-par wages to further enrich Wal-Mart, the Walton family and other billionaire merchants. They can afford to pay a fair, living wage in Chicago and they can afford health insurance for their workers," Monroe said.

Monroe is the principal owner of Execusearch, a Hyde Park-based search firm specializing in placing African-Americans, Hispanics and women in management and professional jobs. In his 15 years with Execusearch, Monroe has placed more than 200 professionals with Apple Computer, SBC Ameritech, Microsoft, Sun Microsystems and many other leading corporations.

Monroe is also the founder and past president of the Bronzeville Area Residents and Commerce Council (BARCC), and founder and former president of the Greater South Loop Association (GSLA).