

EXHIBIT B

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Bankole: Democrats in Lansing have misplaced priorities

Bankole Thompson

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Democratic control of the Legislature has been heralded as a historic first in four decades. It has ignited a renewed sense of optimism from the liberal establishment that this is the moment to complete the unfinished business of meeting the dire needs of underserved communities in urban Michigan as well as the expectations of rural areas that are also dealing with inequality.

But the pomp and circumstance that marked the beginning of Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's administration has been perhaps in Shakespearean parlance, much ado about nothing.

Disappointing at best.

Consider how the budgetary priorities of the Legislature and the Whitmer administration has focused largely on spending millions of dollars on pet projects for anyone who can conceive an idea without any realistic or meaningful goals, and sometimes under the guise of infrastructure grants.

As the state sits on billions of dollars in surplus, the budget is basically a free lunch for anyone who is politically connected in Lansing and can talk a good game to their local representative or flex their political muscle with the Whitmer administration. Among them have been labor groups, who basically have been experiencing a Christmas-like festivity with the state budget, stuffing their stockings with goodies.

Meanwhile impoverished cities like Highland Park, Benton Harbor and other bastions of Black existence around the state are left crossing their fingers and wondering when the Whitmer administration and the Legislature will come to grips with reality and map out a plan to confront a major issue such as fixing the water infrastructures of these cities.

Highland Park Mayor Glenda McDonald told me recently that the \$20 million that the state finally proposed to help wipe away the city's water debt, after much criticism of Democrats, is just one segment of the overall problem.

According to McDonald, addressing the water infrastructure crisis is the bigger problem.

“Why can’t we get the things we need to be successful? I feel like we are literally begging for money we are entitled to,” McDonald said. “I know that there is ARPA money that has been designated for infrastructure. If we can get our infrastructure fixed, why shouldn’t we? We knew that our pipes were 100 years old. That has to be fixed. How do we do that if our revenue is taken from property taxes?”

McDonald added, “I think about Flint and I think about their infrastructure, their water. We’ve had issues. There’s been some lead issues. Why wouldn’t you want to help us get that taken care of so that no child would develop lead poisoning? I think the state can do more.”

McDonald’s cry for help will likely fall on the deaf ears of Whitmer and Lansing’s other powerbrokers. They are not looking at the bigger picture of making a generational impact and possibly averting a public health disaster by fixing the water infrastructure problems facing Black cities like Highland Park.

Lansing is busy dishing out taxpayer money to ill-conceived and fancy sounding projects.

Just like how the well-connected Fay Beydoun received \$20 million from the state for a nonprofit that was only reportedly set up 10 days after the funds were allocated to the organization, which has no track record and isn’t deserving of the money.

Benton Harbor remains an unresolved issue and faces some of the same problems as Highland Park.

But the Democrats who claim that they are committed to taking care of Black communities have yet to map out a serious plan that could mitigate any potential contamination of drinking water resulting from corrosive pipes.

For McDonald, Democrats can’t miss the boat.

“This is an opportunity for them to get it right. Highland Park is a Democratic city. This is an opportunity for them to step up,” McDonald said. “Because we don’t know when that opportunity happens again.”

The sad part about the misplaced priorities of Lansing is that it is happening under the leadership of the first Black speaker of the House, Rep. Joe Tate, who seems to have no real

priorities and no bold agenda to tackle the deeper urban issues.

Tate, who appears to be flailing in the wind, should be taking a tour of cities around the state right now to determine where water infrastructure dollars are immediately needed.

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Catch “Redline with Bankole Thompson,” which broadcasts at 11 a.m. weekdays on 910AM and “Sunday Nation,” on Sundays at 1 p.m. on MyTV38 WADL-Detroit. His column appears on Mondays and Thursdays in the newspaper.