

Rawlings-Blake pledges 'open-door' policy with businesses

by Gary Haber, *Baltimore Business Journal*, January 7, 2010

Stephanie Rawlings-Blake said in a City Hall news conference Thursday she'll take the same "open-door" approach to Baltimore's business community that she showed as City Council president.

"I know jobs will create a way out of this 'Great Recession,'" she said. "And I expect the business community to stay committed to Baltimore."

Flanked by fellow City Council members, Rawlings-Blake, 39, promised a smooth transition as she assumes the mayor's office and said she has already asked Police Commissioner Frederick H. Bealefeld III and Fire Chief Jim Clack to stay on. She declined to discuss her plans for filling out the rest of her cabinet. She said she would name a transition team next week.

"Yesterday morning when I woke up, I had no idea whatsoever that, by the end of the day, we would be discussing a transition of power at City Hall," she said in prepared remarks. "I am the same person that I was yesterday morning — and that is a mother, a wife, an attorney and a lifelong and proud resident of the great city of Baltimore, Maryland."

Rawlings-Blake, a Democrat, called her upcoming move into the mayor's office "an awesome and important responsibility, brought on by very sad and unwelcome circumstances."

Sheila Dixon resigned as mayor Wednesday after agreeing to a plea deal with state prosecutors on one charge of perjury. The plea stems from Dixon's trial last month on corruption charges stemming from the use of gift cards given to the city by a prominent developer.

Rawlings-Blake's fellow council members praised her as a hardworking legislator with a quick grasp of the issues, despite her young age.

"Stephanie has shown a great talent for being a quick study," said District 5 Councilwoman Rochelle "Rikki" Spector. "She gets it."

"It's been a mixed day for me," added Spector, who said she's helped mentor Rawlings-Blake since she was elected to the council at age 25, the youngest person elected to the post in the city's history. "I'm sad, yet confident that it will be a transition in which the citizens of Baltimore won't lose any momentum."

“She’s young, but she ain’t no kid,” said District 14 Councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke. “She’s young enough to have the energy and old enough to have the wisdom.”

District 11 Councilman William H. Cole said he expects Rawlings-Blake to have “a cooperative relationship” with Baltimore’s business community.

He said her predecessors, Dixon and Maryland Gov. Martin O’Malley, also faced questions when they took office about their approach to the business community.