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Essay 5: Capital Gains from Ehrenhalt, chapter 39

Leadership is the power to encourage people to strive willingly for group purposes. It is the ability to be a leader or the qualities a good leader should have. Washington, D.C. at this time has flourished under Mayor Anthony A. Williams who makes remarkable recoveries from poor management. The outstanding role of the mayor was brought up to be a theme in the article Capital Gains by Jonathan Walters, which orderly details critical changes in the government and the city. However, the big transformation leads not only praise but also blame to him. To review this article, I will indicate the author's main point, later briefly describe the story, and then analyze how the author ties ideas together and uses sufficient examples to support his main claim. Finally, I will explain what I think, why I agree or disagree, and how relevant the topic is to my work experience.

The article details the role of Mayor William by presenting the important changes under his leading which creates both positive and negative feelings from surrounding people. The author's main point wants to show the leadership of the mayor under pressure that how he manages his organization and city, and how he deals with the roll conflict.

Walters starts an introduction by explaining about managerial incompetence of D.C. government. He depicts its management from the late 1980s to the late 1990s as dysfunctional: the poor information technology system, the operation under court-ordered receivership, the red fund balance and the disorganized tax. Those lead people know this city as the murder capital of the U.S.

Walters describes the effort of transformation from inefficient management by a variety of people, and the outstanding one is Mayor William. He became the District's CFO in 1995, hired by the former mayor. At first, many observers underestimated his ability that he couldn't do much on such situation, but he showed the strong leadership, not hesitate to make a better change by firing

165 people in the tax department and putting new appropriate persons to maintain the District's revenue-collection system. He fought to be in charge of the city's budget which led to the argument with the mayor at that time. He also made the community speaking circuit by telling his fiscal recovery plans to people to show his own standing out of control board-backed fiat. As a result of his intention, in 1998, he ran for the mayor and won in a decisive victory.

Walters shows Mayor William's determined effort to keep his early promise as CFO: to focus on the method and the outcome by raising his serious workaday activities that supports the project task; he had cards made up for showing the work details of his directors and for annual contracts with expected results. After seven years of effort, the city turns to the right direction. D.C.'s tax system is well organized, the city budget is balanced for five years in sequence, and all departments are also back to the proper management. However, he wants to run more the mayor in a second term, and it is not too easily as the first glance. There are many facts concerning him: an embarrassing flap over thousands of fraudulent signatures on his nominating petitions, the disaster from introducing computer system to DMV's, which reverses the situation to poor management and testy employees, and the problem that the capacity of any department to improve its management is different; some still operate on paper basis while others already apply new management and computer systems.

Walters raises the opinion from the opposite side. Kevin Chavous who ran against William in the 1998 gives an opinion that the city should be better than this, especially in rebuilding depressed community, changing in public education and developing in public safety. Some criticize Mayor William in economic development as a down town mayor because he ignores the outskirts. But people in that area are agree that it is good to improve the streets, sidewalks and trash transfer station, and they support him to do more. Nonetheless, Mayor William accepts that he still has to improve other areas by placing the city offices as the strategy to invigorate economic growth.

Walters points out one problem that annoys Mayor William. He often doesn't get enough credit for his well done jobs such as well rat eradication, leading job creation, and less homicide rate and infant mortality rate. On the other hand, when he closed down D.C. General Hospital and laid off 1,400 employees, it affected him much in a bad way even though that hospital was known for its bad care and wasting budget, and he put a system of community health centers in its place, also with contracting with other hospital to cover residents.

This decision led much effect to him because D.C. Hospital was mostly for black residents. To whites, it was the difficult policy decision for the long-term fiscal health. To many blacks, it showed the indifferent political standing of the mayor, who is African American, to the black community. As a result, the mayor's approval rating for black residents fell from 72 to 54 percent in the past two years, and for white residents remained high at 83 percent. But the approval rating of city services among blacks and whites was the highest in the seven year history, at 69 percent.

Walters also mentions about another possible reason that the mayor is not very popular among black residents is that he cut off the employment rolls from nearly 50,000 to about 33,000. The size of D.C.'s workforce and the cost of government are highly controversial issues. Critics said the size is too big and not worth it. Even though the mayor cut down employee rolls by 30 percent and put an excellent upper-management team to rearrange the work system, there still is the report about the overcrowded employees below those top managers. For this issue, Mayor William explains that he tries to make employees to get with the program or move them out. In this case, he had already done when he first became the mayor by creating an entirely at will "management supervisory service" for all mid-level managers and higher. For the big employment payroll, he reasons that D.C. provides services more efficient and broader than any other city such as police, transportation and public works resources for demonstration as well as for other city residents who work in D.C.

Walters mentions more about the D.C. workforce because the commitment of city employees is the key to success of city development. He raises an opinion about this workforce problem that it might be because 72 percent of employees don't live in D.C., and they don't care much about the city. And about the District's efficiency, someone is concerned about the way to improve D.C. is not efficient enough because it doesn't regularly benchmark against other places. For all comments, Mayor William accepts and says that these help improve the city to the right direction.

In this article, the author ties ideas together from section to section by presenting the role of Mayor William in developing the city and raises the arguments and the examples from both sides, those who agree and disagree equally and understandably. The author describes the chaotic situation of D.C. government, which later will present as the main subject in sequence. However, the main idea is the leadership of the mayor to deal with such crisis. It is the ability that the leader should have to influence people to reach the aim. The author tries to show different circumstances that the mayor has to handle. He focuses on the action and reaction when Mayor William interacts with people and counteracts any problem. At first when he came to D.C. as CFO, and many observers underestimated his ability, he proved his leadership right away by firing unqualified employees and put higher ones instead. He tried to achieve the better management by fighting to control the budget and proposing the recovery plan. He kept his promise by doing what he said and making cards to remind his memory. Nevertheless, there are also a lot of negative feelings toward his management. Some blamed him failed to apply computer system to DMV's and other departments, closed D.C. Hospital, ignored suburban areas, and especially lacked ability to manage the D.C. workforce. To those issues, he answered people with appropriate reasons why he had to do, and he showed his intention to improve the city by accepting all comments to be the guideline in development. Especially in D.C. Hospital case and suburban areas case, they can prove his ability to handle role conflict that there are two incompatible demands which he had to make a decision.

In sum, I, myself, agree with the author that the leadership is much important to achieve the goal of management. Today's problems are much more complicated and involve many factors and people. It is impossible for now to do anything without side effect. It depends on that person that he or she can handle the difficulty and lead people to agree with. This can prove his or her leadership. For Mayor William, the way he closed off D.C. Hospital is quite impressive. Even though it was the hot item, he still did it. It shows his leadership that he intends to do improve the city for everyone. This article concerns me about the personality that important to handle the crisis, leadership, which is rare in Thai government right now.

As a bureaucrat, I realize that leadership is the crucial characteristics to influence people and co-workers to fulfill the purpose. From my experience in Royal Thai police, such leadership is hardly found in the government of Thailand. In 2000, our country enacted the law to reduce all bureaucrats five percent a year and the rest had to pass the government criteria. This implement covered Royal Thai Police Department. It made all police panic, and also we were threatened by our bosses that we might be fired if doing anything wrong or unsatisfied. However, at the same time as applying this law, we still saw some big police accepted their relatives to be police without the recruiting process. This is one of the reasons why later we had a big strike all over the country. We don't trust our leaders because they think for their own benefits, not for all.

As I have shown, leadership is the ability to influence others to fulfill group purposes. It is much important for leaders or managers to achieve the aim of management. It will create power from people involved to go through the difficult situation. It is the faith power to lead the group. And Mayor William is the one who already proved it. (1791)