

## **Johnson has this priority straight - THE TIME IS RIGHT TO EMPHASIZE PHILANTHROPY, VOLUNTEERISM**

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When Kevin Johnson takes office as mayor Tuesday, he will bring with him a broad and ambitious agenda. Given the limited powers of his office in Sacramento's weak-mayor system, some parts of that agenda may prove to be unrealistic.

But there is one item on Johnson's agenda that is both realistic and badly needed. The mayor-to-be wants to highlight and promote the role of volunteerism and philanthropy in Sacramento.

The timing for such an effort could not be better. The economic downturn is cutting into the budgets for schools, health care, education and a variety of social services at the very time more people need such help. State and local governments won't be able to meet all the needs.

That makes the efforts of charities, philanthropies and faith-based programs more crucial than ever. But bad economic times also eat up the resources of charities and nonprofit agencies. In these circumstances, a mayor who uses the pulpit of the office to promote volunteerism and philanthropy will be performing a real service.

Johnson's actions at his ceremonial celebration at Memorial Auditorium last Tuesday suggest he is serious about making this an important theme of his administration. To gain admission, those who attended the festivities were asked to make a contribution to the Sacramento Food Bank or to sign up to do volunteer work. And in his speech to the crowd in the auditorium, Johnson emphasized the importance of public service.

He asked business leaders to provide internships and job training for young people and the unemployed. He urged senior citizens to tutor young students. He asked labor unions to organize neighborhood cleanups. He implored high school students to complete 100 hours of community service before they graduate.

"It is only with this kind of significant and collaborative effort that change in our city will truly occur," Johnson said.

That's a message he should pound home throughout his time in the mayor's office. But that alone won't be enough to strengthen philanthropy and volunteerism in this community.

As mayor, Johnson should also take a lead role in encouraging nonprofits both in Sacramento and the region to work together, to pool resources for greater effectiveness and coordinate efforts to avoid duplication. And he should help create opportunities for people strapped for both money and time to contribute, thus broadening the pool of volunteers and donors throughout the region.

In electing Johnson, voters cast votes for energy and vision. His vision of a Sacramento where more people donate time and money to making a better city is right on target. Starting Tuesday, he should apply energy to making that vision a reality.

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