



ASHTON J. HAYWARD  
MAYOR

### **An Open Letter to the Citizens of Pensacola**

Since my election in 2010, we have attempted to move Pensacola forward in a constructive fashion. You elected me to look out for the best interests of the citizens of Pensacola and our city government. That, I promise you, is what I have done since day one.

In line with that commitment, I will not attend the Council's special meeting, set for May 26, concerning the termination of the City's interim fire chief and deputy fire chief.

Some Council members have persistently attempted to foster an atmosphere of discord in our City. My participation in the special meeting would do no more than add to that rancor.

The City Charter, approved by voters in 2009, gives the mayor "the power to appoint, discipline and remove all officers and employees" and "to suspend, discipline or remove a department head with or without cause and without the consent of City Council members."

The decision to dismiss the Chief and Assistant Chief was carefully and thoughtfully made. I reached that decision only after commissioning a thorough investigative analysis by a board-certified employment and labor lawyer. I considered the report as I weighed whether it was in the best interests of the City, Fire Department employees and our citizens to continue with the existing leadership of the Fire Department or to select new leadership. It is an irrevocable decision – one that the Council cannot change, according to our Charter.

The Charter states that the Council "may express its views" on the appointment or removal of any administrative officer or employee. If the Council chooses to hold a special meeting, it has the right to do so, however ill-advised I believe that would be. The Charter also states that the Council "may ... fully and freely discuss any and all matters with the Mayor pertaining to the appointment and removal of City officers and employees." If any Council member has questions, he or she can ask me and I will answer to the best of my ability. I have always responded to concerns any Council member has expressed to me. However, holding a staged rally for the terminated employees is beneath the dignity of the Council and is not a constructive way to discuss anything.

A Council member may disagree with my decision but the Charter does not allow the Council to interfere with hiring and firing decisions of the Mayor. Conduct of the terminated employees that I find unacceptable, a council member may believe is acceptable, but there is no power provided under the Charter to second-guess the decision to terminate an employee. It's unfortunate that some Council members have attributed to me illicit, unfair or mean-spirited motives that do not exist and never will.

The larger point is that Pensacola is moving forward in every way – with new jobs, a booming downtown, first-class development, a better infrastructure and an overall sense of citizen satisfaction. Yet some Council members continue to balk at our new form of government that grants the Mayor broad executive control and assigns the Council an important legislative role but not a role in the

management of the City. We have to have mutual respect for our roles under the Charter and, in this instance, the Council is not doing so. It is time to accept the change that the voters have endorsed with our new Charter, and I ask the entire Council to work with me to make our already-thriving City even better. Dissent is good and vigorous disagreement is healthy to assure that the best decisions are made; created discord and divisiveness, however, are not, and the citizens do not like it and do not want it to continue.