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Where the newspaper stands McKinley Price's experience, achievements and vision will make him a fine mayor for Newport News

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In many roles and over many years, McKinley Price has demonstrated his commitment to Newport News and his ability to serve it well. He is clearly the best choice for mayor in the May 4 election.

Price has amassed a firsthand understanding of the city, its operations and its challenges. Essential in these times, he understands jobs and economic development, which must continue to be a priority for Newport News. Price will bring a keen sense of their importance and the knowledge and connections he gained as a gubernatorial appointee to the Virginia Economic Development Partnership. In the arena where cities compete for jobs, he will represent Newport News effectively.

Price's reputation for leadership has repeatedly been confirmed by those who appointed him to other local and regional boards, including Newport News School Board and City Council, Thomas Nelson Community College and the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel Commission.

He has also stepped up to tackle even controversial and unglamorous needs: He co-founded People to People, a group of volunteers who have worked to address the city's racial and social issues.

Price's opposition describes him as being pro-business, as if that's a bad thing. Indeed he is pro-business, and Newport News will be the better for it because the city prospers, and residents and taxpayers benefit when businesses succeed. Businesses create jobs, generate income and pay taxes. They provide much of the funding for the amenities residents enjoy, from museums to youth programs.

Candidate Pat Woodbury has also been on both the City Council and the School Board. But her service has been marked more by dissension than productive collaboration. And it has not demonstrated a fine grasp of what it will take to move Newport News forward. Some of her solutions have the advantage of not costing much, along with the disadvantage of being unlikely to achieve much.

Her proposal for addressing crime — pairing gang members with disabled veterans — isn't likely to make a dent in the fundamental issues that feed gangs, nor is there evidence of its effectiveness.

One of her economic development proposals — to get successful entrepreneurs to coach struggling businesses — is helpful on a modest scale, but it won't produce the kinds of recruiting and expansion successes the city has seen in the last few years, which brought hundreds of good jobs and hundreds of millions in investment.

Woodbury and Price are both correct when they say fiscal restraint is essential, but she does citizens a disservice by creating an impression of profligacy. She cites a figure for the total city debt — \$1 billion — that sounds scary. But a chunk of that is not what a citizen would think of as debt: money borrowed that taxpayers have to pay back or promises made to future city retirees that taxpayers will have to fund. Some of it will be paid off by other revenue streams. Some of it is liabilities that accounting rules insist be on the books but that can be managed or may never come due. And some of it was invested in projects that return revenue to the city.

Woodbury offers a false contrast when she says that, as a retiree, she can devote more time to the job than Price, who must maintain his dental practice. Newport News, like most cities in Virginia, long ago moved to the city manager form of government, with professionals overseeing operations under the elected council's direction.

The mayor and council members are meant to be part time, and a "full-time" mayor overly involved in day-to-day affairs is actually something to be avoided.

Price's leadership on previous boards and projects produced lasting results, including new schools, new facilities, new programs that help young people and new resources that have made Newport News a better place to live and work.

McKinley Price is a team player, a collaborator, inclusive and respected. His record of dedicated contribution and achievement shows that he will make a fine mayor.

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