

Detroit Free Press

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Paul Anger
Editor & Publisher

Dear Distinguished Judges,

As Detroit became the largest city in the nation to file for bankruptcy, Stephen Henderson was heard clearly by all who had a stake in the historic process – state officials, city officials, legal officers and especially the people of Detroit.

Stephen's passion for the Motor City comes from growing up in Detroit. He graduated from the University of Michigan, worked in Chicago, Baltimore and Washington, D.C., and then came home. He had watched, for years, as Detroit slid into collapse. He returned determined to play a strong role in its resurgence.

His mission in 2013: Draw from his experience growing up in Detroit, understand what it's like to live in its neighborhoods now, with unacceptable levels of crime and bus service and emergency response and blight, and do something about it.

In the pages of the Detroit Free Press and the digital platforms of FreePress.com, he has written columns that have turned heads in Detroit, Lansing, Washington, D.C. Through a year of massive change for the city, and all the complexities of this unprecedented bankruptcy, he has championed a singular goal:

Make lives better for Detroiters.

The Free Press Editorial Board, which Stephen leads, tends to deliver a liberal message. But Stephen got behind the appointment of an emergency financial manager opposed by most of the city's Democratic elected leaders. He eloquently supported the new EM's decision to file for bankruptcy.

In a Page 1A column headlined *It's not about Detroit's budget, it's about Detroiters' lives*, Stephen argued for emergency management as a way to finally begin to solve the city's deplorable police response times. He wrote: "Detroit's elected leaders have been unable and in many cases unwilling to confront the horrible fiscal imbalances that leave insufficient money for EMS rigs, fire trucks, police officers and public lighting. Now they'll lose power to someone who will."

After Detroit's bankruptcy filing, when the Obama administration indicated it would take a wait-and-see approach to Detroit's financial struggles, Stephen's outrage was palpable and his direction clear in another 1A column headlined *Wake up, White House, get in the game*. "We don't need a bailout," he wrote, "but an investment in an iconic city with unique problems and unique promise."

Stephen's appeal helped spur deployment of a special White House team tasked with maximizing aid to Detroit through new and existing programs. He was also invited to appear on national media including the Diane Rehm Show and "The Colbert Report." In introducing Stephen to his audience, host Stephen Colbert asked: "Who knows where Detroit goes from here? This guy does."

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We think Colbert got it right.

As *Free Press* reporters dove into decades of financial records for a definitive project called *How Detroit Went Broke*, Stephen built on that research by confronting the pernicious accusation that African American leadership caused Detroit's downfall.

"Simple tag lines and slogans don't explain Detroit's financial difficulties," he wrote, "so clinging to them now assures failure in the effort to rebuild the city once it's back on its financial feet."

Detroit's historic bankruptcy filing coincided with the most important mayoral contest since the 1967 riot. Looking past the campaign's considerable melodrama -- the leading candidate was kicked off of the primary ballot but won an improbable write-in victory -- Stephen zeroed in on the issue most Detroiters hesitated to confront publicly: Why a city whose population is 80% African American should elect a white mayor, the one most qualified to serve.

This approach is emblematic of Stephen's voice in Detroit. He has the courage to ignore the pressure of politics and the hate sometimes directed at him personally and to remind everyone -- readers and leaders -- where their focus should be.

The Detroit Free Press is proud to nominate Stephen Henderson for the 2014 Pulitzer Prize in Commentary.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Paul Anger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Paul" being more prominent than the last name "Anger".

Paul Anger
Editor and Publisher