

METRO

Panel signs on to work on race

Gathering focuses on commitment

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After three days of deliberations and discussions, the pact was signed: Metro Detroit stakeholders promise to make a concerted effort to improve race relations in the region.

Led by Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, Compuware CEO Peter Karmanos Jr. and other business, political, religious and community leaders who participated in the Leadership Summit on Race signed a covenant Tuesday to meet three more times before January — before Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday — to formulate an action plan on race and improved humanity.



Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick



Compuware's Peter Karmanos

"The power of dialogue is so inspiring ... whether it's about racial issues or other issues," said David Campt, the summit's facilitator. "We didn't invent the history of the last 400 years, and we didn't invent the riot 40 years ago. It's a legacy we just inherited. The question becomes, 'What do we do with it?'"

Many of the participants

spent time in breakout sessions discussing how their areas of expertise could have an effect on the region. For example, a group of business CEOs agreed to meet to talk about hiring practices and their attempts to attract more minority employees.

Officials from New Detroit, the gathering's host, offered oversight as plans move forward. New Detroit, a coalition of leaders from civil rights and advocacy organizations, was formed in response to Detroit's 1967 riot. President Shirley Stancato said this week's summit was a necessary beginning to an ongoing conversation.

Participants, about 200 in all, appeared to agree. Of those who responded to an electronic poll, 53% classified the group participation and interaction at the gathering as excellent, while 38% said it was good. Forty-three percent of those polled gave it an overall excellent rating, followed by 48% who defined it as good, 8% as fair, 1% poor and 1% as needing serious improvement.

During the summit's final luncheon at the Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center, Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney shared best practices from his state and said he believes the biggest civil rights issue of his generation continues to be the disparity in education.

"It's the perception on my part, and possibly on your part, that the public education system is failing our children and in particular our minority kids," said Romney, who was born in Detroit, the son of former Michigan Gov. George Romney.

"The gap is frightening. The gap cannot be allowed to persist."

Romney also offered insight on how he was able to establish universal health care reform for Massachusetts residents and full scholarships for high-achieving high school students.

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