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THE ENQUIRER

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## A time for leaders to step forth

Election season may have ended, but our region's most important campaign has just begun.

Tuesday the United Way of Greater Cincinnati released the second edition of its State of the Community report.

It says that this is a place where babies are more likely to die, Hamilton County adults are more likely to be unemployed and neighborhoods are more segregated than in the nation as a whole.

We have relatively more smokers here, and relatively fewer young professionals. Greater Cincinnatians are losing health insurance coverage and gaining weight.

Local college enrollments are climbing and so are local housing costs. We spend less time commuting than our fellow Americans, but we also spend less time in the voting booth.

And while our suburban communities are safer and wealthier than national averages, the City of Cincinnati has alarmingly high rates of both poverty and murder.

It's interesting to note how many of these variables *didn't* make the platforms of most candidates vying for local and state office. Downtown development was a hot issue in city races, but nobody was talking about low-birth-weight babies or the 20 percent of Cincinnatians who lack regular access to a doctor.

Building a new jail was a topic of much debate, but voters heard little about the one in four Cincinnatians who live in poverty or Hamilton County's rising unemployment rate - both of which may contribute to why we need that new jail.

And even more interesting, according to observers, *not a single elected official* attended Tuesday's State of the Community press conference.

Think back to mid-October when we couldn't keep wildly accessible candidates away from any gathering with a handful of potential voters.

Now it's time to move from running *for* office to leading *in* office. For all its high-profile launching on Tuesday, the United Way report mostly told us what we already know - and its findings changed disappointingly little from a similar report two years ago. Our region is in a pivotal period, faced with the enormous advantages of a quite well-educated workforce, affordable housing and a growing economy - and the challenges of shrinking health coverage, concentrated poverty and an alarming and continuing loss of population in the urban core.

That looks like an agenda to us. It also looks like a scorecard.

When election season rolls around again for local leaders, the State of the Community report will make a terrifically handy checklist for measuring officials' performance and our region's progress.

The report lists 10 critical, bear-down issues, from sending young children off prepared for kindergarten to keeping young professionals in town. That's what we'd call work orders.

The Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber has agreed to oversee development of a regional civic agenda, which would be patterned on Kentucky's Vision 2015 effort, engage help from both sides of the river and share Kentucky's areas of focus.

Sounds like a plan. Now let's all keep track of which community leaders, businesses and agencies sign on to help not only discuss and document but indeed improve the state of this community.

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