

**Remarks By Bill Walls, Committee For A Better Chicago
One Year Anniversary of Meigs Field Destruction
"The Day Democracy Died"
30 March 2004**

One year ago today, democracy was bull-dozed in Chicago by a Mayor who exercised absolute authority by destroying – Meigs Field – a precious city asset. Our purpose here today is to memorialize democracy and call on all Chicagoans to coalesce around an issue that affects all of us.

My name is Bill Walls. I am a spokesman for the Committee for a Better Chicago. We are here today to tell the true story of how public safety and the economic vitality of Chicago was compromised and assaulted by Mayor Richard Daley's arrogant disregard for due process and public discourse.

For over fifty years, Meigs Field was an important component of our city's aviation network.

- It had the capacity for over 100,000 flights per year – at a time when the Mayor is about to sink at least \$15 billion into relieving overcrowding at O'Hare.
- It was a staging area for emergency fire, police and coast guard rescue activities.
- It was an important cog in the city's convention & tourism engine.
- It was a training ground for thousands of future aviators.
- And, most importantly – in today's post 911 homeland security atmosphere – Meigs Field was this city's last line of defense against exactly the type of air traffic threat Mayor Daley claimed to be protecting us against.

Before last year, every plane that entered Meigs Field's airspace was required to identify itself with that airport's control tower. Failing to do so was a violation of FAA rules and would have alerted us to any potential threat from an unidentified aircraft. The absence of that control tower exposes our entire lakefront and central business district and hundreds of thousands of lives to the dangers posed by unidentified aircrafts. Moreover, hundreds of thousands of people, not only at the Taste of Chicago and the Grant Park concerts, but at the Museum Campus, Soldier Field, Navy Pier, Water Filtration Plant, as well as thousands of boaters and beachgoers are actually less safe today than they were a year ago. Not to mention the many private citizens who – in times of crisis – when seconds count – are deprived of air/sea rescue and Medi-Vac operations that were once available at Meigs Field.

When Mayor Daley claimed "public safety" was his reason for carving up the public's property and claimed, "if Mickey and Minnie can have a No Fly Zone, then Chicago should too" – well it seems he was portraying Pinocchio at the time. He lied...again and again. And then, after the runways were destroyed and there was nothing anyone could do about it, he admitted he lied.

Well, we can do something about it, and we're here to endorse and offer up a plan submitted by the Friends of Meigs Field that will pay for restoring the airport, provide needed revenue to the Chicago Park District, and give the citizens of Chicago another downtown park that we can afford – the Bessie Coleman Skypark.

It's common knowledge, and Daley freely admits, he wants to replace Meigs Field with a ninety-acre nature park. Well, considering the Mayor's track record on building grandiose parks in the central business district, we have little confidence in the city's ability to actualize Mayor Daley's personal agenda for the public's property. Particularly given the Park District's current financial condition, which further highlights the folly of the Mayor's assault on Meigs Field. The Chicago Park District has already hiked its real estate tax levy,

increased fees and instituted paid parking in all lakefront parking lots...it is now raising the fees charged to neighborhood Little Leagues from \$1300 to \$8200. Neighborhood parks are already suffering at the expense of downtown parks, and now, we're balancing the park district's deficit on the backs of kids playing baseball.

The Bessie Coleman Skypark, would infuse enough capital to the Chicago Park District to eliminate the need to increase its fees, create a complementary addition to the city's museum campus, add new parkland, as well as pay for restoring the airport.

This newly formed grass roots coalition is joining with a number of groups today to call for a halt to Mayor Daley's campaign to dismantle democracy. The Committee for a Better Chicago has organized to empower people with shared values and interests to raise awareness and to seek social, political and economic justice for citizens of Chicago. In short we will pro-actively organize communities around a common agenda and take a leading position in matters of public discourse.

The mission of the Committee For A Better Chicago is to bring democracy back to the City of Chicago. By building coalitions and through public discussion, CFABC will work to shape public policy that is in the best interest of the people of Chicago.

In the coming months CFABC will speak out on a number of issues and offer solutions as we demand that government responds to the interests of the greater good, not a privileged few.