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Cobo Future Uncertain After Judge's Ruling

Detroit (WWJ) -- A significant ruling was made Thursday on the future of Detroit's Cobo Center.

WWJ Newsradio 950's Florence Walton reports Judge Isidore Torres has ruled that Mayor Cockrel does not have the authority to veto the Detroit City Council vote rejecting a plan to turn Cobo over to a regional authority. The ruling came after a couple weeks of negotiations between attorneys for city council and the mayor's office.

The legislation would have created a five member regional authority to operate Cobo Center, while paying the city some \$20 million. Council members who voted against the authority have said they don't want Detroit to lose another asset.

City Council President Monica Conyers, who led the effort to defeat the legislation, told WWJ she wants an authority similar to those set up to run the Detroit Zoo and Detroit Institute of Arts.

"We're not saying 'we don't want an authority, but we want it to be similar to the zoo, the DIA, Eastern Market, Historical Museum we want it to be similar to those... we still own those properties, we don't want it to just be taken away from us," Conyers said.

Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson fired back , following the ruling Thursday, "I don't think Monica Conyers is going to the MENSA picnic this summer," Patterson said. "And why they're letting her lead on this issue is beyond me."

Speaking live on WWJ shortly after the vote on February 24, Patterson described the Council vote as a "disaster" for Detroit and the future of Cobo.

"It's the best deal we were going to get -- certainly the best deal Detroit was going to get," Patterson said. "So, now they've saddled themselves with a deteriorating facility which they now draw somewhere between \$15 million and \$20 million a year from their general fund to put into this building, just to keep the doors open," he said.

Cobo Center is home to the North American International Auto Show which brings in an estimated \$500 million to the region each year.

"It's now totally the obligation for the City to put it back in working order, to upgrade it, and to maintain the North American International Auto Show. So, in a word, I'm flabbergasted," Patterson said.

The plan called to increase the 700,000 square feet of convention space at the downtown Detroit convention venue by 166,000 square feet and hands over its operation to a five-member board. That authority would've been made up of Detroit and the three surrounding counties, with one member appointed by the governor's office. The authority would have had the power to sell bonds and collect tax revenue from hotels and other sources.