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Editorial: 'Take it or leave it' should be message on Cobo deal

The Detroit News

The Detroit City Council's majority seems to be under the impression that there is a better deal on improving the Cobo Center waiting in the wings. There isn't. And the council members need to be forcefully told just that by the other players in the Cobo deal.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm, Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson, Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano and Macomb County Commission Chairman Paul Gielegem need to issue a joint, one-line statement: Take it or leave it.

Detroit's role in hosting the North American International Auto Show, a signature event that defines the city and region as the world auto capital, is at risk because of the council's decision to reject the Cobo deal.

Doug Fox, co-chairman of the auto show, told The Detroit News that German automakers committed to the 2010 show in part because they expected the Cobo agreement, reached after years of negotiation, proposals and counterproposals, would be approved.

The plan would create an authority to own and govern the convention facility, with appointees from Detroit, the state, and Macomb, Oakland and Wayne counties. But each member, including the Detroit appointee, would have what amounts to a veto over the authority's decisions.

The deal would provide \$288 million for expansion and renovation of the facility, give Detroit an upfront payment of \$20 million as compensation for loss of parking revenue from the convention center and relieve the city of the \$15 million annual cost of operating it.

Council President Monica Conyers apparently believes that additional money for Cobo will be forthcoming from the Obama administration. But Gov. Jennifer Granholm has already stated that Cobo is ineligible for the stimulus funds Congress approved earlier this month. Others on the council asked for new terms from the other parties. That isn't going to happen, either.

Detroit is facing a \$300 million deficit. It is the poorest big city in the nation. It is losing population at a rapid clip. The council members who voted against this deal -- Conyers, Barbara-Rose

Collins, Martha Reeves, Alberta Tinsley-Talabi and JoAnn Watson -- seem to be living in some kind of bubble in which they think the rest of the region and state want to "steal the city's jewels."

That's absurd. Most of the rest of this state is heartily sick of the kind of racial politics represented by this vote. The fact that they don't just throw up their hands and write Detroit off reflects their understanding that the health of the region and state depends on the health of Detroit.

But they have to have help from more of the city's politicians. Council should reverse this decision by this weekend, before the dismay caused by this week's rejection of the Cobo deal curdles to disgust and disengagement from Detroit.