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# Tom Walsh: Bill Ford to city, state: Don't sugarcoat fiscal reality, deal with it

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Bill Ford

MACKINAC ISLAND -- If the City of Detroit and State of Michigan want to cheat death, they would do well to heed the example of Ford, which not only avoided both bailout and bankruptcy but also turned massive losses into big profits, better sales, improved credit and a gusher of public goodwill.

"A couple lessons," Bill Ford, the automaker's executive chairman told me in an interview Thursday on Mackinac Island, "are relevant no matter what sector you're in or what your enterprise is, private or public."

First, he said, "You have to deal with reality. That's easy to say, difficult to do. You've got to not sugarcoat, not hope for better days to save you. You can't build a plan on hope and you can't build a plan on rhetoric. You've got to take a cold and rational view of

what reality is today."

Second, "You have to build a plan that deals with that reality and not deviate from it. There are so many temptations as fortunes start to get better, or worse. ... No plan is static and as the world changes, you still have to tweak it. But the basics of the plan have to stay the same and the relentless execution of that plan has to stay the same."

Ford said Gov. Rick Snyder adopted this approach to his first state budget and the state now has a surplus.

Detroit has been less-decisive, less-rigorous in attacking its chronic financial problems, Ford said, which is why it finds itself on the brink of bankruptcy or having an emergency manager if the

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consent agreement now being implemented by the city and state falters.

"I do think that for the city in general, it's frustrating to see a lack of progress. I wouldn't pin that all on the mayor, by any means, but it's time to get on with it. We're out of time," said Ford, who also is vice chairman of both Business Leaders for Michigan and the Detroit Lions football team.

Asked to assess Detroit Mayor Dave Bing's leadership, Ford said: "I'll leave it for others to grade his performance. I like Dave Bing very much as a person and I always want to help him wherever I can."

In a speech to the Detroit Regional Chamber's annual Mackinac Policy Conference on Thursday morning, Ford said trends in transportation, manufacturing and green technology offer an opportunity for Michigan to emerge as a global innovation center.

He also announced two initiatives to help young innovators by providing space to create and promote their ideas and inventions.

"While Michigan is the home of the auto industry, the trends affecting our industry offer a great opportunity to make it the home of a variety of other industries as well," Ford said. "We are heading in the right direction to grow Michigan by putting the right policies in place and investing in Michigan's future."

One new initiative is the Motor City Innovation Exchange, a collaboration among Ford's intellectual property licensing group, the new TechShop Detroit workshop, Wayne State University's TechTown and AutoHarvest to help entrepreneurs commercialize their creations. It provides a showroom to display and pitch inventions.

The second, the Jump Start Program, provides work space near TechShop in Allen Park to help entrepreneurs grow their new businesses.

"All of these efforts are to encourage innovation, not just in our company, but throughout our state," Ford said. "New ideas are a priceless resource, and the ultimate driver of economic growth."

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Black River Sturgeon  
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