

EDITORIAL/OPINION

Why a black presidential candidate?

by M. Carl Holman, President,
National Urban Coalition

Racism: A national disgrace

There is a major effort by the national news media to label Congressman Harold Washington, Democratic Party candidate for Mayor of Chicago, a racist.

Sure, Bernie Epton, the Republican Party candidate, is appealing to the racism of white Chicagoans they say. But Washington—in his call for unity and his heavy campaigning to black voters—is also appealing to racism, they add.

Yes, it is understandable that black Democrats would support a black Democrat, they concede. It also is normal that whites might prefer a white candidate, they continue.

The important fact that many national (and Chicago) news sources fail to mention is that black Democrats are supporting the Democratic Party nominee—while thousands of whites will abandon their party and vote for Epton—probably the first Republican they ever voted for in

their lives.

They are not voting for Epton because he holds to the same political philosophy as they do; they are not voting for his background and experience. They are voting solely because of his color.

On the fifteenth anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., we cannot fail to note that Chicago was King's most difficult campaign. It was in Chicago that he said: "In the North there are brothers and sisters who are suffering discrimination even more agonizing, in a sense, than in the South. In the South, at least, the Negro can see some progress, where in the North all he sees is retrogression."

Chicago's reaction to Washington's campaign for Mayor is not just a Chicago affair or a reflection on the Democrats. It is a national disgrace and it is perpetuated by the government functionaries and the national press.

Tax reform should be priority

The House Revenue Committee has held a series of public hearings around the state to hear citizens' suggestions on how the legislature can increase or shift taxes from one group to another.

At the Portland hearing Chairman Tom Throop attempted to prevent speakers from addressing the sales tax because Oregon now has no sales tax, even though sales tax options are before the legislature and may well appear on the ballot. He lectured the large audience to sit back and relax and admonished them to express their own ideas and not criticize the ideas of others.

Throop's attempt to avoid opposition to the sales tax disintegrated when Russ Farrell shouted him in a long defiant attack on the sales tax and its promoters.

Businessmen extolled the attributes of the sales tax. The Portland Association of Teachers

made a long presentation on the need for more money but did not address the method of raising that money. Office building managers wanted to shift the taxes to consumers; old-timers said they couldn't pay more.

None of the stop-gap measures being discussed by the legislature—each with its refunds or exemptions for the poor and loopholes for the rich—will provide a long-term answer. Rather than patchwork, Oregon needs a new tax structure. The corporate and personnel income taxes and property tax need to be restructured to ensure that taxes are based on ability to pay, and they should be the prime source of income for the state.

If the Revenue Committee can't develop a simple and equitable plan perhaps it should hire a consultant to do so. The continuous hassle over who will pay for state services cannot go on forever.

Whether they are for or against what Jesse Jackson calls the "Proposition," a number of blacks across the country who have been involved in discussions of the political primaries and the 1984 elections are being queried, or chided, or lectured to by whites and other blacks on one question: "Why consider a black presidential candidacy?"

Since the media generally has tended either to present the negatives or to quote one well-known personality in opposition to another, perhaps it might be useful to note some of the reasons why the possibility of supporting a black candidate in the Democratic primaries is under very active consideration by a good many people who are neither on ego trips nor candidates for straitjackets.

Some of the reasons go back as far as conversations about a Carl Stokes candidacy in 1972 even before Shirley Chisholm made her run. Some of them fed into the informal discussions of issues and tactics over many months in 1982 and 1983 prior to the first floating of this latest version of such an initiative.

What follows is an admittedly incomplete rendering of some of the ideas and feelings that have given rise to increasingly serious consideration of this "Proposition."

Many blacks feel they have not fared too well at the hands of white candidates and of a party that has been long on promises and short on regards for loyal support.

For some it was the short shrift given the Congressional Black Caucus budget last year even by colleagues who privately admitted it made sense; or the Me-tooism of Democratic members of Congress on votes harmful to blacks, Hispanics, cities and the poor. Or for others it was what was seen as the anti-minority bias of the Hunt Commission's delegate rules; or the crumbs originally allotted by the Democratic National Committee for black voter registration. Even those black Democrats with strong ties to white candidates actually began voicing their unhappiness long be-

fore the notion of a black candidacy took form.

One of the minor rites of the pre-presidential primary season over the past several campaigns has been the rapid-recruitment drill as white liberal and moderate candidates hasten to acquire black staff. Some of these, like their Hispanic and female counterparts, serve reasonably well. But past history suggests that a black candidate could hardly be less sensitive regarding black and other minority constituencies than some earlier white candidates have been.

Veterans of past campaigns were reminded at one meeting this winter that a black candidate would be unlikely to repeat the fiasco that reportedly occurred some years ago. A white candidate, appearing before a special convocation of black political and civic leaders, discarded his original text and treated the astonished group to a speech designed to please the white ethnic voters of the region.

Some are convinced that no white candidate is likely to be able to feel and to articulate the objective needs and the pain of blacks as keenly and insistently as would any one of the potential black candidates who have been suggested.

Certainly some of the white candidates now in the field are regarded as friends by several black leaders and have civil rights records ranging from very good to fair. But their trumpets so far have sounded an uncertain note, or have been totally silent on concerns critical to blacks. A black candidate, it is argued, will need no interpreter to express the ache and anger of a black America ravaged by lost jobs, homes and businesses, food for families and schooling opportunities for the young.

As has been true for other racial and ethnic groups, the presence of a black candidate has almost always served as a catalyst to bring out black voters—especially among the ranks of those who do not usually register and vote.

At a time when population shifts and rule changes have made voter participation by blacks, Hispanics

and the poor more critical than ever, many feel that the stimulus a black candidate could provide is a potential lever not to be discarded lightly.

In weighing the possibilities of a black presidential candidacy, it has been considered understandable and appropriate that both political leaders and non-politicians be considered.

The rationale for interest in such political leaders as Richard Hatcher, Walter Fauntroy, Andy Young (who has said he is not interested), Louis Stokes and other elected officials seems self-evident. Jesse Jackson, the most cited non-politician, like Wendell Willkie, has not offered before for public office. Like Adam Powell and some of the other not under consideration, he would be a political standard bearer with strong roots in civil rights and religion.

Not that the basic issue is being reduced to personalities alone. Strategies, regional and local concerns, money, timing and a great many other factors will be playing themselves out as the ultimate decision develops in the course of the series of meetings now going on around the country.

Perhaps the most powerful motivating force of all is the often suppressed but persistent urge to take seriously the possibility of something other than second-class citizenship for blacks in the political arena.

In part, the healthy differences between and among equally committed leaders on either side of the question revolve around the hard choices blacks have had to make from the time of the murderous middle passage to these shores, through the slave revolts, the tumultuous Sixties, the retrogressive Seventies and the present. Today, as in times past, there is mutually respectful debate between those who contend that the time is not right and those who feel that the time has somehow never been right for minorities to challenge the demeaning double standard that keeps them fractional Americans.

Letters to the Editor

Prostitution rap excuse for police neglect

To the editor:

We share the sorrow of the family of Trina Hunter at her untimely and unnecessary death. We share the anger of her family and friends at the way the case is being handled by the police. It's clear that police negligence—their failure to take her family's and Trina's own pleas for help seriously and their totally inadequate search for her—was responsible for Trina's death.

Her family and friends tell how their pleas for help fell on deaf ears because Trina was black and had been arrested for prostitution. Law enforcement officials have made it clear, time and time again, that women's lives are worth nothing to them and that if you're black and/or you've been a prostitute, you deserve what you get. In Seattle, the murder of a dozen women over the last year, many of them involved in prostitution, still remains unsolved.

In their anti-prostitution campaign last year, Mayor Ivancie and Police Chief Still tried to foment a vigilante atmosphere against prostitutes. They invited individual men and the police to have free reign to harass any woman walking the street at night. The prostitution laws used in this kind of campaign against women and the prejudice in the police force were responsible for

the inhuman behavior of police in a situation like Trina's. We'd like to know why harassing prostitutes is a police priority yet when they could save a woman's life they do nothing.

The issue of whether or not Trina Hunter was a prostitute, voluntarily or not, is totally irrelevant to whether or not she deserved police protection and assistance. Yet, police officials are quoted as saying that it was not clear whether she was forced into prostitution or involved "willingly." Are they saying she deserved her fate?

The majority of prostitute women, like Trina Hunter, are mothers struggling to bring up their children. When women turn to prostitution because it is the only way to feed their families, who can say that they are doing it voluntarily.

Support Washington campaign

To the editor:

It is unusual to be campaigning for an out-of-state candidate, but we are outraged at the turn of events surrounding the candidacy of Democrat Harold Washington of Chicago! However, as of March 24, Jane Byrne has withdrawn from the campaign, not on principle but on technical difficulties. I perceive it to be racism at its highest form and want to speak out against it as forcefully as possible.

I believe you agree, that we in Oregon want to support Democratic Mayoral candidate Washington morally and financially. Please make your contribution, in any

amount, to Oregon Democrats for Washington, 3415 N.E. 19th Street, Portland, OR 97212. Checks should be made to Citizens for Washington Campaign. We will collect the contributions and send them directly to the Harold Washington campaign. The election in Chicago is April 12.

There will be a reception on Friday, April 8th, from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the Portland Plaza Party Room, 1500 S.W. Fifth, Portland, OR. Please join me, Bill, Arnold and Rosie Biskar, other elected officials, and Democrats for refreshments and conversation.

Gladys McCoy,
Chairperson, Oregon Democrats for Washington

The politics of the arms race

by Dr. Manning Marable

It is clear that a majority of Americans favor a massive reduction in expenditures for nuclear weapons. What has not yet been placed firmly on the public agenda is a general debate to reallocate billions of dollars in federal money from both conventional and nuclear arms into spending for human needs—housing, health care, jobs, and necessary social services.

Economic Notes, a publication of the New York-based Labor Research Association, makes this point quite clear in its January, 1983 issue on "Labor for Peace." Last November, over 11.6 million Americans voted in favor of a nuclear freeze between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. In cities with sizeable black populations, the margin of victory was between 3-1 and 4-1. Washington, D.C., for example, cast 77,521 votes in favor of a nuclear freeze, with only 23,369 votes against. In Philadelphia, the vote was 231,787 to 75,149; in Chicago, 404,173 to 135,325. 276 City Councils across the nation passed freeze resolutions, and both chambers of eleven state legislatures. Last June, about one million people demonstrated to halt the arms race. This upsurge in the streets and legislatures forces Congress to refuse a Reagan-backed proposal for \$1 billion for the production of the MX missile last December.

The day after this historic vote, however, the House voted by a massive margin of 346-68 to accept a military appropriations bill of \$230 billion. This amount included \$2.5 billion for the research and development of the MX missile.

The obvious contradiction between millions of Americans demonstrating for peace and a nuclear freeze vs. the adoption of a \$230 billion war budget by the House was attacked by democratic socialist Ronald V. Dellums. "It is very sexy, it is very attractive now to be for the freeze; but how do you translate that commitment into the budget?" Representatives were guilty of the most blatant form of hypocrisy when they proclaimed their support for arms reductions and then "vote

for all the weapons that deny the freeze—the MX, Pershing II, the Trident submarine and the B-1 bomber," Congressman Dellums declared.

Several months before, Dellums introduced an alternative Appropriations Bill (HR-6696), which reduced by more than \$50 billion the current military budget. Money for the Cruise and MX missiles, the Pershing II and Trident II would stop. Dellums' bill was defeated by a margin of 55 yes, 348 no, 31 not voting. Last May, the Congressional Black Caucus proposed an alternative budget which demanded spending for human needs and reductions in war programs. It too was trounced: 86 yes, 322 no, and 24 not voting.

Why the powerful mandate for military expenditure? Part of the reason lies in the political economy of military spending. Defense department contracts with major corporations jumped from \$76.8 billion in 1980 to \$97.4 billion in 1981. The top five defense contractors in 1981 were Boeing, \$2.7 billion; General Electric, \$3 billion; General Dynamics, \$3.4 billion; United Technologies, \$3.8 billion; and McDonnell Douglas, \$4.4 billion. The entire process is a kind of corporate welfare from top to bottom. Generals (notably former Secretary of State Alexander Haig) and bureaucrats at the Pentagon slip and slide between posh, well-paid jobs in defense-related industries and the federal government. Sources indicate that "profits before taxes were 56 percent for defense contractors—higher than any in the civilian sector. All research and development costs are paid by the government so that contracting firms stake relatively little capital of their own. Practically all defense

contracts are let on a non-competitive cost-plus basis, insuring high profits." For companies with a history of bad management, a lucrative defense contract can bail them out of fiscal difficulty. For instance, Chrysler received \$1.4 billion in Pentagon contracts in 1981 alone—the 10th largest defense supplier in the U.S.

But the merchants of war also insure their profits in other ways. The Friends Committee on National Legislation, a Quaker lobbying group, monitored the legislative activities of twelve major contractors in the first eight months of 1982—McConnel Douglas, United Technologies, General Dynamics, Boeing, Lockheed, Litton, Hughes Aircraft, Grumman, Raytheon, Martin Marietta, Rockwell International, and FMC. In this period, these 12 corporations spent \$1.2 million to Congressional candidates in the pre-election period. This was an increase of 250 percent over their expenditures during the entire 1978 election year.

Most of the House and Senate members who received these corporate gifts were on the Armed Services Committee and Defense and Military Construction Appropriations Subcommittees. Key Senators received between \$11,000 to \$38,500. In fact, three Senators who were not even up for reelection until 1986 were given healthy contributions. Is it any wonder that the votes against the Dellums bill and the Black Caucus' initiatives to slash military welfare were so large? The "best Congress that money can buy" cannot afford to turn its backs on its corporate patrons, who in turn escalate the probability of a general nuclear or conventional war.



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