

EDITORIAL / OPINION

LOW INCOME BENEFITS TIED TO TAXES

by
John E. Jacob

Many low income households are in danger of losing up to \$874 if they fail to file a tax return. Families with at least one child under age 18 at home are eligible for the Earned Income Credit if they had work-related earnings during the year.

Some 11 million families qualify.

Those with earned incomes between \$6,000 and \$10,000 can get \$874 from the government. Families with earnings below \$6,000 qualify for a check equal to 14 percent of their earned income. The benefit phases out over the \$10,000 level, but the income cutoff point doesn't come until a family's earnings hit \$18,576.

The catch is that families have to file income tax forms to get the benefit, since it's tied to the tax structure. And many low-income people who don't earn enough to pay taxes or didn't have any taxes deducted from their paychecks don't file returns.

So it is crucial for low income families who think they don't need to file a return to do so. Otherwise, they'll miss out on one of the most effective programs devised to prop up the incomes of low-earning workers.

Too many people aren't aware of the Earned Income Credit -- people who have been laid off, part-time workers, and people in low-paid jobs who think tax forms are only for those who owe the government money.

And the credit is not only available to low income families in 1988, but also to those who did not file returns in any of the past three years. They can file for those years now and claim the credits for those years.

Because the eligibility cutoff points and the amount of the credit are adjusted for inflation, they're somewhat lower for previous years. In the 1985 and 1986 tax years, the cutoff point was \$11,000 of earned income and the benefit ceiling was \$500. For 1987, the cutoff was \$15,432 and the top benefit was \$851.

Another aspect low income families should consider: if people anticipate that this year's family income will make them eligible for the earned income credit in 1989, they can choose to have their employer add to their paychecks rather than wait until next year's tax filing to get the benefit in one lump sum.

And families don't have to do the arithmetic to file for their credit. Once they file a return, the tax office will calculate their credit and send them a check.

The Earned Income Credit has been on the books since 1975. The idea behind it was simple: to give back to low income families the amount they've paid in social security payroll taxes. That would correct the regressive impact of those taxes on the working poor, while serving as an incentive for people to work.

But the credit wasn't adjusted for inflation and by 1986, was worth a fraction of what it was. So in 1986, Congress expanded the value of the Earned Income Credit and tied it to the inflation rate to keep its value constant.

At the same time, the tax reform removed 5 to 6 million low income families from the tax rolls. That was a major anti-poverty move, but an unintended by-product is that many of those families may not file returns, and miss out on the credit.

If your family qualifies for the credit, file a tax return and claim it. If you know someone who qualifies, tell them about it.

DEAR EDITOR:

I am writing to thank you on behalf of Portland Cable Access for the publicity in the Portland Observer of March 2, 1989 promoting Video Showcase.

Portland Cable Access has just begun this series of four monthly evening screenings designed to provide access producers with feedback on their work from other producers and interested individuals. This is a way that producers can improve their work and get to know each other, and the first session was well attended and enjoyable.

The Portland Observer provides a valuable service to the community in its publicity not only of hard news, but of

events and training opportunities that can serve to improve the quality of our lives and our awareness of the world around us.

I appreciate very much the courteous help given to me by Joyce Washington; she went the extra mile and it made all the difference. I look forward to working with her and the rest of the Observer staff in the future.

Sincerely,
Phyllis Ainsworth Cole
Outreach Coordinator
Portland Cable Access

I am writing to you about the December 30th Oregonian article written by Diane Dulken, "Parents Protest Science Center Chief's Dismissal". The kindest comment that I can make concerning this article is that it does not truly represent what occurred at this meeting. It is another example of how the Black Community and its positions are misrepresented by the Oregonian. Therefore, this is another reason for community concern.

While there are many examples that I could use to refute Miss Dulken's article, the most pointed is that Miss Eichinger said that she has a personal problem with Mr. White. This fact and not the budget is the reason that he has been fired. Additionally, we outlined a plan which 1. saves OMSI money and 2. allows us to maintain the ASK Center in its entirety. I, specifically, pointed out that the ASK program to which Miss Eichinger refers and remains committed is NOT the ASK Program that currently serves the community. Miss Eichinger would have after school clubs, "like the Boy Scouts or Camp Fire Girls, run by volunteers." The Center would be open 2-3 hours a day, M-F. The ASK Center was officially open 12-7, M-F, and 12-4 on Saturday. However, the center and staff were available much longer. There are children who came to the Center before they went to school. Mr. Cottrell White was there to help them finish their homework and to inspire them for the day. There was a parent's class which met on

Wednesday night. The staff volunteered their time to make these things and much more happen. The ASK Center involved the entire family and served our community quite well. I addressed this point as did some of the other parents. These are major points but aren't even mentioned in the Oregonian article.

Additionally, Miss Dulken stated that Miss Linda Johnson was unavailable. Miss Johnson introduced herself as the only board member of the ASK Board who was present at the meeting. She also relieved me as the chairperson and was still present long after Miss Dulken had left the meeting. Miss Dulken talked with Mr. White for approximately three minutes. She spoke with me an additional three minutes and was very clear about the fact that she was in a hurry and talking to me was definitely an imposition upon her time. However, she did spend about 20 minutes with Miss Eichinger.

We would like for the Oregonian to print an article which fairly and accurately presents our position. We would be happy to discuss this matter with the Oregonian management at their earliest convenience.

As of December 26th our records indicated that we have expended \$59,763.94 which represented 74.15% of the budget. The remainder is spent on administrative expenses.

Sincerely,
Millie E. Harmon

"How Black Power was lost in Chicago"

Dr. Manning Marable Along the Color Line
Part one of a two part series.

The victory of State's Attorney Richard Daley over Black incumbent Eugene Sawyer for the Democratic nomination in Chicago's mayoral primary was not unexpected. Sawyer was a dull, uninspiring candidate, and had no coherent or progressive program to address the city's problems in housing, health care, economic development or education. But the margin of his defeat by Daley, a massive 101,000 vote mandate, is indicative of the broader political dilemma for Black politics throughout the country. Only six years ago, Congressman Harold Washington swept to victory in Chicago's Democratic primary and general election, becoming the city's first mayor to represent an insurgent coalition of Blacks, Hispanics, and progressive elements of labor and the liberal white constituencies of the city's lakefront. Now, the immediate question is: How was Black and progressive power lost in Chicago?

When Washington became mayor, the majority of Black elected officials, leading clergymen and many Black entrepreneurs had opposed his initial candidacy. They believed incorrectly that it was premature to talk about Black, Brown and progressive electoral power in Chicago. Washington himself was unsure whether to run, and it took a massive voter registration campaign in 1982 which made the mayoral race possible. However, Washington was not vindictive in victory. He did not lead a campaign to oust Congresswoman Cardiss Collins from her House seat, despite her endorsement for Washington's opponent, Mayor Jane Byrne, in 1983. He permitted machine hacks from the Puerto Rican, Mexican-American and African American communities to join his administration, regardless of their past political records of compromise and accommodation. Washington believed correctly that the pressure from the masses of non-white and progressive voters from below that such politicians could be "remade" or reformed. This had been his own political trajectory and experience after his decisive break from the old Daley machine in the early 1970s.

When Washington was re-elected in 1987, he failed to purge those elements within his coalition who were ideologically conservative, closest to the downtown business interests. He also permitted Blacks who had openly campaigned against him to retain their ward seats unchallenged. But the major error committed by Washington was the failure to groom a logical political successor, who would stand for his progressive, anti-machine principles. Perhaps Washington felt that he would actually be mayor for another twenty years, despite his weight problem, chain-smoking, and generally bad personal health. For whatever reason, when the mayor died of a heart attack, no one in his own coalition was prepared to move forward with a plan to maintain the essential coalition between Blacks, Hispanics, and liberal whites which produced Washington's electoral victories.

The racist political machine of Edward Burke and Company, the heirs to the Daley organization, recognized one thing immediately: they could not elevate a white political leader into the mayor's seat in the aftermath of Washington's death. This was impossible, given the majority held by the Washington coalition in the City Council. They had to split their opponents, selecting the weakest, most vacillating Black leader who was willing to betray the grassroots struggle for democracy. Sawyer was more than willing to play the puppet's role, despite the fact that the majority of Washington's

forces favored Alderman Timothy Evans to become mayor. With white conservative support, Sawyer became mayor in a raucous City Council session besieged by angry Black and Hispanic demonstrators. And despite Sawyer's rise in the polls just before his mayoral defeat, the machine knew that a weakened, divided Black community could never defeat a unified, well-financed campaign by one white challenger. Daley's victory was partially won the night Sawyer became mayor.

The victory of Richard Daley in Chicago's Democratic mayoral race occurred for several reasons. The most obvious problem was that his opponent, incumbent Mayor Eugene Sawyer, lacked any viable strength within grassroots constituencies in Black and Hispanic communities. For example, Sawyer failed to establish a political organization which could reach voters in the projects and community centers. He had no political agenda and worse, apparently no progressive vision which built upon the legacy of the late mayor Harold Washington. Sawyer went after official endorsements and television advertisements, without trying to solicit the support of ordinary working class voters.

But Daley had other advantages as well. He was inarticulate and not too bright, to be sure. But his father had been boss of the city for more than two decades. The junior Daley had run in city and county-wide elections seven times since 1980, whereas Sawyer had never run for public office outside of the sixth ward. White conservative and liberal would-be challengers, such as 14th Ward Alderman Edward Burke, former Chicago Park District Superintendent Edmund Kelly and 5th Ward Alderman Lawrence Bloom, dropped out or stepped aside, and erratic demagogue "Fast Eddie" Vrdolyak ran a successful write-in campaign for the Republican mayoral nomination. Daley was also successful in raising funds, spending approximately \$1.8 million on media alone. With sufficient fiscal resources, plus the advantage of a one-on-one race against an unpopular Black mayor Daley should have trounced Sawyer.

Wisely, Daley also ran a campaign which minimized racial polemics. Although Daley had been defeated by Washington in the 1983 Democratic mayoral primary, coming in a poor third behind incumbent mayor Jane Byrne, he distanced himself from the acrimonious and confrontational style of Vrdolyak. Speaking in Black churches just before election day, Daley tried to blur the distinction between progressive and reactionary politics by focusing on elements of style. "Harold Washington was a strong mayor who believed in open government and who talked about fairness," Daley declared. Daley applauded the Washington legacy, stating only that he had "a different style, a different management style" from his former opponent. Daley's only major gaffe was using the phrase "white mayor" at an appearance before an all-white crowd, in an effort to whip up a decent turnout among race-conscious voters.

There were also defections from the original Washington coalition to Daley. Many lakefront white liberals who had endorsed Washington returned to the fold by joining Daley. Joan Peters, a former administrator under Jimmy Carter and a supporter of Washington, backed Daley. One group of Jewish liberals, represented by a formation called the Jewish Committee for Responsible Government, refused to support Sawyer because of the mayor's "inability to act firmly and decisively in the face of overt anti-Semitism." The major defection occurred in the Latino community, as 26th Ward Alderman Luis Gutierrez campaigned extensively for Daley. Back in 1987, Washington carried the 26th ward, which has thousands of Hispanic voters, by a 4,300 vote margin over Jane Byrne. In this election, Daley defeated Sawyer by 4,300 votes in the 26th Ward.

In the middle class lakefront 49th ward, Washington had defeated Byrne by a narrow 400 vote margin; two years later, Daley defeated Sawyer in the same ward by 3,600 votes. Citywide, Sawyer won less than 8 percent of the white vote.

Embittered and disappointed, Sawyer now refuses to endorse Tim Evan's independent race for mayor against Daley in the general election. Sawyer thus places his own frustrated ambitions above the fundamental interests of

the Black community, preferring to return the political establishment to the corrupt status quo. If Black and progressive power is lost in Chicago as it was in Cleveland two decades ago with the demise of the administration of former mayor Carl Stokes, there is a very real possibility that no Black or Latino mayor could emerge in that city for another ten years or more.

But there is one additional shadow cast by the fiasco of fragmented Black power in Chicago. Jesse Jackson and his former campaign manager Ron Brown, now the Chairperson of the Democratic National Committee, played curious roles in the campaign. After some moments of uncertainty, Jackson embraced Sawyer for re-election, calling upon Blacks to "Keep the Keys" to City Hall. Operation PUSH president Rev. Willie Barrow and other Black leaders who had been close to Jackson over the years were key Sawyer supporters.

With Daley's victory, however, Brown pledged his "full support to the election of a Democratic mayor of the City of Chicago... The emphasis for all Democrats must now be on unity and conciliation." Jackson challenged the party hierarchy by announcing his support for Evan's insurgent campaign in the general election. If Evans has any chance for victory, he must rebuild the Washington progressive coalition, and Jackson must assume a critical role in this process without overshadowing the local candidate.

But is Jackson actually committed to the progressive, grassroots politics of a Harold Washington? At the most recent national meeting of the leaders of the Rainbow Coalition, Jackson's allies passed new requirements which would permit the appointment of state chairs, rather than their democratic election. If progressive politics means anything, it must mean mass participation and activism from below, which empowers working class and low income people. Black and progressive power was lost in Chicago because Sawyer failed to understand this fundamental reality.

DEAR PRESIDENT BUSH: STOP WAR ON ANGOLA

by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

African American as well as other church leaders recently made an urgent appeal to President Bush to stop the United States sponsored war on Angola. This multi-racial group of clergy and church leaders from across the nation expressed their opposition to Bush's support of Jonas Savimbi and his terrorist group known as UNITA.

It is a good sign when African American church leaders are joined by Hispanic American, Asian American, Native American and Anglo-American church leaders in this important appeal to President Bush. Tens of thousands of Angolans in their own native land have been murdered, tortured and maimed as a result of the vicious acts of brutality committed by UNITA on the people of Angola.

The following is the text of the letter that was sent to the President: Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to make an urgent appeal to you concerning the injustice of the present foreign policy of your administration toward the People's Republic of Angola.

We have a moral and a theological responsibility to speak out and to act for the cause of freedom, justice and peace. We are aware that in January of this year you wrote a letter to Jonas Savimbi, the brutal leader of the terrorist group UNITA. We are very dismayed that you have stated your intention to "continue all appropriate and effective assistance to UNITA" inclusive of covert military aid.

Today Angola has the highest amputee rate per capita in the world, most of whom are women, and children who have been criminally tortured and victimized by Savimbi's UNITA. Now that peace accords have been signed between Angola, Cuba and South Africa, why does the United States under your leadership continue to send land mines and other military weapons of mass death and destruction to UNITA? How can there be peace in Angola or in southern Africa if the United States continues to support the terrorism of UNITA?

We appeal to you, President Bush, in the name of Christ, to change your policy toward Angola in the following ways:

1. Terminate immediately all aid and support to Jonas Savimbi and UNITA.
2. Grant full diplomatic recognition to Angola.
3. Support the providing of medical care and emergency aid for the tens of thousands of victims of the unjust war on Angola.

Whether or not Bush will answer this letter - or more importantly, whether or not Bush will change his current policy toward Angola will be dependant upon public outcry. Our sisters and brothers in Angola need our help and solidarity and most of all they need our united voice demanding justice and peace.

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