

EDITORIAL

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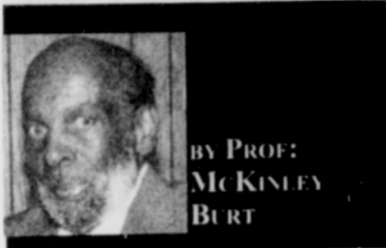
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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

perspective

Gov. Pete Wilson (CA.)

A Presidential Candidate?



BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

Why not. As I stated here Sept. 3 regarding Gov. Wilson's virulent anti-affirmative action posture, "this drama is being watched across the land" ("A Dream Deferred or A Dream Interred?" Prop. 209.)

And very pointedly, I cited the example of a notorious pair of racist governors from another generation - Faubus of Arkansas and Wallace of Alabama - who also sought to use a 'schoolhouse door' as a window of national political opportunity. With those disastrous failures in mind, Gov. Wilson was adroit enough to 'play a black hand' from the very inception of his political plans. Or was it the Republican political machine as such?

It now appears that the infamous Wade Connerly, the black (?) member of the California State Board of Regents may have been planted

there. Ideally positioned as a 'Trojan Horse', Connerly, as has been described here, made his fortune off the "race-based" contracts he was fed for years (before suddenly discovering that the concept was "racist and un-American"). And it was his deciding vote against affirmative action at the university level that was the first volley fired in this new class war.

Since our Sept. 3 article this demagogic Right Wing campaign has taken on a profile that can only be described as virulent. An "American Indian Child Education" program is high up on Wilson's 'hit list' according to a 9/10/97 report by the 'LA Times-Washington Post News Service': "Wilson identified 25 additional statutes that he considers to be in conflict with Proposition 209. The list includes a variety of laws regarding education, health, contracting and government procedures."

We are not amused or confused by the great flood of crocodile tears unleashed by a sudden philosophic awakening on the part of some Ameri-

cans that any form of discrimination against one's fellow citizen is wrong (of course, if it is wrong now, then it always has been, right?)

It was only several decades ago that a 99% white U.S. Congress passed affirmative Action laws operative at the federal level-and, subsequently, some state legislatures followed suit. Despite the protestations, innuendos and, often, outright lies of many in opposition to such programs, none of this legislation provides for the creation of pools of "unqualified" persons who are to be automatically given job preference based on their race, gender or handicap. A terrible inequity was realized and an attempt was made to deal with it.

What over 400 white congressmen realized was that America's racist approach to employment practice was not only wrong - and indecent of a civilized nation - but effectively prevented this country from reaching its full potential as a major nation or representative of humankind. Not a good situation where one if fast

becoming a minority oneself!

Now, instead of adjusting or rectifying those few situations where affirmative action laws may have been inappropriately applied, there is this killer campaign to end overnight any all legislation that patently was designed to facilitate the entry of all Americans into the workplace without fear that such equality of employment and economic opportunity could be restrained by race, gender or physical handicap.

The overwhelming majority of Americans by virtue of birth has enjoyed "affirmative action" since the formation of this Republic or since later forbearers got off a boat from Europe. And when you have enjoyed a position of pride, privilege and prejudice for so many hundred years, the appearance of 'unfamiliar' colors, sexes, and physiognomies in previously 'reserved' sectors of the workforce can, indeed, prove disconcerting. But progress has always been of that nature, hasn't it?

Teamsters' Victory At UPS

Labor Day 1997 was one of the most joyous in decades for organized labor and working people because of the Teamsters' Union victory in the strike against the United Parcel Service. Throwing the full weight of the AFL-CIO behind Ron Carey and the striking Teamsters, John Sweeney, President of the giant labor federation, correctly sensed that this strike was potentially a turning point in the fortunes of organized labor in this country. Ever since President Reagan fired the striking federal air traffic controllers (PATCO) the fortunes of organized labor have been waning in America with an attendant decline in the overall living standard of working people in this country.

The AFL-CIO's failure to fully embrace and back PATCO proved to be a near fatal mistake. This lack of solidarity signalled a weakness to big business which suggested that labor could be coerced into making major concessions in terms of wage and benefit freezes, reductions and concessions and give-backs. The passage of NAFTA and GATT and the increasing globalization of the economy also put additional pressures on labor to be tame in the face of the bogeyman of "foreign competition." Emboldened by the apparent weakness of labor, corporations also adopted the tactic of permanently replacing striking workers with scabs striking fear into the hearts of rank

and file union members.

In addition, U.S. corporations went on a binge of downsizing hurling thousands of workers into the unemployment lines further increasing the anxieties and insecurity of workers. Two tier wage schemes, temporary work and part-time employment with low wages and little or no benefits also became fixtures within the American labor market. Under these circumstances membership in unions dropped dramatically with the unionized share of the American work force declining from 25% to 10% over the past two decades.

The consequence of the downturn in the fortunes of American labor was dire if not disastrous for large

numbers of working people in this country. While corporate profitability and the stock market have soared to record heights in the last five years, the standard of living for working people has continued to remain stagnant or has actually declined. Despite the persistence of racism in the ranks of labor, as a general rule, when organized labor has been strong the standard of living of working people, including Blacks and other people of color has improved. Conversely, when organized labor has been weak, it has had an adverse effect on the living standards of Blacks and people of color.

RAINBOW PUSH

COALITION

San Francisco-it was a glorious day, a historic day, a day for standing up and fighting back. On the 34th anniversary of Dr. King's March on Washington, thousands and thousands of marchers streamed across the Golden Gate Bridge, challenging Pete Wilson's efforts to radically re-segregate California.

This list of high-ranking officials marching was long and impressive--Jesse Jackson, Mayor Willie Brown, Patricia Ireland, Dolores Huerta, Belen Robles, Mayor Ellhu Harris, Barbara Lee, Kevin Murray, Rev. Amos Brown, Rev. Cecil Williams, Bishop Chandler Owens, Bishop Charles Blake, Rev. Chuck Singleton, leaders of the Teamsters, SEIU Local #250, and many other unions.

Even more impressive were the rank-and-file members of these

unions, these churches, the UFW, NOW, LULAC, the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, and so many other organizations, plus the thousands and thousands of people of conscience who came out to march to fight back against re-segregation.

Rev. Jackson stated the case for the march: "We march to protect the American Dream, the one big tent America under which we all must live together. Under this big tent, there are four fundamental guarantees: (1) equal protection under the law; (2) equal opportunity; (3) equal access; and (4) fair share.

"This march is not just about saving affirmative action. This march stands in opposition to the radical re-segregation of our nation. We will not sit quietly by while African American, Hispanic, and Native American students are purged from higher edu-

cation in California, or anywhere else.

"We will not allow this country to move from the most diverse, the fairest, the most inclusive law, medical, and graduate school classes in our history, to professional schools with no Black, Brown, or Red students. This is not right. This is not moral. This is not why Dr. King gave his life.

"We march today to roll back Wilson's rollback of civil rights. We will keep marching until the civil rights laws is a states rights issue! People of conscience must stand up with us, and be counted for justice--and we trust they will join us as we march again in Sacramento on October 27th. We will keep on marching; we shall not be moved."

Governor Wilson, the driving force behind Prop. 209, which bans consideration of race or gender as a factor in public policy, emphasized his deter-

mination to enforce state rights over the wishes of county, city, or local governments. He made it very clear that he would crack down hard on any mayor or county executive who continued to allow affirmative action.

Our question is obvious: why aren't the President, the Vice-President, the Attorney General, and the U.S. Department of Justice following that same logic? Governor Wilson is asserting the State of California's power to override city and county officials. It is long past time for the Clinton Administration and the Federal government to assert the U.S. Government's right to supersede states' wishes, especially concerning issues of civil rights.

This has been a wedge issue for Wilson, and a hedge issue for prominent Democrats.

The radical re-segregation of higher

Freedom March

education in California is at heart a states rights issue. Pete Wilson is attempting to overturn civil rights laws and regulations that were won by Rosa Parks, Dr. King, and the mass civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. (A movement, by the way, in which Pete Wilson--like most of those now so concerned about the falsely-named issue of "reverse discrimination"--was not prominently featured, despite being old enough to participate at the time it was happening...)

States rights and civil rights have a certain history in America. When Orval Faubus tried to assert states rights in Arkansas, President Eisenhower sent in the National Guard and overrode him. When George Wallace tried to secede Alabama from the civil rights laws of this Union, Presidents Kennedy & Johnson over-

rode him. When Lester Maddox waved his ax handle in Georgia's school doors, these same presidents backed him down.

Now it is President Clinton's turn. This is a decisive moment for the President, and for the Vice-President. A single state is trying to undo Federal laws and rules that were passed to eliminate discrimination and overcome the effects of centuries of slavery and segregation. The Federal government should be on the side of existing civil rights laws, and the fact that California passed a misleading, mis-named, massively-funded initiative trying to undo those laws is neither legally nor morally relevant.

The truth is, the real race conversation is now being held, in California, on affirmative action and states rights.

To Be Equal

By HUGH B. PRICE
NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

Have you noticed? For the second time this year a young African-American athlete has vaulted to the top of a sport in which African Americans have rarely occupied the top rungs--and in doing so has spurred predictions of a revolution in the sport. First, it was Tiger Woods, golfer extraordinaire, of Asian, American Indian, and European, as well as African descent.

Now, it's Venus Williams. Williams, the 17-year-old tennis phenomenon who powered her way to the finals of the U.S. Open in New York last weekend, was no match this time for the superb play of Martina Hingis, the world's top-ranked player.

Still, the expectations of Williams are astonishing: Although she's just begun her career at the top of the sport, the president of the United States Tennis Association

declared after the tournament that she "is the best thing that has happened to American tennis for the last 20 years."

These two young African-American athletes are important in ways that transcend sport.

For one thing, Woods and Williams have restored the public memories of the true African-American pioneers in these sports--an Althea Gibson in tennis, a Charlie Sifford in golf--and in so doing shown that in fact there's very little in the field of human endeavor black people haven't done before. The newcomers aren't breaking barriers; they're opening the doors wider.

Their stardom also underscores the point that, once the barriers to its participation are lowered, no arena of human activity is "off limits" to any ethnic group.

Tiger Woods and Venus Williams

are exceptional people, alright. But they're not exceptions among African Americans.

The qualities they've displayed--talent, determination, discipline, self-confidence, and faith in the future--aren't limited to a few African-American youth. In fact, we have those kinds of youngsters in abundance.

Some of them are in two-year technical schools, or community colleges, or the military, or the workforce. Some others of them have had the luxury of choosing among Harvard, Stanford, Pennsylvania, Emory and Morehouse for college. Last year still others, seventy-nine high school seniors who won prestigious National Achievement Scholarships, chose to enroll at Howard University, propelling that historically black institution to the top of the heap in the national competition for those prized students. That's revolutionary activity worth

talking about.

We'd be the first to say that we, Black America and all of America, need more young people like this. That is to say, we need to inspire more young people to cultivate the qualities, which will enable them to achieve in school, contribute to their communities and build productive lives for themselves.

That's the purpose of the annual national celebration we at the Urban League call "Doing The Right Thing." To show off our youth all across the country who are doing well in school and in their communities--and to show their peers that excellence is worth pursuing and will be recognized and rewarded.

We began this event last September with great success; nearly 100 of our League affiliates sponsored street fairs, parades and award ceremonies which showcased the good things

young people do. This year we expect it to be even bigger because we have joined with nearly a score of other black professional, fraternal and church organizations to launch the Campaign for African-American Achievement.

As Bishop Roy L.H. Wincush, chairman of the National Congress of Black Churches, says, our purpose is to harness the power of the African-American community to lift the academic achievement levels of black children.

We'll help education officials renovate school facilities and improve curricula to give young people a proper scholastic learning environment. And we'll ally ourselves with local community organizations and parents and young people themselves to spread the culture of achievement within these neighborhoods.

Our young people must have ac-

cess to opportunity--to quality education, to ample chances to develop socially and spiritually through work and community service.

They need to feel surrounded by caring adults who provide emotional support and advice and guidance.

Those are the qualities which have produced a Tiger Woods, a Venus Williams and uncounted others.

We and our partners in the Campaign for African-American Achievement know that there are many more of these achievers out there in the neighborhoods in which African Americans live.

And we know that it's our responsibility to make sure that all of them get the opportunity to let their talents draw cheers.