

EDITORIAL

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

This Way For Black Empowerment

BY DR. LEONORA FULANI

Democracy Gets Another Chance

As readers of this column know, over years I've aggressively lobbied Congress for legislation that would open up our political process to new parties, new voices and new ideas. Fair elections must be a central part of any Black agenda and over the years members of the Congressional Black Caucus have been in the forefront of supporting this type of legislative reform.

Last week, Congressman Ron Paul (R-TX), re-introduces two fair election bills into Congress that I have a long history of supporting.

The first bill is the voter Freedom Act of 1997, H. R. 2477. Drafted initially off of the lessons learned from a 1984 effort I undertook with my colleagues to place an independent presidential candidate on the ballot nationally the bill was originally introduced in 1985 by John Conyers (D-MI). In its present form the bill retains its objective to make structural reforms to the ballot access process which has been so manipulated by the major parties in their self-serving effort to monopolize political power and influence.

Basically, the bill would say fair and uniform ballot access standards in federal elections sand prevent states from erecting excessive ballot access barriers such as currently exist. For example, right states and DC. This is 28 times the number needed by a Democratic party candidate and 13 times the number needed by a Republican. Presently 32 states require no signatures of Democrats or Republicans while only 3 states require no signatures of independents. Minor party candidates must also meet discriminatory filing fees, filing

fees, filing deadlines, and restrictions on who can sign the petition that are not required of the major parties.

In his press release announcing the introduction of the bills, Congressman Paul, a former Libertarian candidate for President and now a Republican, states, "The two major parties love their hold on the system because it keeps them in power. While it is unconstitutional for the federal government to tell states what requirements they should have or candidates seeking state and local offices, it is the job of congress to ensure the federal elections are fair, open and, above all, representative of the great diversity of opinion in our nation."

The second bill, the Debate Freedom Act of 1997, H. R. 2478, was initially sponsored and championed by former Congressman Tim Penny (D-MN) in the 101st and 102nd Congress (1989-93). Developed originally in collaboration with Congressman Penny and drawing heavily from the experience of my exclusion from the 1988 presidential debates and subsequent law suits, it provides its current form, that major party presidential candidates must debate each other and any other presidential candidate wish to receive general election public financing.

Congressman Paul is also considering adding a second debates bill directed at the legal status of debate sponsors. In it, the debate sponsor must invite all legally qualified presidential candidates who are eligible to receive general election presidential campaign funding and are on the ballot in 40 states. Otherwise, the debate would be considered a corporate campaign contribution to candidates.

To Be Equal

BY HUGH B. PRICE PRESIDENT NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

Last June, President Clinton urged our nation to lay the groundwork for becoming what he calls "One America in the 21st Century" by confronting its lingering tensions over race.

American must heed his advice. We all have an enormous stake in that effort because our racial difficulties undermine our many strengths.

On a moral level, America can't preach human rights to other nations when racial injustice continues to fester in our own. On a pragmatic level, we won't be prepared to compete in the global marketplace if the dynamics of race and ethnicity continue to deny millions of people a first-rate education.

The Urban League has acted to promote racial harmony and inclusion for nearly a century; and we've recently joined with the National Conference, Anti-Defamation League, National Council of La Raza and Leadership Education for Asian Pacific's in the National Voices coalition to more effectively do that.

We salute the President and the early steps his task force of distinguished citizens has taken.

But, to be blunt, we worry that the Initiative is too long on dialogue and too short on action. Talk is not enough. Now is the time for actions to speak louder than words—in order to

empower the words with real meaning.

For one thing, the President can react swiftly to the dismaying announcement last week by Gilbert Casellas, chairman of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, that he'll resign at the end of the year.

Casellas is widely admired in the civil rights community for trying to effectively lead an agency burdened with a huge caseload and a too-small budget. His own assessment—that the agency "could do a lot better if we had more money, more people, more support"—ought to galvanize the White House to take the action necessary to eliminate its backlog of 80,000 cases and enable it to stay current with its caseload from now on.

Secondly, Clinton and the task force must continue to remind the nation that by the middle of the next century, half the population will be people of color. That reality underscores how important promoting inclusion and equal opportunity is.

America's economic and civic vitality will increasingly be dependent on nonwhite workers, entrepreneurs, taxpayers and customers. The better educated this growing segment of the American population is, the more robust our economy, the more har-

Actions Speak Louder

monious our society and the more secure the entire population will be.

Court decisions and state ballot initiatives may alter some of the tools and mechanisms used to reach that goal. But the President's Initiative should keep the nation's eye on the prize of inclusion—in the neighborhoods we live in, the schools and colleges we attend, in companies we work for or own—even if the mechanisms used to achieve it have to evolve.

The President can drive that point home by inviting corporate CEO's, Chamber of Commerce leaders, and university presidents to high-profile meetings to affirm their commitments to inclusion. Similar summits involving grass roots organizations like the Urban League and our partners in National Voices and other community and religious institutions could be held simultaneously all across the country to shore up the national commitment to inclusion.

The President's Initiative must also squarely confront the festering issue of police misconduct and brutality toward minority civilians. The 1996 killing of Johnny Gammage by white police officers outside Pittsburgh, the vicious assault on Rodney King and, most recently, the barbaric attack on Abner Louima are just the most notorious of a widespread pat-

tern of law enforcement tactics that often ensnare civilians who've done little or nothing wrong.

Of course, we must catch and punish criminals and maintain order by enforcing "quality-of-life" laws. But treating trivial offenders and true innocents like hardened criminals is dangerously counterproductive. If there's one lesson America should have learned by now, it's that race relations won't improve until there is peace between police and the minority civilians they are sworn to serve.

The President and the Task Force should summon governors, mayors, and state and local police chiefs in order to focus public attention on the urgent need for reform. Clinton should insist that the Justice Department investigate and prosecute any patterns of abuse found in police departments. Finally, he should instruct the U.S. Solicitor General to urge the courts to scale back the runaway discretion that has encouraged this abuse of power.

These are just some of the tests the President and the task force must pass if their work is to extend the American Dream to all Americans. Only then will the country embody the slogan of the President's Initiative on Race: "One America in the 21st Century."

perspectives

Is It Too late To Rebuild?



BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

thing 'we' do.' On common viewpoint I've heard is that "neither group is looking for renewal within the institutional church." A manifest American failure?

But speaking of 'promises' I did say I would present a model of a failed African American attempt to develop just that type of economic venture which many thought the 'Million Man March' should have been about.

In the winter of 1970 I spent a month in Washington D.C. presenting a series of seminars at Howard University and community institutions (including several churches). The subject was Black Inventors of America and the heretofore hidden contributions and abilities of African Americans discovered during research for my book of that title.

What was so amazing, and initially gratifying, was the spirited conversations and speculations that developed after speeches. There were the invitations to address black bassoonist and social groups, situations

where consistently there was expressed a common upbeat theme. "We've done it before and we can do it again."

It sounded good and the enthusiasm was infectious. I pointed out to one particular group, primarily mature men and women who were real estate brokers or directly and indirectly involved in property development. Having not that long ago had direct accounting and tax court experience in the operation at Los Angeles 'Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITS), I had an immediate 'tour of opportunity' on which to take this group.

Prowling around town in a rented car, my usual 'discovery technique in each major city on my book tour, I found several blocks of two and three story stone apartment buildings (3 and 4 room). They were structurally sound but the slum-lord had not maintained tenant amenities or decor and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) was foreclosing and all was to

go up for auction.

As an investment, the location was ideal; only a few blocks from Pennsylvania Avenue and its miles of federal office buildings where both low and high level government employees worked. Even then, 25 years ago, you were talking about refurbished apartments that would bring \$500 a room from federal executives (\$1,500 today).

Seeing all these smart, sophisticated blacks from their focus groups, the lawyers draw up papers of incorporation and explore financing modes. I was certain I had inspired a modern day renaissance of 'pre-war' building phase of black pullman porters. But not to be; the spirit of cooperation, the high-flying plans and objectives disintegrated within 30 days. As I remarked several months ago in "Building Neighborhood Capital," there has to be an experienced-based foundation to these grandiose concepts-social and spiritual structure.

Concluded next week

Civil Rights Journal

Tears For Nigeria

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

I met Walter Carrington two decades or so ago. I remember being impressed here was an African American deeply committed to Africa, a scholar, a Peace Corps veteran, a warm and gentle brother, who was determined to make a difference in our nation's Africa policy. So, many of us were especially proud and deeply moved when he was appointed Ambassador to Senegal by President Carter in 1980 and were again pleased when he was appointed Ambassador to Nigeria by President Clinton. How ironic that such as the object of harassment by the government of Africa's most populous nation. It does not bode well for Nigeria or for human rights.

It seems that in his final days in Nigeria, as Nigerian pro-democracy and human right groups held a farewell reception for the American Ambassador, heavily-armed Nigerian state security officials burst into the room, threatening to shoot the speakers and ordering everyone to leave. Mr. Carrington called this latest in a series of desperate acts by an out-of-control government the "most surrealistic experience I have had here yet."

From the earliest days of Mr. Carrington's appointment to Lagos in

1993, the relationship between the United States and Nigeria has been troubled. Indeed, he was in the country less than two weeks when the military, led by General Abacha, took over the government in a coup. Shortly before he arrived, the military had annulled the democratic elections and jailed President-elect Abiola. He remains imprisoned and last year his wife was murdered execution-style on a Lagos street. The Nigerian government described her murder as a robbery attempt.

Indeed, thousands of Nigerian human rights and democracy leaders remain imprisoned. Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka, who has repeatedly denounced the Abacha military government, faces the charge of treason should he return to his homeland and environmentalist and poet Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni leaders who dared to oppose the government were executed in 1995 despite worldwide pleas for clemency.

Despite promises of a return to democracy, Nigeria's 110 million people are still denied their basic human right to vote. The constitution remains suspended, opposition political parties are banned, the free press is shackled and freedom of assembly is denied. And while the military government promises a transition to democracy, there is little evidence that they are

willing to give up their rule. "They cannot explain why an elected President enters his third year in prison without a trial when his only crime was to win a free and fair election," said Jennifer Davis, Executive Director of the Africa Fund, recently.

Incredibly, and despite this long list of human rights violations, the Abacha military government has blamed Ambassador Carrington for the troubled Lagos-Washington relationship. They have charged him with being a part of a "corrupt African American elite" that publicly criticizes Nigeria in the secret hope that the Nigerian government will offer them money to keep quiet. They even have said they wanted to question the Ambassador and several embassy staff about several bombings which have taken place.

And after the United States government filed a strong protest about the armed break-up of the Ambassador's reception, instead of an apology, a Nigerian government minister launched an attack once again on the Ambassador, describing his tenure as a four years of waste in which nothing of value was accomplished. Only in the last few days has the Nigerian government offered a tepid apology for its inexcusable actions.

The government of General Abacha has made it clear that it has no intention

of changing its policies. As one of the world's largest oil producers, Nigeria and its overseas oil partners, earn billions of dollars selling oil to the U.S. while Nigerians at home cannot buy gasoline for their own cars and 40 percent of its people of its people face malnutrition. The government has made no good-faith efforts—it has released no political prisoners and has only set up a sham political process transparent to all who are watching critically.

This last attack on an United States Ambassador should be the final straw for our nation. Congress is facing a bill sponsored by Representative Donald Payne which would bar new American investment in Nigeria and link resuming those investments with the release of political prisoners, real political elections and free speech and assembly rights. With the increasingly desperation of the Abacha regime, the only question we might ask is does the bill go far enough fast enough.

In the words of Ambassador Carrington, "as a black American, this deeply saddens me. This is a place that should be one of the leading countries in the world. But until they are able to resolve the problem of allowing the people to choose their leaders democratically, I am afraid they are not going to be able to realize this potential."