

OPINION

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Supporting a Plan to Eradicate Poverty

Start with making hurricane victims whole

BY U.S. REP. MELVIN L. WATT

After leading the debate to have Congress approve our request to have Rosa Parks, the mother of the civil rights movement, lie in honor in the Rotunda of the United States Capitol, and after participating in memorial services to Rosa Parks in Washington and Detroit, the members of the Congressional Black Caucus made an important, tangible tribute to Ms. Parks by introducing legislation to respond comprehensively to the victims of Hurricane Katrina.



The legislation provides for the comprehensive recovery, reclamation, restoration and reconstruction of the Gulf Coast region and for the reunion of families in that area. It will also provoke a debate and hopefully some real action on the issue of poverty and its intersection with issues of race in the United States, issues that

were so dramatically exposed and brought into focus by Hurricane Katrina.

The legislation introduced by the CBC is comprehensive - comprised of 12 sections - aimed at making Hurricane Katrina survivors whole by restoring them to their pre-hurricane condition.

The bill would create a Victims Restoration

Medicaid health coverage for those at or below the poverty line, more unemployment compensation to Katrina evacuees and create a fund to pay health insurance premiums for those who have private health insurance.

The bill would also fund the repair and rehabilitation of public housing units in the Gulf,

historically black colleges and universities damaged so badly by Katrina; protect the voting rights of Katrina evacuees and help restore and replace election supplies, materials and equipment damaged by the Hurricane; reinstate the Davis-Bacon wage requirements and affirmative action laws suspended by President Bush after Hurricane Katrina and require the use of local and minority contractors and employees in the reconstruction efforts.

Finally, the CBC legislation calls on the President to present a plan to eradicate poverty in the United States by the year 2015.

The members of the CBC need your help. We must demand that our fellow citizens displaced by Hurricane Katrina be given a chance and made whole. We cannot allow their plight to become yesterday's news as the nation goes back to business-as-usual or as the nation goes on to the next news item of the week.

Call your member of Congress and insist that he or she support the Congressional Black Caucus' Katrina bill - that's House Resolution 4197. The CBC needs your support and thanks you for your support.

U.S. Rep. Mel Watt, D-N.C., is chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus.

The Congressional Black Caucus made an important, tangible tribute to Ms. Parks by introducing legislation to respond comprehensively to the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Fund, patterned on the 9-11 Victims Compensation Fund, under which each Katrina victim's personal situation would be assessed by a Special Master to determine what is needed to make the victim whole.

The legislation would require comprehensive, on-going environmental assessments; provide

provide 300,000 additional Section 8 rental vouchers, prohibit placement of Katrina survivors in substandard dwelling units and require more aggressive enforcement of Fair Housing laws.

It would provide education funding for early childhood services (including Head Start), elementary and secondary schools, and for the

Honor Parks By Protecting Civil Rights

The playing field is far from level

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

Rosa Parks' going home celebrations were a sight to behold. Three cities, nearly a half dozen memorial services, becoming the first woman and second black person to lie in honor in the Capitol Rotunda, thousands lining up to view her body, dignitaries from around the world eulogizing her. Extraordinary honors for a quiet, reserved woman.

Beautiful as the tributes were, they do not do the woman or her legacy justice. Pomp and circumstance has its place and few are more deserving than Mrs. Parks. But the ceremonies are

not enough. If we truly want to honor the Mother of the Modern Day Civil Rights Movement, we must follow the path she laid and continue the work to protect our civil liberties.



Parks is known around the globe for a simple, yet historic act of defiance: on Dec. 1, 1955, she refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a segregated Montgomery, Ala. bus. Her refusal landed her in jail. Three days later, the Montgomery bus boycott began, setting the stage for the fight for racial equality and justice, a fight that has spanned generations and continues to this day.

Comments have been made over the years - some joking, some not - that, on that fateful day, Mrs. Parks was simply too 'tired' to move from her seat. Parks had been entrenched in the growing Civil Rights movement for years - she was volunteer secretary to E.D. Nixon, the

Montgomery NAACP branch president; her decision to keep her seat was an act of protest. On that day, she made a conscious decision and took a stand for not only her rights, but for those of all oppressed people. We must do the same.

As we approach the 50th anniversary of Mrs. Parks' courageous act, it can be safely said that civil rights in this country have improved. The playing field however, is far from level. Consider: Only half of all black high school students graduate with their class, compared to 75-percent of white students; the numbers are lower for black males. Blacks are twice as likely to die from disease, accident, and homicide at every life stage than whites are. We are three times more likely than whites to be incarcerated once arrested, our average jail sentence is six months longer than a white's - for the same crime - and blacks are sentenced to death four times more often than whites. To be fair, many factors contribute to these disparities, but the underlying

cause is lack of access, rooted in years of social and economic discrimination. These statistics, recent cross burnings in Detroit and Durham, North Carolina, the reluctance of some politicians to extend all the provisions of the Voting Rights Act and the federal government's neglect of Hurricane Katrina's vast number of black victims are clear signs that there is more work to be done.

Mrs. Parks would have been thrilled to hear Aretha Franklin's moving voice bounce off the walls of Detroit's Greater Grace Temple during her final memorial service. And she would have been delighted to hear Reverends Jackson and Sharpton, former President Bill Clinton, Senator Hillary Clinton and others sing her praises. But, more than anything, Mother Parks would want to know that those of us still here are doing our part to make sure the struggle for equality lives on.

Judge Greg Mathis is chairman of the Rainbow PUSH-Excel Board and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Achieving True Equality

Are we still at the back of the bus?

BY BOYCE WATKINS

As I reflect on the life and death of Rosa Parks, I think about how far we have come as a people since that fateful day in which she made sure she was no longer going to be the only one with tired feet. Fifty years later, African-Americans are now "flossing" like never before, "blinging" out of our minds, and "ballin'" out of control. We are more likely to be pushing a Benz than a broom, and more likely to be one of the Huxtables than we are to be a cast member for the show "Good Times".

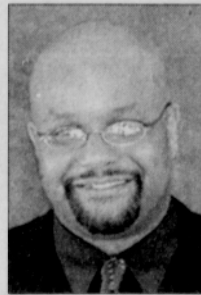
If so much progress has been made, why don't I feel good about where we are as black people? As I reflected on this issue over a grilled cheese sandwich, it finally hit me: There has been progress, but we are still, for the most part, sitting at the back of the bus.

There are more black men in jail than there are on college campuses. Eighty-two percent of black men of college age are not enrolled in college. Sixty-one percent of all black households have zero or negative

net financial assets.

Predominantly white school districts have graduation rates 31 percent higher than those in predomi-

black, then 13 percent of high ranking corporate positions should be held by African-Americans, at least 13 percent of all teachers should be



Rosa Parks opened the door, now it is time for our generation to walk through it.

nantly black school districts. The murder rate for black males is nearly seven times greater than for white males. African-Americans are three times more likely to be born into poverty than white Americans. Black boys are 2.5 times more likely to be placed in special education than white boys.

Rosa Parks opened the door, now it is time for our generation to walk through it. She endured personal strife in order to create opportunity. It is important that we demand these opportunities and be willing to endure our own strife in order to achieve true equality.

Some of us have forgotten that equality does not mean that we have most of what we deserve, it means having our entire share of this country. If a state is 13 percent

black, at least 13 percent of all police officers should be black. The list goes on.

Such disparities in wealth and opportunity are not rectified with focus groups, friendly conversations and an agreement to stop burning crosses in front yards. They are corrected through progressive, deliberate action on the part of all Americans to resurrect this country from the crippling impact of past indiscretions. At the funeral of Ms. Parks, everyone held hands and sang, "We shall overcome." It is time for our generation to give both of the hand holders something to sing about.

Boyce Watkins is the first black finance professor at Syracuse University and the author of "What if George Bush Were a Black Man?"

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