

OPINION

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Election Rewards and Neglect

Will we be rewarded for our vote?

BY WILLIAM REED

The November elections will become the most expensive in American history. Estimated to cost \$5 billion or more, the 2010 Midterms will be the biggest test of public opinion since the 2008 White House race. In the final stretch of the elections, President Obama and the Democrats are leaning on the black vote big time. Will we be rewarded if we vote in big numbers or just be part of the party's base that continues being neglected and taken for granted?



If you voted for Obama, he needs you to vote now for a Congress that will help him get the legislation that he promised.

Over the past months, Obama has reached out to African American voters to urge that they participate in these midterms like they did in 2008. But shouldn't blacks be exercising caution about simply voting Democratic for

President Obama without making any demands of them?

After black voters fulfilled their "dream" of seeing a black person in the White House, there seems little else in the process for them. Black party partisans have succumbed to emotionalism, symbolism, and are so excited to have a black president in the White House that their only

idea about political activism is about how to keep him there.

But fewer blacks are expected to vote in the midterm elections than did in 2008 because they now feel President Obama does nothing for them. The Obama people are talking loud and sayin' nothing when they claim a need to finish the plan that black voters elected Obama to put in place. Nowhere along his trek to the White House did Obama ever promise to do anything for blacks. While other groups tend to agitate and vote for direct benefits, blacks tend to vote only to exercise that right.

What better time could there be for blacks to exercise their self-interest and start telling politicians: "no benefits, no votes"? They'd do better than before by using the Hon. Elijah Muhammad Rule for enlightened self-inter-

est: "Enter politics, not to be subservient but to go for that which is in our self-interest because it is necessary for us to become politically powerful in order for us to change the reality of our lives."

"President Obama neglects to explicitly address race-specific issues" says black activist Dr. Ron Daniels. He says, "Blacks should mobilize for the midterms but understand that simply voting Democratic and for President Obama without making demands bankrupts our ballots."

Vice President Joe Biden says the party's base should "stop whining." This is more of a your results are your own damn fault; get off your butt and go to work, a tuff-love approach that both Biden and Obama have taken toward blacks. In further defini-

tion of his remarks, Biden says, "Those who ... didn't get everything they wanted in this electoral cycle, it's time to just buck up here, understand that we can make things better ... but not yield the playing field to those folks who are against everything we stand for."

Blacks may need to stop whining, but they definitely need to move against what the Democrats "stand for." Blacks need to stop being political pawns. With poverty rates at an all-time high, black unemployment numbers at daunting levels, and no change on their education, employment or economics, it's curious that black support for Obama is virtually unchanged at 91 percent since his inauguration.

William Reed is the publisher of *Who's Who in Black America*.

Shaping Our High Schools for the Future

Closure and other changes were not easy to make

BY CAROLE SMITH

Last Tuesday night the Portland School Board made major decisions that will shape our high schools for decades to come:

To establish seven community schools, guaranteeing every student, no matter where they live, equitable access to a common core program including rigorous college preparation, academic support, world languages, technology, the arts and career learning.

To build on Jefferson High

School's strengths and location to develop a powerful focus school that offers students the opportunity to earn college credits even as they complete high school.

To close BizTech, Pauling and Renaissance Arts academies, the three small schools on the Marshall Campus, to strengthen our high school system as a whole, as the remaining high schools will have higher student numbers and stronger programs.

These were not easy recommendations for me to make, nor for the board to decide. Portland Public Schools has not closed a high school in almost 30 years, even as our high school enrollment dropped by more than 2,500 students in the last decade alone and our budgets were cut repeatedly.

Over the last two years as we have discussed our high schools, Portlanders have shown their passion for their neighborhood schools, their dedication to their students and a strong desire to deliver better results for all students across the district. They have offered their suggestions, their support and their concerns throughout this effort.

The plan that emerged is stronger because of the contributions from our students, teachers, school staff, families and friends in the community. I thank you for your engagement in this effort.

The work is not done. Planning moves quickly to implementation and I know we must be unrelenting in our attention to carrying out many further aspects of the plan.

Six years ago, Marshall High

School undertook a difficult transition from comprehensive high school to small schools. Marshall leaders and staff were able to create close knit school communities with clear identities where students and their families felt they belonged and many students realized their potential. Every moment of the impassioned testimony at last week's board hearing from students, families and community members was a tribute to their efforts. We owe our Marshall students and staff concentrated support to ensure a successful transition to new high schools.

We will implement the core program at our community schools, and we will work with school leaders to provide needed flexibility in the face of an uncertain budget. We will develop plans for career learning at all

schools, and for specific career interests at Benson High. We will bring forward a resolution to make Harriet Tubman Leadership Academy for Young Women a stand-alone focus school for the first time.

We will work with the Marshall community to establish new high school attendance boundaries, and with the Jefferson community to finalize plans for the dual enrollment area. And we will confirm the measurements against which we will judge our success in this effort.

One chapter in our High School System Design has closed. I look forward to the next phase—and to greater success for our high schools and students across the district.

Carole Smith is the superintendent of Portland Public Schools.

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