

OPINION

Women of Power at the Forefront

Uplifting our families and our nation

BY MARC H. MORIAL



At the start of a new school year, millions of women and mothers are working overtime to prepare their children to return to the classroom. I thought this would be a good time to remind ourselves of the many simultaneous roles that women, and especially women of color, play in uplifting our families, our communities and our nation.

Women have always been at the forefront of the Urban League Movement. Ruth Standish Baldwin joined Dr. George Edmund Haynes in 1910 as founders of this organization.

The National Council of Urban

League Guilds, under the current leadership of Guild President Ms. Frankie M. Brown, is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year. Considered the heart and soul of the Urban League Movement, the Guild was started in New York City in 1942 by Mrs. Mollie Moon. Through its 85 chapters across the United States, the Guild plays an instrumental role in connecting the league with its communities, and its members contribute thousands of volunteer hours annually.

Women are also leading the National Urban League into its second century of service and empowerment. The CEO's of some of our largest affiliates are women, including Arva Rice in New York, Nancy

Flake Johnson in Atlanta, Esther Bush in Pittsburgh, Maudine Cooper in Washington, DC, Patricia Coulter in Philadelphia and Andrea Zopp in Chicago.

In addition, the National Urban League Young Professionals, our cadre of volunteers aged 21-40, is also headed by Ms. Brandi R. Richard. Our young professionals are the next generation of leaders inside and outside the Urban League movement; and contribute thousands of dollars and volunteer hours to local Urban League affiliates.

Brenda W. McDuffie, president and CEO of the Buffalo Urban League was one of 11 "Women of Power" honored at the recent National Urban League Conference in New Orleans. Ms. McDuffie has devoted her life to community ser-

vice and she has led the Buffalo Urban League for the past 14 years.

Others chosen as 2012 Women of Power are Louisiana U. S. Sen. Mary Landrieu; Deborah Elam, vice president, General Electric; Kim Fields, actress and television director/producer; Ohio Congresswoman Marcia L. Fudge; April Holmes, athlete and global motivational developer; Dr. Debra B. Morton, senior pastor, Greater St. Stephen Full Gospel Baptist Church, New Orleans; Natalie Randolph, head football coach at Calvin Coolidge High School and the first female high school football coach in Washington, D.C.; Sally Ann Roberts, news anchor at WWL-TV in New Orleans; Laysha Ward, president of Community Relations and the Target Foundation; and last but

not least, my mother, Sybil Morial.

My mother has not only nurtured two New Orleans mayors—her husband, the late, Ernest "Dutch" Morial and me—she has also distinguished herself as an outstanding educator, community activist and businesswoman. Like so many of our Women of Power, Sybil Morial overcame numerous racial and gender barriers to achieve her goals, serve her community and inspire others.

There is no doubt, America would not be as strong as it is today and the National Urban League Movement would not be the force for empowerment that it has become without the indispensable leadership of countless Women of Power.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

Dignity and the Right to a Decent Job

First black AFSCME president

BY NORMAN AND VELMA HILL

Little good (read no good at all) was voiced about the future of organized labor in this country at the Republican National Convention in Tampa, Fla. This comes on the heels of an African-American labor leader being elected to head one of the largest public employee labor unions in the nation. This, like electing an African-American U.S. President, is a historic first with historical reverberations yet to be realized.

Today, Lee A. Saunders helms the 1.6-million-member American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). Saunders, who has received scant mention in the national media, faces an era when organized labor is under blistering assault, including by the likes of the Romney-Ryan ticket and its supporters.

Yet, the Saunders election remains important, and vastly more important in this election year.

For starters, the AFSCME president plans to allocate \$100 million on political campaigns this year, 65 per-

cent of it for non-federal campaigns. That is essential because public employees have been the primary target of state and local Republicans seeking scapegoats for budget deficits.

We live and, if we are fortunate enough, work at a time when one-third of this nation's public employees are unionized, compared to just 7 percent of private-sector workers. That gives public employee unions like AFSCME an outsized influence on organized labor, which has suffered a severe downturn in membership since the mid-1950s.

Back then, about one-third of the overall American workforce belonged to unions, while today that figure is closer to 10 percent.

And back then, towering national leaders, including African-Americans A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin, argued that there was a natural nexus of the aims and aspirations of the civil rights and labor movements.

Many have forgotten that the full name of the landmark 1963 March on Washington included the words "for Jobs and Freedom." Randolph, president of the first black-led labor union to gain a contract from a major company, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, long connected human dignity to the right to a decent job at

a decent, living wage. We are convinced that the same is true for Saunders, who since 2010 had held his union's second-highest post as its secretary-treasurer.

Saunders, the son of a Cleveland, Ohio bus driver, has the opportunity to pick up the mantle of The Movement politic and reinvigorate organized labor by emphasizing the relationship between civil rights and economic justice. In some ways this reflects a central tenet of Rustin's 1965 call to action, from Protest to Politics. In it, Rustin wrote "The labor movement, despite its obvious faults, has been the largest single organized force in this country pushing for progressive social legislation."

The union movement has been the most democratic, integrated mass organization in the United States. Saunders' presidency of a large, black-minority union puts an exclamation point to such a characterization. No doubt black trade unionists seeking high leadership posts will be encouraged. The delegates also chose Laura Reyes as its first woman secretary-treasurer.

Saunders' election carries additional significance. His opponent criticized the union's previous longtime leader for overspending on national elections. Saunders rightly disagrees.

Control of the White House and Congress, and its consequences for the U.S. Supreme Court's composition—never more clear in the 5-4 decision upholding President Barack Obama's Affordable Healthcare Act—are of paramount importance.

A more progressive Congress could reform American labor law to give unions a level playing field in organizing. Hundreds of thousands of public-sector workers have been laid off, and deficits have been used as an excuse to rip into the collective bargaining rights of workers. Wisconsin's Governor Scott Walker, backed by fellow Republicans in the state legislature, did just that last year. His survival of a recall election last month was a major defeat for unions and the middle class.

But Saunders and AFSCME reject the commonplace idea of irrevocable union decline. Just as important as the Wisconsin vote, they point out, was the big victory in Ohio last November in which 62 percent of voters—significantly higher than the 53 percent that voted for Walker—backed repeal of a law gutting the bargaining rights of civil servants. Also, Democrats captured the Wisconsin state senate.

Saunders is seeking more wins with stepped-up militancy. For ex-

ample, he is already working to promote a referendum for repealing a shockingly anti-democratic law: a 2011 Michigan statute allowing the governor to replace elected local governments facing deficits with "emergency managers" empowered to reduce deficits by revoking public employee contracts. This puts Saunders on the side that unions customarily find themselves—the side of democracy. He also pledges stronger opposition to the privatization of public services, which always leads to lower wages and often to inferior services. And Saunders is creating a task force to find answers to the pension crisis that may stymie further drives to cut pensions.

We can feel A. Philip Randolph, Martin Luther King Jr., and others who have been friendly to labor, giving Saunders a sort of cosmic nod of approval. Now Saunders and his AFSCME membership must be bold enough to continuously forge a path that history will fondly remember.

Norman Hill was the staff coordinator of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, is president emeritus of the A. Philip Randolph Institute. Velma Hill is a former vice president of the American Federation of Teachers.

The Portland Observer Established 1970

USPS 959-680

4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., Portland, OR 97211

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, PUBLISHER: Charles H. Washington

EDITOR: Michael Leighton

ASSISTANT TO PUBLISHER, PUBLIC RELATIONS: Mark Washington

CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Paul Neufeldt

ASSISTANT TO PUBLISHER, OFFICE MANAGER/CLASSIFIEDS: Lucinda Baldwin

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER: Leonard Latin

ADVERTISING MANAGER, PUBLIC RELATIONS: Tony Washington

STAFF WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER: Mindy Cooper

The Portland Observer welcomes freelance submissions. Manuscripts and photographs should be clearly labeled and will be returned if accompanied by a self addressed envelope. All created design display ads become the sole property of the newspaper and cannot be used in other publications or personal usage without the written consent of the general manager, unless the client has purchased the composition of such ad. © 2008 THE PORTLAND OBSERVER. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED. The Portland Observer—Oregon's Oldest Multicultural Publication—is a member of the National Newspaper Association—Founded in 1885, and The National Advertising Representative Amalgamated Publishers, Inc, New York, NY, and The West Coast Black Publishers Association

CALL 503-288-0033 FAX 503-288-0015

news@portlandobserver.com

ads@portlandobserver.com

subscription@portlandobserver.com

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Portland Observer, PO Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208