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# OPINION

## Creating a More Equal and Just America

### Museum a tribute to shared past

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

The recent opening of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. is the realization of a dream that's been a very long time coming, beginning a century ago when black leaders first proposed a memorial to black Civil War veterans.

Dr. Rex M. Ellis, the museum's associate director for curatorial affairs, speaking to young teachers during the Children's Defense Fund's 2016 Freedom Schools training, shared his hopes that the museum will help light the way for the next generation of Americans and that the museum's vision will "change the master narrative of our nation."

The new museum opens at a



critical inflection point in our nation's history. By capturing America's struggle to overcome our birth defect of slavery and our ongoing struggle to close the gap between America's creed and deed, for the first time our children will be able to accurately learn the too often hidden or misstated history of America.

With this museum, I hope new generations of children will grow up not only learning the truth about who we are and where we came from but also what they can do to create a more equal and just America.

The struggle to build the museum often seemed to mirror the story it was trying to tell. One

that required grit, determination, and persistence — a struggle Dr. Ellis feels was well worth having:

"When we began back in 2005, we had nothing. We had no building. We had no collections. We had no land to put a building on and very little money. We had a very small staff of about three people. Now, just 11 years later, we have a staff of over 180 people, nearly 37,000 objects, five acres of land that shares our neighborhood with the Washington Monument and the White House and the United States Capitol and the National Park Service and 18 Smithsonian museums."

Ellis said there were many people who never believed they could raise the \$540 million to build the museum and doubted organizers could find a world-class collection. But they accom-

plished both feats.

The museum's artifacts include the vest Michael Jackson wore during his Victory Tour and one of his signature gloves — but that's not all.

"We've got Chuck Berry's Cadillac," Ellis said. "We've got Maybelline, his guitar. But that's not all. We got hip-hop artist Chuck D's jacket. The original funkmaster George Clinton, we got his Mothership. We got Prince's tambourine."

Dr. Ellis went on as the audience cheered. "We got Nat Turner's Bible. We got Harriet Tubman's shawl. We got Radio Raheem's boombox from Do the Right Thing. We got a training plane flown by Tuskegee Airmen. We got the Olympic torch that Muhammad Ali signed in the 1999 games in Atlanta, his head gear, his training robe, and on and on and on . . . We never stopped

believing that we could do it. We could build this museum. We could make it happen. We didn't give up, didn't turn back, didn't listen to those who said that we would fail, and the more people saw and experienced our belief, they caught the fever too."

The African American experience has always been an integral and essential part of the larger American experience. Now, with this beautiful and powerful new museum finally open in the heart of the nation's capital, many of those connections that help complete the true and full American narrative are on full display. Acknowledging our shared American past and all of the ways it echoes in the present is the only way to keep moving forward together. Only the truth can make us free.

Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund.

## Support Open and Accountable Election Reform

### City Council proposal builds trust

BY STEVEN CARTER

Recent polls show the public is increasingly distrustful of government, is angry over big money in politics, and is convinced that the common interest takes a back seat to special interests with large wallets.

Here in Portland there's an opportunity to fight these perceptions with the Open and Accountable Elections reform proposal before the City Council.

AARP Oregon, and many other civic groups, are backing this proposal because it will encourage the kind of government we all want: elected representatives who reflect the increasing demographic, cultural and economic diversity of our city, the ability of small donors to amplify their voices in elections and the ability of ordinary Portlanders to run competitive campaigns for mayor, city council and city auditor.

The proposal would empower qualified candidates who opt into the program and prove they have a wide base of public support to run their campaigns — matching six-for-one every dollar they raise up to \$50 per donor with limited public funds. In return, candidates would face strict limits on what they could spend the money for and could accept donations only from individuals, and not political groups

or corporations.

In addition, requirements for reporting contributions and expenditures would be tightened, producing greater campaign transparency. Only donations from Portlanders would be matched, and donations larger than \$250 per individual would be banned.

Candidates using the system would have every reason to spend their time campaigning among and listening to a wide spectrum of Portlanders because individuals with limited means would have the ability to mag-

nify their donations with public dollars. It will help bring balance to our political system so that big donors don't have the loudest say.

Small donor matching is proven way to create more open and accountable elections. Thirteen states have some form of small-donor funded elections, as well as local governments like Seattle, New York City, and Albuquerque. In New York, for example, their matching program has led to much wider array of candidates for office, a greater number of citizens contributing to campaigns and an increase in the percentage of small donors.

The new proposal is a great improvement on Portland's earlier experience with publicly financed elections. Candidates won't get all their public money up front once they qualify, rather they will have to prove that they have community support to receive matching funds. Expenditure reports are required more frequently, and any campaign violations can result in very stiff fines — up to \$10,000.

The City Council would control how much public money is used in the program, and it would require no new taxes. The program may take no more than two-tenths of a percent of the

city budget. In return voters will get a government accountable to everyone.

AARP Oregon believes the Open and Accountable Elections reform is a big step in the right direction toward more open, fairer and accountable Portland elections. We believe it will create a wider array of candidates for city positions and make the voices of ordinary Portlanders count much more in our elections. We urge the Portland City Council to approve this program.

Steven Carter is an AARP volunteer and past member of AARP's Oregon Executive Council.

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