



“Challenging People to Shape
a Better Future Now”

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Cogen: It’s About Confidence and Trust

In his role as Multnomah County Chair Jeff Cogen has done good work. Despite shrinking government revenues, Cogen championed the social welfare safety net and kept the books balanced. Under his leadership, the county has made a significant commitment to equity in contracting, hiring, and justice. It has built one of the best health departments in the country.

Much more remains to be done in all those areas. And we’ve been disappointed in the county’s lack of outreach on disaster preparedness. It’s true that in most circumstances, having an affair is not a firing offense. If it were, we’d see a lot more people losing jobs. But Cogen’s mistakes were far more than a private stumble that’s best sorted out in family therapy or with pastoral support. The affair between county boss Cogen and his subordinate Sonia Manhas hurt the county and its employees. Cogen has denied pulling strings to promote Manhas to a top job in the health department. And we’d like to make it clear that we believe Manhas deserved her position.

EDITORIAL

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Nevertheless their affair has created the perception that power was abused.

But the crux of the matter is that Cogen has lost the confidence and trust of his colleagues and the public

But that’s just part of the harm done. For more than a year, Cogen and Manhas maintained a secret affair, manipulating their work environment to carve out time together, blurring the lines between work and romance, traveling together on more than one occasion. Their colleagues have a right to feel betrayed. It’s clear they had passion for their work. But it’s unclear where that passion left off and their passion for one another started. It’s also unclear if the affair would have stopped had their reckless behavior not

been called out by an anonymous letter. Nobody likes being lied to or taken for a fool. County employees don’t like it. County commissioners don’t like it. And neither do voters. So even though law does not require it, it’s hard to see how

in the more powerful position. Cogen denies any misuse of county funds and resources. But even if the criminal investigation agrees, his ability to lead has been irreparably damaged. Unfortunately, Cogen is no longer the man for the job. Last week all four of his colleagues asked him to resign. He refused. As an elected official that is his right. He answers to the citizens of Multnomah County and no-one else. But the crux of the matter is that Cogen has lost the confidence and trust of his colleagues and the public. He simply can’t continue supervising 4,500 employees under that cloud. That leaves him no other alternative. Chair Cogen you should resign.

What do you think?

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Focus on Poverty, Not the Middle Class

Several of us were sharing our views on radio Sunday night with Gary Byrd when my friend and colleague Cash Michaels urged us to remember that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated while organizing poor people. This is a good time to remember that as President Obama seeks ways to strengthen the middle class and civil rights leaders focus on celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Aug. 28, 1963 March on Washington. The idea of organizing a Poor People’s Campaign was discussed during a Nov. 27-31, 1967 Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) planning session in Frogmore, S.C. With the nation’s attention focused on the Vietnam War, Dr. King wanted to redirect the conversation to what the Bible calls the least among us by focusing on jobs and income.

Dr. King’s idea was to bring poor people from all over the country to Washington, D.C. in order to put a face on the suffering of people. While still firmly committed to nonviolence, his plan was for a dramatic presence that would disrupt traffic and shut down the nation’s capital. “We ought to come in mule carts, in old trucks, any kind of transportation people can get their hands on. People ought to come to Washington, sit down if necessary in the middle of the streets and say, ‘We are here; we are poor; we don’t have any money; you have made us this way,’” King said. “And we’ve come to stay until you do something about it.” Just as his close advisers had urged him not to give his “I Have a Dream Speech” in 1963, varia-

THE CURRY REPORT

George E. Curry



tions of which they had heard earlier, most of Dr. King’s inner circle disagreed with his decision to embark on a Poor People’s Campaign. Children activists and former civil rights attorney Marian Wright Edelman recalled in her book, *Unfinished Business*,

dollars necessitated smaller campaigns in the South.” But Dr. King forged ahead, calling for \$30 billion to be spent on anti-poverty measures, employment and housing construction. King was helping organize garbage workers in Memphis when he was assassinated. Ralph D. Abernathy, his successor and close friend, continued with plans for the Poor People’s Campaign. Instead of the militant protest Dr. King had envisioned, however, the highlight of the Poor People’s March to Washington was not shutting down the capital, but the erection of Resurrection City, a collection of tents pitched in D.C. Various executive agencies were

are considered poor. The Associated Press reported: For the first time since 1975, the number of White single-mother households living in poverty with children has surpassed or equaled Black ones in the past decade. Since 2000, the poverty rate among working-class Whites has grown faster than among working-class non-Whites, rising 3 percentage points to 11 percent.

Still, poverty among working-class non-Whites remains about double that of Whites. Mark Rank, a professor at Washington University in St. Louis, believes Dr. King was on to something when he sought to unite poor people across racial lines. “Poverty is no longer an issue of ‘them,’ it’s an issue of ‘us.’ he told the Associated Press. “Only when poverty is thought of as a mainstream event, rather than a fringe experience that just affects Blacks and Hispanics, can we really begin to build broader support for programs that lift people in need.” This is no time to keep Dr. King frozen in the memory of the 1963 March on Washington or his “I Have a Dream” speech while neglecting his true calling to eradicate poverty five years later. As he said, “If you can’t fly then run, if you can’t run then walk, if you can’t walk then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward.”

George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of Emerge magazine, is editor-in-chief of the National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service.

Most of Dr. King’s inner circle disagreed with his decision to embark on a Poor People’s Campaign

“William Rutherford, who had organized the Friends of SCLC in Europe in 1966 and was appointed executive director of SCLC during the summer of 1967, declared that, ‘basically almost no one on the staff thought that the next priority, the next major movement, should be focused on poor people or the question of poverty in America.’ At the time James Bevel wanted to remain focused on combating slums in northern cities, Hosea Williams promoted voter registration campaigns in the South, Jesse Jackson wanted to continue to develop Operation Breadbasket, and Andrew Young worried that SCLC’s budget of under a million

lobbied on behalf of the poor and leaders called for an Economic Bill of Rights. The shantytown was disbanded after six weeks. In the view of many observers, Dr. King posed a greater threat to the power structure when he began organizing poor Blacks and Whites. But there is an even better opportunity to unite poor people today because so many Whites have become impoverished as a result of a recession and high unemployment. Poverty is officially defined as a family of four living off of \$23,021 or less a year. Today, a record 46.2 million people –15 percent of the U.S. population –