

Point of View

FROM CAPITOL HILL

By Alfreda L. Madison

Black Voting Power Can Make A Change In The Political Arena

The Joint Center for Political Studies in its recent published report states that Blacks gained in political power in 1985. This contributed to the increase in Black elected officials by 6.1 percent. Between January 1985 and January 1986, the total number of Black elected officials increased from 6,056 to 6,424. This growth occurred in every category and every region of the country for which elections were held in 1985. There were 102 Blacks elected in jurisdictions where no Black had ever held office.

Douglas Wilder became the first Black lieutenant governor in Virginia and the first Black candidate to win a statewide election in the South since Reconstruction. Alyce Clarke became the first Black woman ever elected to the Mississippi State legislature.

The election of Black women has doubled since 1976, rising from 684 then to 1,483 in 1986. They make up twenty-three percent of all Black elected officials and one-third of all of last year's Black elected officials. Of the elective offices held by Black women, 50 percent are municipal positions. The largest contingent of female Black elected officials are in

Washington, D.C. (113). There are also 109 in Illinois, 98 in Michigan, 95 in Mississippi, 94 in California and 91 in New York.

Blacks in the House of Representatives were increased by one in a special election held in Queens, New York in June, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Joseph Addabbo. This brings the total to 21.

In Boston, Birmingham and Mitchell, South Dakota, Blacks were elected as President of the City Council for the first time. Incumbent Black mayors were reelected in Atlanta, Charlotte, N.C., Detroit, Hartford and Los Angeles.

The catalyst for the election of many additional Black elected officials was the shift from at-large to district election systems. The number of Black municipal officeholders increased in 1985 by 214.

The addition of fifteen judicial and law enforcement officials brings the number to 676. Eight were judges of state courts of last resort, and 366 were judges of other courts. The greatest judicial increase was in the South.

There was a sixty-six percent increase in Black officials in the field of education, most of whom

were local school board members.

Black elected officials somewhat parallel the distribution of the Black population. The South has fifty-three percent of the nation's population and 63.8 percent of all Black elected officials. The North Central region has 19.8 percent of the nation's Black population and 19.6 percent of all Black elected officials. The Northeast, with 18.5 percent of Blacks, has 10.9 percent of Black elected officials; and the West, with 8.9 percent of the Black population, has 5.7 percent of Black elected officials.

The report conclusively demonstrates the Blacks have made advancements in electoral politics. However, Blacks still hold fewer than 1.5 percent of all elective offices in the United States, while constituting almost eleven percent of the total voting-age population. The rate of growth in the number of Black elected officials has slowed down since 1976. Between 1970 and 1976, the average rate of growth was 18.2 percent but since 1976, it has decreased to only 4.9 percent.

The Study shows states with the largest number of Black elected officials include Mississippi (521), Louisiana (488), Illinois (426), Georgia (417), Alabama (403), South Carolina (329), Arkansas (315), Michigan (314), California (287) and Texas (281). These states have three major characteristics: women compose more than 12 percent of the state's number of Black elected officials; except in Texas, women are represented at both the state legislative and the mayoral level; and Blacks constitute at least 7 percent of the state's voting-age population.

According to Eddie Williams, President of the Joint Center for Political Studies, "Further growth in the number of Black elected officials is needed and will depend on the ability of Black candidates to appeal to non-Black electorates."

To Be Equal

Health Gap Grows

by John E. Jacob

Being black is bad for your health: that's the only rational conclusion to be drawn from statistics that show black disadvantage extends to virtually all areas of health care.

Black infant mortality rates are double those of whites -- and for higher than in any other industrialized country.



John E. Jacob

Last year the Department of Health and Human Resources reported that black life expectancy is five and a half less than that for whites, and that if minority death rates were equal to white rates, 60,000 minority deaths would have been avoided in 1984.

Black death rates from heart disease and stroke are far higher than white rates, and minorities suffer excess deaths in a number of other major diseases including

It has been shown that the increase in the election of Black officeholders in 1985 was partly the result of the presidential candidacy of Jesse Jackson. Where Blacks are running for office, there has been an increase in Black voters and greater enthusiasm is generated in the political arena.

For the 1986 election, there is a great need for the maximum voting power of Blacks in order to defeat the Reagan Administration's civil rights gains' assault and to promote the liberation of South African Blacks. There is a move among Blacks that defeat reelection of incumbents who are civil rights opponents and for those who vote against sanctions for South Africa. If all voting-age Blacks register and vote, they can accomplish these goals.

cancer. So while American medicine makes high tech breakthroughs, minorities still lag far behind the majority population in the basic indices of health.

That's because the major cause of black health problems is poverty, which results in stress, vulnerability to diseases based on nutritional deficiencies, and inability to get quality health care.

Disproportionate black

estimates are that well over thirty million Americans have no public or private health insurance.

And most Americans with health insurance have it as a job-related benefit, which makes them vulnerable on two grounds.

First, if they lose their job, they lose their health insurance. Second, high costs have led employers to increase the amounts insured employees must pay

John E. Jacob is President Of The National Urban League

poverty results in disproportionate black death rates. We can see the link between poverty and infant mortality easily enough. Districts with large numbers of poor people have the highest infant mortality rates; those with large numbers of affluent people have the lowest rates.

The health of the poor has worsened in recent years, largely through the increase in the numbers of poor people and cuts in programs that provide access to health care.

Tightened eligibility rules for Medicaid, for example, led to thousands of people being denied subsidized medical care. And studies indicate their health has deteriorated, especially in the area of control of hypertension.

Cuts in programs that provided food aid for pregnant women and their children are blamed for high rates of birth-related deaths.

And the cost squeeze on hospitals has led to many turning away poor, uninsured patients. One 1983 study estimated that 200,000 people were denied emergency hospital care and 800,000 were denied routine care for lack of money.

The myth that everyone is privately insured is dangerously false, for it prevents action to implement some form of universal health insurance program. Some

for health care. So many put off going to the doctor -- a false economy since early detection of many diseases spells the difference between cure and death.

Another worrisome trend is the privatization of health care, with public and non-profit facilities giving way to for-profit hospitals.

While some feel this will not result in any deterioration of health care quality, it is bound to affect access to health care by the poor, who lack insurance and who often turn to hospital emergency rooms for primary care.

The growing black-white health gap reflects the growing black-white income gap and the rise of poverty, which should be recognized as a life-threatening source of high death rates and illness among its victims.

VOTE

The Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice welcomes expressions of all views from readers. Letters should be kept as brief as possible and are subject to condensation. They must include signature, valid mailing address and telephone number, if any. Pseudonyms and initials will not be used. Because of the volume of mail received, unpublished individual letters cannot be acknowledged. Send to: Letters to the Editor, The Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice, 1201 S. Eastern Ave., Las Vegas, Nevada 89104.

The views expressed on these editorial pages are those of the artists and authors indicated. Only the one indicated as the Sentinel-Voice editorial represents this publication.

Words of Marcus Garvey
By Kofi Tyus

"Let us not divide ourselves into castes, but let us all work together for the common good."