

An Exclusive Interview With Senator Richard Bryan

This is the conclusion of an exclusive interview with U.S. Senator Richard Bryan - D. Nevada.

Sentinel-Voice: I'm sure that you've heard many times that the African American male is being mentioned as an endangered species. Do you feel that they are indeed that, and do you feel that the present crises of African American males are acute enough to be addressed by the Congress and the Senate?

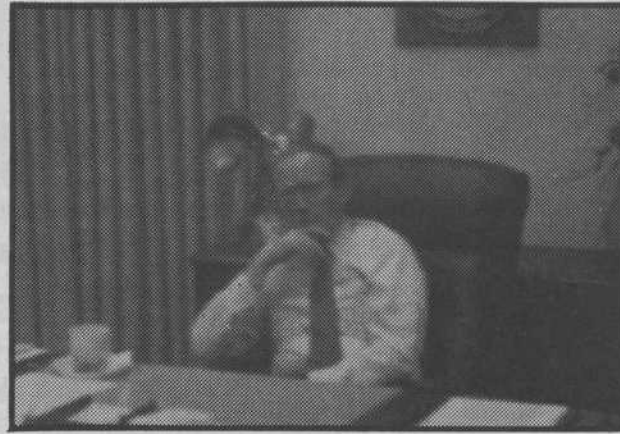
Senator Bryan: I think it's a serious problem, a very, very, serious problem. I talked with admission directors at various universities, universities that are very sensitive to wanting to increase their minority enrollments. Universities that have concentrated more resources in terms of scholarships and financial assistance, and almost to an individual director, they say, 'look, we are having some success in terms of attracting more women minority applicants and more African Americans, but we are sorely pressed at times to find African American males to participate in these programs. Now, these are people who are doing, not just because they are required by law, but because they have a sense of consciousness, or they recognize that there's a need to do so and they tell me that it becomes very, very difficult, and that's not to suggest that they're not qualified African American males in our society - there certainly are - but I must say, that from what I hear from people who are involved within these programs, we do have a very serious problem.

Sentinel-Voice: What can we do about that? Do you feel that it would ever be addressed by the Congress and Senate?

Senator Bryan: Yes, I think there are some things we need to do about it. Pretty clearly, the standard of living for the economically disadvantaged needs to be addressed. The fact that they are slipping into the poverty, below the poverty level, the fact that they live in ghettos, the fact that so many come from divided homes in which there's not the strong male role model. I mean the black women have done an extraordinary job in America as serving as role models. You look at our athletes out here at the university, that have made successes of their lives after they have finished here and have come to live in our community. How many times I have been to banquets and many times I've been to social gatherings and see these guys, 6 feet, 10 or 7 feet-1, strapping handsome young men with tears in their eyes and they say, 'look, I owe it all to my mother.' That's not to say that none of them have fathers who have been, but I can tell you the refrain is often times, 'it's my mother,' that you know, 'I was about ready to go off the deep end when I was in grade school or junior high or high school, with associates that may have gotten me in trouble and it was my mother that brought me up tight,' and said, 'you know, I think there is a national problem and it's because of the ghetto conditions, the lack of opportunities, the fact that these families have often times not had the strong presence of male role models. There are truly exceptions to that; I don't want to generalize, but I do believe that the black family has been more victimized than most American families in that category. That's my own sense, can't rule out any statistics, but I believe it to be true.

Sentinel-Voice: What about the welfare system?

Senator Bryan: The welfare system has been a contributing factor, absolutely. I mean, the Aid to Dependent Children program virtually forced the family unit that was together, to live separately, apart, because one was not eligible if there was a male. You're absolutely right. You talk about all of the right-wing, fundamental historical groups talking about they're pro-family; there was probably nothing that's more anti-family than that type of a welfare model, where, in effect, the male in the household had to leave, if he was there to begin with, in order for the family to qualify... The Welfare Reform Act that was passed a couple of years ago has changed that law; I believe that was changed in 1987 or 88, before I got there. I know it was before I got there, but I remember because the Governors warped on national welfare... There is a pretty blind consensus. I'm talking about Republicans, Democrats, folks who are more liberal, folks who are more conservative. It was amazing how that came together in effect, but the governors were talking about pretty generally, was passed by the Congress, so that is a positive step.



Sentinel-Voice: Are there any indications that it is making a difference?

Senator Bryan: Well, it was just at a recent time, but I think the black community itself, this is what I see in Washington, D.C. that I think is very positive, is that there seems to be a resurgence within the black community, recognizing how destructive this trend has been, that there are a number of programs, not funded by the government, but community action-type programs that are trying to, in effect, stabilize the family unit, and you're seeing a number of black professionals, male and female, who have made it, if you will, recognizing that they have a special obligation to the community from which they've come and from which they escaped, in a sense, from economic deprivation, to do and provide somewhat of a role model for those families in which there is no role model to relate to and I think that is positive.

Sentinel-Voice: With gaming being the number one industry in this state, are you willing to assist and become involved in moves to bring African Americans into the field of gaming as licensees and into casino ownership?

Senator Bryan: Oh, you bet. I think that certainly is not an area that anybody ought to be excluded from in Nevada. Gaming is an opportunity that provides enormous potential and there are, as you probably know, I appointed to the Gaming Commission when governor, Jerry Lockhart who is a CPA and who had auditing experience with the Internal Revenue Service and he served as one of my appointees. I think he may yet today be the only African American appointment to the Gaming Commission. And then, there's Sarann, who has gotten her license now, has she not? Her problem was with the ownership with Leo Frye, as I recall, the landlord.

Sentinel-Voice: A couple of days ago, I received in the mail an announcement of a press conference to be held soon relative to the formation of the Nevada Smoker's Rights Association, during which they will discuss their organization and state their position on, among other things, excessive taxation on cigarettes. They said they intend to address this issue through YOU. How would you respond to this issue?

Senator: I am not aware of that fact. I have, by and large, supported legislation that, for example, the law goes into effect at the end of this month, which eliminates smoking on Domestic airlines flights. For all intents and purposes, I supported that. Now there is a group or groups around the country, that have begun to organize to kind of counter attack all of the restrictions on smokers. For example, as I told you, I was just with the military earlier today, and they are very strict in not permitting smoking in certain public areas, and that sort of thing. There's a number of ordinances, some statutes in Nevada, that you can't smoke in an elevator, so the smokers' rights groups are forming to counteract that. But other than talking to me as a member of Congress, I don't know. "Brenda, has our office been contacted on that?" But I suppose what it could possibly mean is that they're going to appeal to all members of Congress not to add further taxation, or not to further restrict smoking. I don't know; I guess that's about the only thing now. I don't have personal knowledge of that.

Sentinel-Voice: President Bush has expressed the desire to be known as the "education President." First, how do you feel his educational programs have measured up this far, and secondly, what measures would you propose to enhance the level of education for all American children and in particular, minority children?

Senator: I think the President's rhetoric has exceeded the scope of the programs he's provided. I do agree with the proposed increase of \$500 million for Head Start. I believe that's one of the most important educational programs that the Federal Government provides and I'm fully supportive of that. I think that the Federal Government's role in terms of funding for education is primarily concentrated in two general categories: 1, the economically disadvantaged youngsters, and Head Start would be that kind of example, and 2, other programs that help youngsters to, in effect, get brought up into the mainstream of the society and to move in the mainstream of educational offerings. So I think the Federal Government has a very important role there. The other area that I think the Federal Government has an opportunity or responsibility is, I don't think any youngster should be deprived of going to college or furthering his or her education because his family can't afford it, and I do think that the numbers of minorities that we've seen enrolled at past high school, graduate levels - I'm talking about community colleges and universities - in the decade of the 1980s, it's growing smaller rather than growing wider. It's actually been reduced and focused, and I think part of that is because the economically disadvantaged are falling further and further behind. So I think the Federal government and the various loan programs and financial assistance has an obligation there as well. The President, I think, has been more tolerant in addressing those areas.

Sentinel-Voice: Would you explain for our readers and for me, please, the proposal HR3179, better known as Velda Sue, which would create a government sponsored enterprise to recycle small business loans into marketable securities in order to provide more capital.

Senator: Let me send you something, if I can, in writing, because it is very very technical. You know, we have Freddie Mack, Fannie Mae and a whole host of programs that involve, you know, the secondary markets for certain kinds of securities that are involved. I don't presume to be an expert in this, but there is a proposal and I would be delighted to try to provide an explanation, hopefully in English, not in that Federal bureaucratic language. I serve on the Banking Committee and Andy Verbunae is my assistant, and we'll try to send you out something that is understandable, and I don't mean to be insulting anybody's intelligence. I'm no authority on this issue myself, rather than passing along some misinformation.

Sentinel-Voice: We would appreciate that.

Senator: You'll have that.

Sentinel-Voice: Did you vote for several minority set-aside legislations that were passed in 1989? For instance, the Dept. of Defense Authorization, the Energy and Water Development Appropriation Act, the Dept. of Veterans Affairs, HUD and independent agencies acts?

Senator: I am virtually positive I've voted for every one of those. Yes, as a matter of fact, there was a provision within the Savings and Loan bill that required some community reinvestment efforts by the Savings and Loan Financial community, and I've supported that provision as well, and that is law. It was put in on the House side and on over to us in the Senate.

Sentinel-Voice: What do you feel could be done to help alleviate the problem of inequitable lending practices towards African Americans on the part of banks, thrifts, mortgage and other lending institutions?

Senator: Well, I think the one thing is we ought to hold those folks to a higher level of accountability and to make a disclosure as to what their banking and lending practices are with the respect to the minority community. There is legislation passed last year that requires just that, and I support it. That is not making this confidential, something that only a bank examiner may have access to it, but to, in effect, make a requirement that the banking and financial community disclose their turn-down rates and records publicly of minorities and others who are in an economically disadvantaged category or neighborhood, and that, I think, would be helpful and make that as an on-going part of their responsibility to the participants and federal programs, whether it be FDIC or Savings and Loans financial mechanisms. That's part of the responsibility of being in business if you are to receive federal guarantees to show that you got a track record in which you are servicing in the minority community.