

# AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH NEVADA'S DRUG CZAR

This is Part II, a continuation of the Sentinel-Voice's exclusive interview with Mujahid Ramadan, Nevada's Drug Czar.

By Linda Porter

Porter: Whenever you turn on the television and you see anything related to gang violence, nine out of ten times it's an African American male. Is the gang problem a Black issue?

Ramadan: No the gang problem isn't. It's more dramatized by the media as being an issue of a certain segment of a population. Not as gangs. That's not necessarily drugs. The media portrays drugs in everybody's neighborhood; it's just portrayed differently. But primarily, good news is no news when you're in the media, so when they dramatize, the most visible people are easy to see. So it's easy to see in our neighborhood and the media doesn't have to go out and see it, we can see it our own selves, but it is there.

Porter: From your experiences going out on a one on one basis with gang members, is the gang and drug issue a side by side thing? Is it, if they done so, would it have to be gang related? Does it necessarily have to be involved in drugs?

Ramadan: No. The gang existed before there was drugs. Gangs have a long history. Gangs actually surfaced late 50s, early 60s and became prominent. Gangs are a social movement. It's a social event that's going on, and then when a bigger social event was being planned, that social event being the Civil Rights - Black Power Movement and the Vietnam War, actually those events supplanted the gangs, because gangs, civil rights and black power kind of brought the gangs into a bigger movement. Then the Vietnam conflict drafted a large portion of those guys who were 18 through 21 who were in gangs and shifted them off to Vietnam. So it created a void until about 1972-74 when the war had ceased and the Civil Rights movement had subsided. Then those who in their youth had been focused in on the Black Power-Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War, resumed their previous behavior, because for a long time after, the American community never did keep up the momentum to keep those youth directed in a meaningful manner. So the gangs came back, but this time after about 4 years, the drugs began to surface. So that really gave the gangs momentum. But the gangs existed without drugs, and of course, drugs have existed without gangs. And it's not just our neighborhoods. Oftentime, we say gangs bring drugs into our neighborhoods. Well, you see, that's perception. You see, when you see Care Unit Hospitals dealing with people who are involved with drugs, or North Las Vegas Unit Hospital, Monte Vista, they're saying they have problems with people who are into drugs, they're not targeting the African American people. They are targeting middle income people and a lot of us probably don't fit in that category. And you can see they're targeting them and you see then how drugs are projected in one way in terms of crime and violence and in another way it is projected as an illness and is treated as such. For us, it's different.

Porter: Let's talk about role models. How do you feel that your position now, or does your position open up the doors for other African American males?

Ramadan: I think so. I think it does in a sense do that. A person from Northern Nevada asked me am I the highest position African American in State government, but I don't think so. That's not the case, but I think that I happen to be the most visible. So now when you turn on your television, you see an African American who's speaking about not just issues that affect African Americans, but issues that affect the State as a whole. It's not about this African American being arrested on anything like that, but one who is influencing decisions and policies that affect our lives. I think that is a unique opportunity and no matter how difficult it is, because I think as African Americans, we all have a responsibility to do what we can, it's an excellent opportunity for me to not only excel myself, but to present an image of our community that oftentimes we don't see. You know, we very seldom see other than just a few people in media, who xpose or who are visible from our community, so I think it's an excellent opportunity. I was at the opening ceremony of Nevada's 50th Statehood...

Sherman Gardens and some of the kids I heard were saying, 'hey, I know that dude right there. I've seen him on television' sometime. And I have become, but I'm not a television person. I'm just a common person who lives in the neighborhood. This just happens to be my job. So we were standing around and after a while they kept moving towards me and I'm moving towards them and then after a while we got together and sat down and chatted. They brought us some potato chips and they had some pops and everything. So we sat there and talked and kicked back. I think they were a little surprised that someone from their community who put on a shirt and tie, but he's in a project and can sit down and talk to them on their level, where I'm not so caught up with big words that I can't relate to them, that I can't talk to them about their problems, that I can't say 'yeah, I know where you're coming from...I don't think that's right, but I'm also letting them know you can kick it through the problems, that you're having, and the fact that if I'm here because I came from a very difficult background like you, all of you, that means a lot of you can succeed the way that I have because I said to them and I still think the most of them are more talented than I am. I'm not that talented.

Porter: When all is said and done, and all the criticism is gone, what is the one thing that Mujahid Ramadan wants the public to remember about him?

Ramadan: I was concerned enough about Nevada to accept all the criticisms and take all the heat to make sure the mission that Governor Miller assigned to me was carried out to the best of my capability inspite of all the opposition, inspite of all the irritations that we were placed under, I was committed to it and I was one who could accept the heat in the kitchen.

I think that it's regretful at times that we allow our decision making in terms of our own ethnic community to be personal

instead of at least political or at least objective. But often times we make our authorization not criticism based on personal feelings and emotions instead of objective thought and what's going to be the long term effect...I don't anticipate and I will not encourage them to support me in any form or fashion, because I'm Black. Too often we did that and the downfall of that is that we support some people who are incompetent, incapable and unreliable as representatives and as a result of that, we end up having a poor representation. But when we criticize, it must be reasoning, objective, unbiased and impersonal. The criticism, I think, that I have received, by and large, are from people in Nevada and I don't think it's been a large majority of people. I get too many phone calls from people, I walk through too many stores, I sit in too many barber shops, I go to too many places and people say, 'hey, look, don't worry about the criticisms.' I get too many letters here in my office telling me I'm doing a good job. So why don't I, if I'm concerned about what people are saying? I don't have a lot of time to pay attention to it, nor do I respond to people when they come to me with heavy accolades of 'you know what a great guy you are,' because, if I responded to one that's positive, then I really would find myself responding to others that are negative. But at least make the criticisms be based on your own insight and don't just follow the charade. You're not following the parade of 'Let's bash Ramadan.' That's not a healthy thing to do and I think all and all, when we're making an impact on this, I go places and people say 'Hey, you know the statements that you're making about us changing our values, that's really true.' Because it begins in the homes, it doesn't begin in treatment. And when law enforcement gets to it, it's out of our hands, it'd completely out of control. So the primary place for us to fight this war is in our homes, in our neighborhoods, in our communities, in our churches and our social

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## New Christian Radio Station Hits the Air Waves

KKVV 1060 AM hits the air waves of Las Vegas. The big day will be Saturday, April 28th. The station will be managed by Jerald Scheurwater, a young 12 year radio veteran.

KKVV has dedicated Sundays from 12:00 noon until 8:00 p.m. to the Black Christian community. It will feature several local Black pastors, as well as the Sammy Graham Gospel Show. It will also have a variety of Black Christian music.

The weekdays have been reserved for many national programs. KKVV will feature 6 hours of live call in talk daily. Scheurwater claims the weekday feature program will be "Talk Back With Bob Larson." This program will be heard from 1:00 p.m. until 3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Bob Larson will be dealing with many issues ranging from drugs, sex, Rock N Roll, satanism, prostitution, pornography, and various other topics. This program gives the people the opportunity to call in to one of the most powerful live call-in talk radio programs, and to be able to receive help.

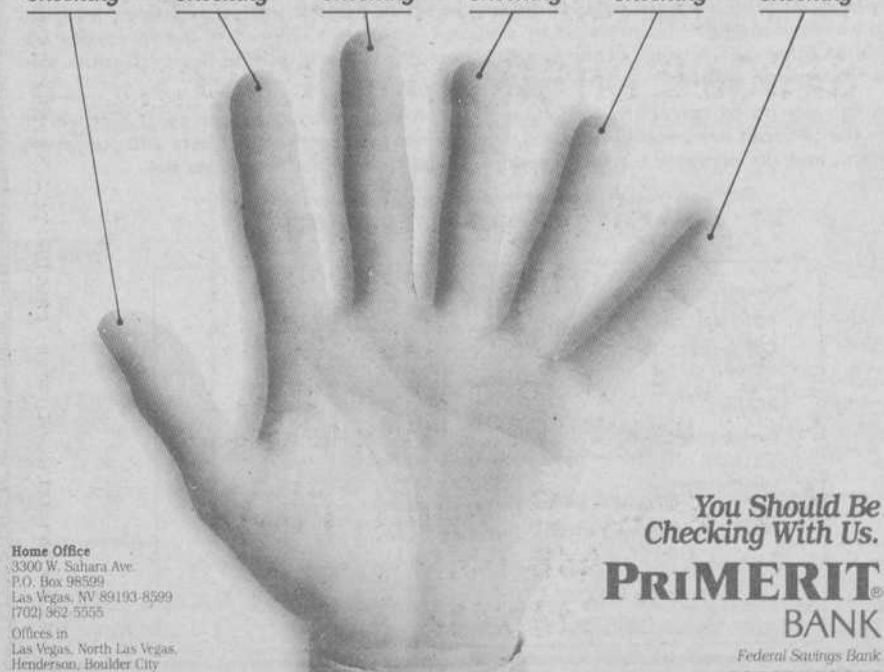
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