

Carl Rowan's Commentary

Campaign financing reform is about to go the way of term limits, to the political graveyard. And it isn't just because only 3 percent of Americans seem to really care about legislation to guarantee that sleazy fund-raisers do not control our elections.



CARL ROWAN

Campaign financing reform seems doomed because of the oldest rule of American politics: never vote for anything that takes away your advantage.

Republicans have always had an advantage in raising money. So while they have had a good time lately ridiculing the Clinton administration for money-grubbing stupidities, they don't really want to close off their sources of "soft money," or other funds.

Well, why, then are you and I supposed to cough up \$6.5 million of our money to pay for Sen. Fred Thompson (R. Tenn.) and a staff of 80 to conduct a long probe of misconduct and abuses in financing the presidential and congressional campaigns of 1996? Thompson might come out of this probe looking more like a presidential candidate, and we may be titillated to learn that "coffee, tea or me" was the White House song to big donors, but a lot of Republicans will get some unwanted exposure in the process.

People don't want the diversion and the divisiveness of a sideshow congressional hearing into who was more crooked than whom in scrounging political donations last year.

But we'll probably get the hearings because Thompson knows from his past how highly-publicized public hearings can catapult skilled inquisitors into positions of greater power and glory. And because some of the mistakes made by the Democratic National Committee are too ludicrous and laughable for the Republicans to resist a chance to exploit them.

But the Republicans may have to do this probe on the cheap. Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (South Dakota) says the amount of money Thompson asks for is "outrageous." Even Republicans don't want him to have so much money that his sleuths can fish every pond and put the microscope to Republican lawmakers who ran big-money campaigns.

I'd like to see laws passed that spell out clearly who can give what, or do what, in raising the money to finance political campaigns. I'd like to see agreements that candidates will not again spend the obscene amounts of money that have become commonplace and made a congressman's two-year term a two-year money-begging exercise. But constitutional freedoms and power yearnings may make it impossible for us to get what we wish.

Given that reality, it is common sense, not defeatism, to say, "Don't spend my tax dollars on the Thompson probe."

Conspiracy

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American people to believe about what happened in the debate, whether or not it really happened. Conspiracies are not just about particular events. They are about how people's way of seeing and thinking about the world are shaped.

The use of the word conspiracy is somewhat arbitrary. For example, did the Republicans and Democrats reach a private accommodation on how to respond to the Newt Gingrich ethics violations? Yes. Was the intent to punish Gingrich minimally and preserve the bipartisan status quo in government? Yes. Was that a conspiracy or just politics as usual?

If you only count events where there's a "smoking gun" as conspiracies, for example, if you only count the CIA crack-cocaine controversy as a conspiracy if you have evidence that three CIA agents sat in a room and planned it, then you miss the fact that there is a conspiracy to have people see things as conspiracies as a way of making them vulnerable and insecure and fixated on trying to find the truth. But truth isn't the issue.

The issue is how people think and feel about things that go on. The very distinguished Martiniquen psychiatrist Frantz Fanon pointed out that there is a particular understanding of the world that oppressed people have by virtue of their oppression. There is also a particular viewpoint about conspiracies that people who have been conspired against have and that is very much a part of the black experience in America.

Lenora B. Fulani twice ran for President of the U.S. as an independent, making history in 1988 when she became the first woman and African-American to get on the ballot in all fifty states.

Price

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probation department, the Mayor's office, local colleges and universities, and myriad community organizations. Aided by considerable funding from the federal Department of Justice, these entities have stitched together a program to surround the city's youth with what Mrs. Moseley called a "a community of concern."

Their message to the youth of Boston was that there would be harsh penalties for criminal activity of any sort — but also help for young people who needed it.

"We needed to send a powerful message to our young people that we cared about them and that we had an investment in seeing that they could and would do well," Mrs. Moseley said. "Everybody recognized that no one nonprofit agency, no community organization, and no government agency could do what needed to be done alone. We had to work together."

The pursuit of that common goal has had several payoffs.

One is that the different agencies and organizations have discovered that sharing their expertise can help their partners do their job better. For example, police officials, now plugged in a network of social service agencies, have found that more and more individuals and organizations in the neighborhoods are looking to them not just as "jailers," but as a source of help, too.

And just as the greater coordination of community organizations' after-school programs help youngsters avoid the temptations of the streets, so the greater cooperation between the police and probation department helps provide juvenile offenders with the help they need to go straight.

Boston's success is further proof that, whether it's called "neighborhood policing," as it is in Boston, or "community policing," as it is in many other places, involving the police in efforts to surround young people with discipline, guidance and compassion is what works best to reduce juvenile crime.

That thinking has been the bedrock of the League's national and local-affiliate youth programs for decades. It stimulated both our now-annual day of celebration to honor youth who are "doing the right thing," and the five-year public service announcement campaign we launched on television and radio and in newspapers with the Advertising Council last October.

We called that campaign, which focuses on establishing after-school and summer programs to keep youngsters away from negative influences, "It's Time to Beat the Street."

The success of the citywide coalition in Boston shows we're not the only ones who feel this way. Thankfully, we've got plenty of company.

Gaming

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Last, but not least, we must begin to put this plan into effect. Even though the gaming barons may reject it at first, on the basis of "What's in it for me?" We have to assure them that higher profits will be a reality. Better-paid employees with opportunities to rise to management and even corporate levels will be more productive workers. Profit sharing, in the way of earning company stock shares will also increase morale, loyalty and productivity. Benefits go on and on if you just think about it.

We now stand ready to meet with the hotel/casino corporate heads to set this plan into action. With input and support of several forward thinking, prominent businessmen representing a true cross section of Las Vegas, we have the resources and skilled

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personnel to administrate this project and get this plan off the drawing board.

Gaming barons here is your chance to save Las Vegas as the foremost resort/gaming center in the nation, and also a chance to prove yourselves to the real citizens of Las Vegas. Together we can make Las Vegas one of America's and the world's best cities not only to play in; but also to work in and live in.

Jerry V. Lindsay
Vice President
Las Vegas Branch NAACP

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

History made whole

By Bernice Powell Jackson

Maybe you remember the scene from the HBO movie about the Tuskegee airmen, black World War II airmen, ready to die for their native land, but having to ride in the segregated railroad cars while German prisoners of war rode in the better "white" cars. A real life scene about racism faced



by African-American World War II veterans took place at the White House, nearly half a century after the war ended.

Seven black World War II veterans were awarded the Medal of Honor by President Clinton, who proclaimed, "History has been made whole today and our nation is bestowing an honor on those who have long deserved it."

In 1993, in response to a request by African-Americans veterans, the Department of the Army began an investigation into why not even one African-American veteran of World War II had received the nations top honor for soldiers. Two African-American Korea War veterans and 20 Vietnam veterans had received the medal and President George Bush had awarded the medal to one black World War I veteran who had been nominated for the medal in 1918, but had never received it. Investigators found that a climate of racism had prevented the extraordinary heroism of some African-American soldiers from being recognized.

One awardee was Ruben Rivers, whose captain, David Williams, a white officer, had worked diligently to make sure that Rivers' heroism was recognized. "This was the toughest battle I ever had. The Germans, I knew were my enemy. But this time it was racism, and it's tougher to defeat," Williams said. When Staff Sergeant Rivers' tank was hit by a mine, he refused to evacuate, taking command of another tank and directing fire at the enemy for three days. He was killed while defending his company.

Another was First Lt. John Fox, who died in Italy in 1944 when he stayed behind to direct defensive fire as his unit withdrew and then insisted that all firepower be directed at his post because it was the only way to defeat the attacking Germans.

A third awardee was Veron Baker, the only awardee still living, who destroyed four machine gun posts, killed nine Germans and drew enemy fire to allow his comrades to evacuate.

Those who argue that racism is a thing of the past or that their ancestors were not slaveholders deny the racism that these African-America soldiers experienced which denied them this nation's highest honor until this year. The irony of black soldiers giving their lives for the nation which denied them human rights is striking. When asked what that felt like, Lt. Baker replied that it was "kind of rough" risking his life while serving a unit. "I was an angry young man. We were all angry. But we still had a job to do and we did it," he said.

This nation had a job to do to recognize these black heroes and half a century later, it finally did it.

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