

COMMENTARY

A VOICE FROM THE HILL

Washington D.C.: Now that the smoke has cleared

By George Wilson

Special to Sentinel-Voice

We, the citizens of the District of Columbia, have been forced to come to grips with the fact that Washington is controlled by outside forces.

After lots of discussion among lawmakers including D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes-Norton (D-D.C.), friends of D.C. like Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), Trent Lott (R-Miss.) and Lauch Faircloth (R-N.C.), a plan was put into motion to "rescue D.C."

What was offered is akin to what the fish sees when the worm is dangling in the water. The worm looks appetizing, but when the fish takes a bite, the hook is discovered and the bite becomes a fight for life.

The "sugarcoated worm" calls for the federal government to assume pension

liability for police officers, firefighters and teachers. (That fund is currently operating at a \$5 billion deficit).

The worm also provides: a \$190 million federal payment for fiscal year 1998, but would not guarantee such payments in future years; a provision to lend the city up to \$300 million for a 10-year period; and a tax credit for single first time home-buyers and joint filers.

I'm sure some would say that it seems like Congress is offering D.C. a good deal to straighten itself up. Unfortunately, the help comes with a hook.

The elected mayor and city council must surrender their powers to the appointed Financial Control Board. In all fairness, Mayor Barry does retain control over such agencies as the recreation

department, tourism and cable television. However, the Control Board is now responsible for the hiring and firing for the city's nine major agencies.

The board is chaired by Dr. Andrew Brimmer, an economist and former member of the Federal Reserve Board. His experience does not necessarily qualify him to lead the city.

Upon officially grabbing the reins of power, Brimmer has shown that he is not concerned with what people think about him or his decisions.

I recently attended a meeting of the board where a group of residents let Brimmer and his cohorts know how they felt about them.

After a few minutes of disruption, Brimmer signaled

to the SWAT team that it was time for it to take action. The result: punching, pushing and arrests.

As a witness to this mayhem, it became clear that Brimmer and crew will have to have the SWAT team handy or else meet in secret locations when deciding our fate. Since its inception, the board has displayed a penchant for arrogance.

What remains for residents of the nation's capital is whether or not they will allow their vote to count for nothing. When Congress returns from its August break, they will legislate for the nation in a place that is devoid of democracy.

George Wilson is a 16-year Capitol Hill correspondent of the American Urban Radio Network.

Blacks: Rethink stance on gays

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Blacks and gays have been a combustible mix for some time. Have things changed? Hardly.

Rappers like Ice Cube still taunt that "Real niggers ain't faggots." Afrocentrists have said that "homosexuality is a deviation from Afrocentricity." And black ministers, with support from white Christian fundamentalists, still brand homosexuality "a sin before God."

Some blacks have escalated their low intensity warfare against gays to a "take no prisoners" battle.

Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan has routinely attacked homosexuality. Though the Million Man March publicly welcomed gays and treated civilly the ones who participated, no one believed that this represented a change in attitude among blacks toward gays.

If some did, Farrakhan dispelled that notion in a television interview with Evans and Novack in March. He emphasized that he still regards homosexuality as an "unnatural act" and would discourage the practice whenever and wherever he could.

Some traditional civil rights leaders have denounced homophobia and urge support of gay rights. They remind blacks that homophobia and racism are two sides of the same coin and that white conservatives, from Pat Buchanan to Jerry Falwell, who savage gays also savage civil rights gains.

But attitudes are hard to change. The only comprehensive survey conducted in 1995 to measure black attitudes toward gays, found that blacks, like whites, had not hedged on their hostility.

The survey found that there was less anti-gay sentiment among the more educated, less religious and more affluent blacks, but only if the gay male was white.

Black gay men are still cast deep in the nether world of contempt. Black gays and lesbians have held a number of National Black Gay Conferences since 1987. Yet there has been only scant mention of black gay men in the black press.

Black gay men continue to feel like men without a people. They carry the triple burden of being black, male and gay. They are rejected by many blacks, barely tolerated by white gays.

Many feel trapped, tormented and confused and fear the hatred by heterosexual black men won't change as long as heterosexual black men feel threatened.

These feelings will only change when more black leaders recognize that black gay bashing does not win brownie points with conservatives. Khalid Muhammad, the former national spokesman for the Nation of Islam, remains villified after a widely publicized 1994 speech assaulting gays.

Some of the leaders who upheld the spirit of the Million Man March were gays. This was tacit recognition that all black men, regardless of sexuality, face many of the same problems. But it did not mean the majority of black men were willing to accept black gay men as brothers and equals.

In time, more gay black men will come out of the closet and more heterosexual black men will meet them, get to know them better, or in some cases, discover that they have known them all along.

This will force more black men to reexamine their own faulty definitions of manhood and confront their own homophobia.

I hope that more black men are wise enough not to jettison other blacks who may be in a position to make valuable contributions to the struggle for political and economic empowerment.

It took time for me to learn all of this, but I did. I no longer wanted my gay problem to be my black problem.

Dr. Earl Ofari Hutchinson is the author of "The Assassination of the Black Male Image."

Our children equal our destiny, Urban League says

Special to Sentinel-Voice

African-Americans and especially African-American young people stand at a critical juncture today.

Never before has their meeting present-day scholastic standards and their learning how to learn — been so important to our future. Never before has it been so critical that young people catch on to the importance of learning early.

Many African-American children, from poor as well as middle-class and affluent families, do understand that.

They have inculcated what the novelist Albert Murray called the "indelible ancestral imperative to do something and become something and be somebody."

They are the ones enrolling in the nation's four-year and two-year colleges and post-secondary training institutes, or enrolling in the military services, or moving directly into the nation's workforce.

But too many others have not caught on. And while we know that many of them face the most daunting obstacles to success, we simply can no longer accept using the existence of those obstacles to excuse their failure and the inaction of the adults who bear the responsibility for their guidance.

We include ourselves in that latter group, along with the national black community and the larger society, too.

All the sectors of American society must intervene more positively in the lives of our youth.

The humanitarian reason for doing so is obvious. And

there's an obvious pragmatic reason as well.

If more African-American youth don't get the message that learning is important, their chances of earning a decent income which will enable them to fashion productive lives for themselves will be slim to none. And that will augur a very dim economic and social future for African-Americans as a people.

We need to invest in producing more of the human capital that will capture the economic capital we need to be strong.

That is the link between the league's intention to help stimulate a greater commitment to academic achievement among African-American youth and its commitment to helping black America achieve and exercise greater economic power and to aim to foster a broader acceptance of racial inclusion.

We can achieve that if we make the destiny of more of our children a bright one.

That's why we at the League have joined with a score of black professional associations, fraternities and sororities, and church organizations to mount a campaign for African-American Achievement—a

nationwide effort to encourage African-American youth to strive for excellence in school and in their community activities.

Our partners represent a small but significant cross-section of organizational black America, from the National Pan-Hellenic Council to the National Association of Urban Bankers, to the Congress of National Black Churches, to the National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice.

The partnership also includes State Farm Insurance and the National Newspaper Publishers Association, the association of African-American newspapers. State Farm has contributed \$1.2 million to support the Achievement Matters campaign.

We and our partners will begin this three-year-long effort on Sept. 20 in Los Angeles to coincide with the Urban League's own annual day of celebration of young people pursuing the path to achievement.

NNPA members will trumpet the campaign in their editorials, advertising and news columns, and State Farm employees will join our other partners in strengthening the

"culture of achievement" in schools and communities.

We intend to do that by mobilizing communities to destroy the obstacles that impede their children doing well in school. Our goals are quite specific.

We will work with education officials and those in youth-development programs to improve school facilities and curricula so that young people have a proper scholastic environment in which to learn.

And we will work with local community organizations and parents and young people themselves to spread the culture of achievement within these neighborhoods.

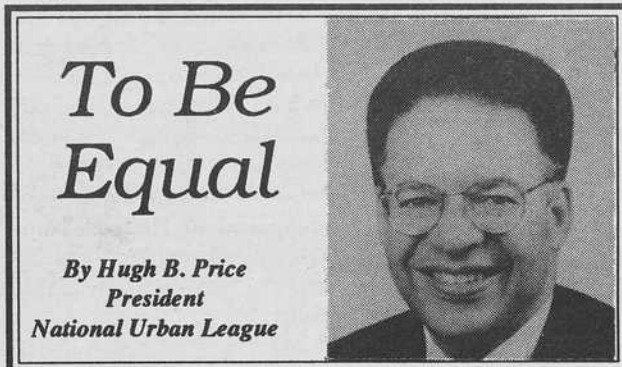
We want all our young people to have access to quality education, ample opportunities to develop socially and spiritually, and a rich menu of work and community service possibilities.

We want them to be safe at home, school and in their neighborhoods. And we want to surround them with caring adults who provide emotional support and advice and guidance about making their way in the world.

We aren't going to just wish for it. We're going to help make it happen.

Some would say these are ambitious goals. We would say they are vitally necessary goals. In fact, the purpose of setting these goals is to send a very simple message to our young people.

That message is: We care about you because you are our destiny. Getting that message across is a goal we must not fail to achieve.



To Be Equal

By Hugh B. Price
President
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