

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

March's spirit continues on

Naysayers said it couldn't be done. Never in a million years could more than one million black men centralize in one place at one time in unity. Or so they thought. Certainly, a racial lightning rod such as minister Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam and March organizer, could not draw black men of varying faiths, education levels and socioeconomic backgrounds together for a peaceful salute to divine forces. Or so they thought.

Now who's eating crow?

More than one million black men — though Lincoln Memorial Park estimates put the figure at 400,000 — converged on the nation's capitol Oct. 15, 1995 in a spirit of atonement. What has followed in the past two years: progress.

No not the earth-shattering progress the March's detractors claimed that the supporters envisioned, but tangible progress.

The March's pervasive effect can be seen in urban cities and rural towns nationwide. Local March organizing committees piggybacked on the positivity of the March and continued the process of nation re-building in their communities.

They organized voter registration drives, leading to one of the best turnouts ever for African-Americans voting in 1996 presidential election. They have stepped up their community activism; presenting events that celebrate our diversity and mobilizing people to fight against wrongs still perpetrated on people of color.

Blacks businesses received a boon, thanks to a re-focusing on the need to patronize our own proprietors. And crime has went down in some places. (For years, cities have reported sharp declines in their crime rate before, during and shortly after visits by Farrakhan).

The local mosque, Muhammad Mosque #75 plans a festive program at the West Las Vegas Library and Theater. On display will be pictures taken by Lisa Margerum, who attended the March. Margerum's photos (see the front page) capture the essence of the historic event.

The event promises to engage the mind, and more importantly the soul, in activities that will enlighten and inspire. In essence, that's what the March was all about; gaining enlightenment to inspire ourselves to live righteous.

Monumental progress? They critics don't think so.

Needed progress? Supporters know so.

If America, the world's true Superpower can't solve society's ills in more than 200 years, surely the critics can't expect the March to solve every problem in two years. In time though...



Democracy gets another chance

By Dr. Lenora Fulani
Special to Sentinel-Voice

As readers of this column know, over the years I've aggressively lobbied Congress for legislation that would open up our political process to new parties, new voices and new ideas.

Fair elections must be a central part of any black agenda and over the years members of the Congressional Black Caucus has been in the forefront of supporting this type of legislative reform.

Last week, Congressman Ron Paul [R-Texas], re-introduced two fair election bills into Congress that I have a long history of supporting.

The first bill is the Voter Freedom Act of 1997, H.R. 2477. Drafted initially off of the lessons learned from a 1984 effort I undertook with my colleagues to place an independent presidential candidate on the ballot nationally, the bill was originally introduced in 1985 by John Conyers [D-Mich.].

In its present form the bill retains its objective to make structural reforms to the ballot access process which has been so manipulated by the major parties in their self-serving effort to monopolize political power and influence.

The bill would set fair and uniform ballot access standards in federal elections and prevent states from erecting excessive ballot access barriers.

For example, right now independents must collect more than 700,000 petition signatures to be listed on the ballot in all 50 states and Washington D.C. This is 28 times the number needed by a Democratic party candidate

This Way
For Black
Empowerment

By Lenora Fulani



and 13 times the number needed by a Republican.

Presently 32 states require no signatures of Democrats or Republicans while only 3 states require no signatures of independents. Minor party candidates must also meet discriminatory filing fees, filing deadlines and restrictions on who can circulate and who can sign the petition which are not required of the major parties.

In his press release announcing the introduction of the bills, Congressman Paul, a former Libertarian candidate for president and now a Republican, said "The two major parties love their hold on the system because it keeps them in power. While it is unconstitutional for the federal government to tell states what requirements they should have for candidates seeking state and local offices, it is the job of Congress to ensure that federal elections are fair, open and, above all, representative of the great diversity of opinion in our nation."

The second bill, the Debate Freedom Act of 1997, H.R. 2478, was initially sponsored by former Congressman Tim Penny [D-Minn.] in the 101st and 102nd Congress (1989-93).

Developed originally in

collaboration with Congressman Penny and drawing heavily from the experience of my exclusion from the 1988 presidential debates and subsequent law suits, it provides in its current form, that major party presidential candidates must debate each other and any other presidential candidate who is on the ballot in at least 40 states and who has raised at least \$500,000 in small donations, if they wish to receive general election public financing.

Congressman Paul is also considering adding a second debates bill directed at the legal status of debate sponsors.

In it, the debate sponsor must invite all legally qualified presidential candidates who are eligible to receive general

election presidential campaign funding and are on the ballot in 40 states. Otherwise, the debate would be considered a corporate campaign contribution to candidates.

The bill challenges the legal status of the primary debate sponsor, the Commission of Presidential Debates, to operate as a non-profit organization and to receive tax-deductible donations.

This would add a much needed enforceability factor and would prevent a recurrence of the 1966 debates when numerous independent candidates were excluded.

That year, the Commission on Presidential Debates circumvented a hard-won FEC regulation that had come as a result of legal battles and testimony we offered during a rule-making proceeding in 1992, which required that the Commission on Presidential Debates use objective criteria in the selection of debate participants.

Dr. Lenora B. Fulani is currently a leading activist in the Reform Party and chairs the Committee for a Unified Independent Party.

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