

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Holley must face the music for slur

Regardless of Dan Holley's attempt to slide his racially insensitive remark about Martin Luther King Jr., to a mental gaffe, the vice president of the Police Protective Association must swallow whatever medicine he receives.

Holley, who faces a recall effort, said he meant to say Martin Luther King instead of "Martin Luther Coon" when he talked to cadets Jan. 15 about the holidays the new corrections academy cadets will get off. That his snafu occurred in front of impressionable novice cops makes it all the more reprehensible.

One would expect such denigrating barbs in rural towns where citizens are holed up with massive arsenals awaiting a great race war, or in the lily-white confines of a Fortune 500 company where degrading jokes are told openly, or at Nazi-styled white power rallies, or on cable access channels owned by race-baiting bigots.

But for Holley's "slip of the tongue" to happen in front of cadets, four of whom were black, is perplexing. But more unnerving is the fact that Holley made the remark to begin with. On appearance alone, the transgression smacks of racism and leads black people — who have a built-in mistrust of law enforcement entrenched by unwarranted beatings, lynchings and repugnant, corrupt judicial proceedings — to believe that all Metro cops are racists.

What near-sighted people like Holley must realize is that racial remarks render deep wounds in the hearts of minorities, causing us to wonder just how far removed are we from the stranglehold white America had on us: the Native American holocaust, slavery, Jim Crow laws, separate but (un)equal school and facilities, Japanese internment camps, environmental racism, the list goes on.

Adding fuel to the flame, Holley, according to a newspaper article, heard the remark from a friend. If true, what does that say about Holley. Does it give us a snippet into the kinds of people Holley counts as friends — people who toss racial banter around at the flip of the tongue?

Oh, what a tangled web police departments weave. Charged with protecting an increasingly volatile, skeptical and, in some cases, cop-hating society, their jobs aren't getting any easier and their morale isn't getting boosted any higher when episodes like this occur.

Holley has already received a verbal reprimand, which to many is akin to putting a Band-Aid over a broken bone — you still have the problem. Fed up with police misconduct, many blacks say Holley should be seeking other employment. Of course, Holley's supporters say his career shouldn't be ruined by one mistake. Holley made his bed — and to some extent the bed of the police department — so he must lie in it, whether it's unemployment or utter contempt from the black community.



Welfare-to-work is not working

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Since President Clinton's signing of the welfare reform act - the one his policy advisors told him to veto and his "score-points-at-all-costs" political advisors told him to sign - moving welfare recipients from public assistance to jobs have become a government focus.

In his February State of the Union address, Clinton called on corporate America to join in creating new partnerships with government to evolve welfare-to-work programs. Things don't appear to be going so well.

Recently, a front page "Wall Street Journal" article reported on what it called the "mixed results" of one such program undertaken by Sprint and AT&T in Kansas City, Mo.

These efforts - loudly trumpeted by the White House at the beginning - have succeeded in placing seven workers at Sprint, one of who was let go after the first week. AT&T hired one person whom they fired in two weeks.

These statistics do not bode well. As you might expect, various explanations have begun surfacing.

One corporate insider said that the programs were ineffective because corporate America wasn't "ready." A supervisor at Sprint said, "There are welfare recipients who choose to succeed and those who choose not to." Can the same be said of presidents?

With the success rate so low, a debate has risen as to which is the best method to effect welfare-to-work.

One camp argues that you must train people before placing them in private sector jobs. The other presents the

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"job first" argument, where welfare recipients receive a one-week crash course oriented toward employment basics, like getting to work on time.

This approach is gaining popularity with policy makers because it is cheaper and because "quick fix" statistics can be used to demonstrate how effectively the program is working.

However, there is no quick fix here. The U.S. economy's structure dictates that it operates without full employment. While the range of unemployment fluctuates between three percent and seven percent, depending on various factors, there has always been — by design — a sector of Americans relegated to being unemployed. This

economic phenomenon has historically helped to keep wages down and profits up.

The welfare and unemployment programs adopted during and after the Great Depression - which institutionalized unemployment - were based on policy makers' acceptance of this macro-economic feature of the U.S. economy. Not surprisingly an entire culture of being both unemployed and unemployable has evolved.

Welfare must discourage self-reliance so that the demand for jobs and job training from within the permanent underclass will be muted. This institutionalized culture cannot and will not be overcome by "job-first" or even by "training-first" approaches.

You cannot take a society - socialized over lifetimes for intractable unemployment - and create a few programs that will suddenly transform the long-term unemployed into reliable workers at a governmental whim.

Political expediency is one thing. Reality is quite another. Politicians from both major parties may hope to pick up votes off a quick-fix approach to welfare reform.

However, until there is a serious, long-term and development approach that repudiates political considerations and readjusts at every level — from the macro-economic to the job training and placement modality — there will be no effective means of moving people from welfare to work.

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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