

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Speedy confirmation based on merit

Let's get the record straight: Johnnie Rawlinson's speedy confirmation for the state's soon-to-be vacant U.S. District Court post was based on merit.

Period.

Not race. Not gender. But merit.

Period.

Despite humorous musings by the city's pseudo-intelligentsia — i.e., mouthy newspaper columnists, "investigative reporters" and know-it-alls — Rawlinson was not picked because her nomination could possibly bankroll votes for a senior Democratic senator who just so happens to be up for re-election this year.

On the contrary, Rawlinson was chosen to fill the seat vacated by Judge Lloyd George because she was, by far, the best person for the lifetime job.

Stack her resume against anyone's. Go ahead.

Political pundits would be hard-pressed to find someone who could match Rawlinson's 17-year career. She has worked her way through the ranks of the Clark County District Attorney's Office, becoming Assistant District Attorney in 1995 and has handled a breadth of cases, from those dealing with the county commission to the county's school district.

Rawlinson's confirmation — the two-week hearings were the fastest for a judicial nominee since the Republicans gained control of Congress in 1996 — makes her the first woman, first black and first black woman to hold a U.S. District Court seat in Nevada.

Those firsts are bittersweet. While we laud Rawlinson for making history, we must frown on society, politicians in particular, for creating a climate that stifles the upward mobility of minority politicians. Doubtless, there are cases where minorities — including women — were qualified for a job but snubbed for whatever reason. Approaching the 21st century, Johnnie Rawlinson shouldn't be an anomaly.

We must also push our children toward more diverse careers and begin, early on, to brainstorm ways to pay for the enormous expense of law school.

Expect Rawlinson, who is in her mid-forties, to be a fixture in state politics for more than a decade to come. But we can't wait for her to retire to begin grooming her replacement. Lawyers should be training to become her judicial compatriot. And politicians should scan the legal landscape a little more to find those gems-of-public-citizens who are the best at what they do and can use their skill for the people.

As for the political pundits, this may be hard, but try weighing people on merit, not any exterior factors.



Task force opens window to police/community conciliation

Special to Sentinel-Voice

In the assiduous way it pursued its mandate and in the judicious recommendations it has produced, the Task Force on New York City Police/Community Relations deserves the gratitude not only of New Yorkers, but of all those who understand the urgency of improving relations between the police and the communities they are supposed to protect and serve.

I'm proud to say that a stalwart of the Urban League Movement, Dennis M. Walcott, president of our affiliate, the New York Urban League, was a member of the 31-member group of lawyers, clergy, community leaders, business people, journalists and former police officers who shaped the Task Force views during an extraordinary seven-month effort.


I'm also happy to see that New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani — who set up the committee last August after Abner Louima, a Haitian immigrant, was savagely assaulted while in police custody in a precinct house — has retracted his initial surprising dismissal of the entire report.

Mr. Giuliani says he agrees with "somewhere between, say, 60 and 75 percent," of the nearly 100 proposals in the document.

That's a hopeful sign because the Task Force recommendations are well worth consideration. They cover not only the obvious aspects of police-community relations, but also hiring standards and recruitment efforts, the training of cadets at

To Be Equal

By Hugh B. Price
President
National Urban League



the police academy and police services and accountability.

And the general recommendations are supported by more detailed suggestions of how to achieve success in these areas.

For example, the Task Force urged that the NYPD substantially increase its programs to reach out to youth in positive ways before they get in trouble, and that it establish in precincts with poor police-community relations a specially trained group of police officers and community residents to help create trust between officers and community residents.

It suggested that the NYPD consider creating model "training precincts," much like "teaching hospitals" in the medical profession, to assure that new police officers are trained by "the best and the brightest in police service," and explore the idea of having cadets at the Police Academy take part of their field training at victim services agencies, hospital emergency rooms and child welfare and protective agencies.

The report even calls for an "Adopt A Cop" program, under which families would "adopt" an officer from the local

precinct whom they would pray for and support. The idea came up during a special "clergy-only" citywide meeting the Task Force convened.

Some cynics might think that a corny idea. But they haven't recognized the power of faith to bring people together.

Indeed, that is the report's great value: taken together, its recommendations constitute a great effort to stitch more tightly the bonds between police officers and the people who live in poor and working-class neighborhoods, and between police officers and black and Hispanic citizens, not just white ones. It presents

a view of policing as service-oriented, as requiring a desire not to dominate but to help — to help keep the public order, yes, but also to help improve civic life.

Oh, yes, there are controversial recommendations here — among them, the residency requirement that officers live in the city, the psychological screening of applicants for the force and the elimination of the so-called 48-hour rule, which gives officers allegedly involved in misconduct two days before they are required to talk to investigators. But one member, Rabbi Shea Hecht, said although the Task Force realized that some proposals are politically unrealistic, they voted to include them because they felt "our statement would be very, very important. And many of these things are not as far fetched as they sound."

Guy Molinari, Borough President of Staten Island and an ally of Mayor Giuliani, told the *New York Times* that he (See Task Force, Page 11)

NEVADA'S ONLY AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

LAS VEGAS Sentinel Voice

GRIOT COMMUNICATIONS GROUP, INC.

Nevada's only African-American community newspaper.
Published every Thursday by Griot Communications Group, Inc.
900 East Charleston Boulevard • Las Vegas, Nevada 89104
Telephone (702) 380-8100
Fax (702) 380-8102

Contributing Writers:
Loretta Arrington
Kim Bailey
Lee Bloom
Lee Brown
Sonya Douglas
Sandra Dee Fleming
Sharon Savage
John Stephens III
Fred T. Snyder
Yvette Zmaila

Photographers:
John Broussard
Randy Merritt

Ramon Savoy, Publisher-Editor
Lynnette Sawyer, General Manager
Marcello Sawyer, Copy Editor
Deborah Kohen, Staff Writer
Don Snook, Graphics
Ed & Betty Brown, Founders

Member: National Newspaper Publishers Association
and West Coast Black Publishers Association