

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Election season brings out political hypocrites

As the election season rounds the bend into its mid-term, political parties are jockeying for the best position to either retain power or wrest it from opponents.

The Democratic Party recently stepped up its efforts to corral the black vote by opening a satellite branch last weekend in West Las Vegas, one of four statewide offices it will use to register voters and spread the party's message.

Stoking constituents by offering them piecemeal concessions in exchange for their votes is nothing new. If anything, the office gives the Democratic Party fodder to fire salvos at Republicans, claiming GOPers don't care about the black vote and using their platform to assault Republicans for railing against affirmative action, threatening to eliminate the National Endowment for the Arts and committing other transgressions that can be viewed as anti-black.

But the Democratic Party committed an error during Saturday's opening almost as egregious as any Republican misstep: they dissed black businesses in the complex housing their office until the November elections.

By blocking off traffic to businesses in the D & K Plaza, they siphoned off foot traffic (and thus sales) that normally supports the clothing shops, boutiques and other businesses in the West Owens Avenue commercial complex. If that wasn't enough, party members didn't spend any money with their new neighbors in order to blunt the effects the opening had on the adjacent businesses.

While the businesses should easily survive the slight, the real damage is the wound to the psyche. The Democrats rely on blacks — and have done so for years — to carry them to mayor's and governor's offices and into the White House. Something should be given in return since blacks have scratched their backs for years.

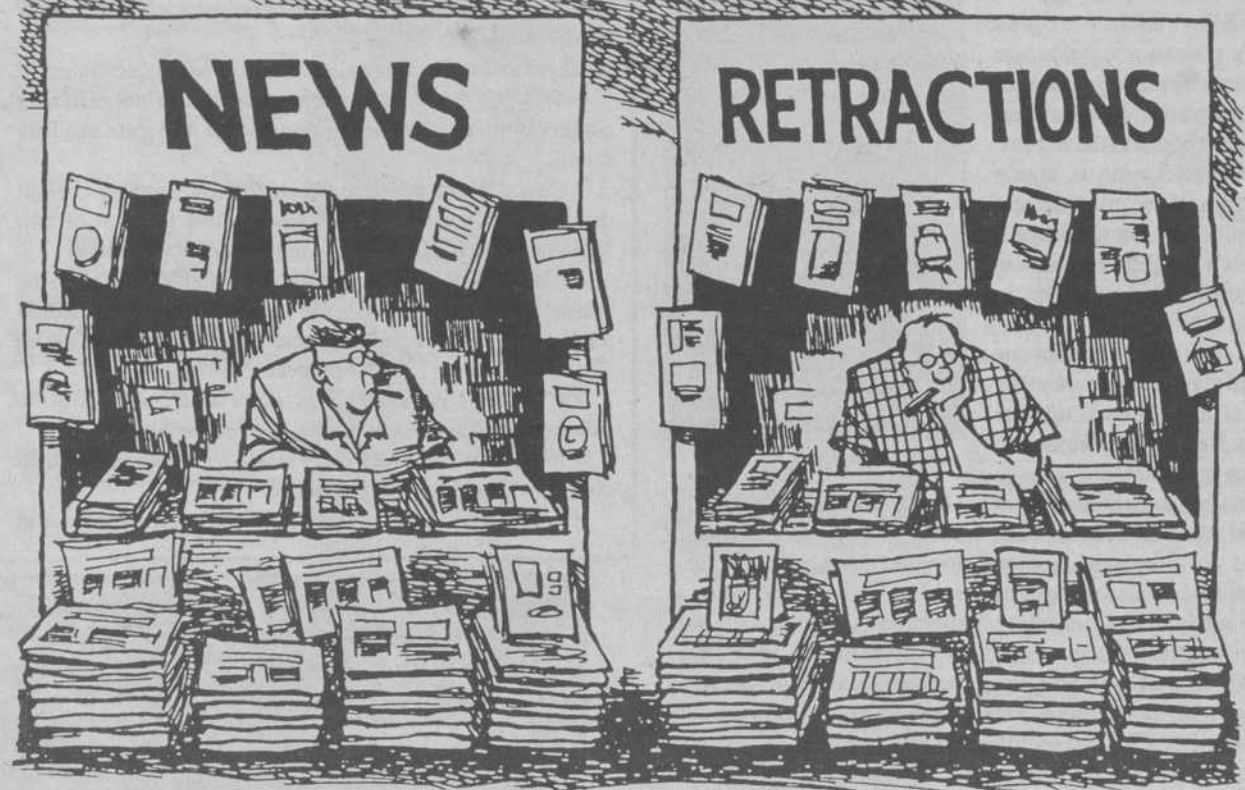
Would it be too much to ask that while you (Democrats) work out of the West Las Vegas office, you throw the party's weight and financial backing behind black businesses and causes advancing the black agenda?

Would it be too much to go out in the community and see what issues are the most important and begin crafting a viable "wish list" of proposed legislation, ordinances and proposals?

Would it be too much to maintain the West Las Vegas office, perhaps shutting down another branch, and run programs out of it?

These things shouldn't be too much, after all that blacks have done for you. If you don't listen, the Republicans might be laughing all the way to Carson City.

KEVIN HERY THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER ©1998



Hate crimes law one step on road to solution

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Last month's horrible murder of James Byrd, Jr. in Jasper, Texas, turned the nation's attention, at least for a moment, to hate crimes.

Sadly, less than two years before the 21st century and nearly a century removed from lynchings, hate crimes are still a part of life for this nation.

Sens. Edward Kennedy, Arlen Specter and others have introduced legislation to expand federal jurisdiction to reach all serious hate crimes and provide grants to state and local authorities to help prevent hate crimes, especially by juveniles.

Now the Senate Judiciary Committee is holding hearings on this bill, in hopes that similar hearings will be held in the House of Representatives and that a Hate Crimes Prevention Act will be passed this year.

"Hate crimes are a form of terrorism," Kennedy said, adding that "they tear at the heart and soul of our country... They threaten the entire community and undermine the ideals on which the nation was founded."

Wade Henderson, executive director of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, noted that the dismembering of James Byrd, Jr., after he was chained to the back of a pickup truck and dragged along a dirt road, and two similar copy-cat crimes in Belleville, Ill., and Slidell, La., are but the latest in a long series of violent crimes against people because of their race, national origin, ethnicity, gender, disability or sexual orientation.

It is estimated that there are some 10,000 such crimes committed every year.

Civil Rights Journal

By Bernice Powell Jackson

"Hate crimes are a form of terrorism, they tear at the heart and soul of our country ... They threaten the entire community and undermine the ideals on which the nation was founded."

— Edward Kennedy

The Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 1998 is designed to close some loopholes in earlier federal legislation which have tied the hands of federal prosecutors in the past.

Under current laws, a federal prosecutor must prove that the defendant acted because of the victim's race, color, religion or national origin and because the victim was exercising a federally protected right. There have been many heinous acts of racial and religious violence that the Department of Justice has been unable to address or unsuccessful in prosecuting because of the restrictions in the law.

Under the new provisions, the federal government would be able to get involved in hate crimes committed by organized hate groups who have sophisticated interstate networks, making it more difficult for local and state law enforcement to prosecute. In addition, it would close gaps caused by the fact that only 18 states have laws criminalizing

violence based on sexual orientation and 12 states have no hate crimes laws at all.

Several states, including Ohio and New Jersey, have had their state hate crimes laws struck down on constitutional grounds. States will continue to take the lead in investigating and prosecuting hate crimes under this new legislation, but the federal government will also be able to punish these crimes.

The horrible death of James Byrd, Jr. shocked many Americans. Many were also

shocked and offended by the police brutality in the case of Abner Louima in New York City last year. But, in the aftermath of the public outcry and once the television cameras went away, little or nothing was done concerning long-range changes in the New York City police department and its handling of police brutality.

We cannot enter a new century with thousands of hate crimes occurring every year. The Hate Crimes Prevention Act is but one step in what we as a nation must do to stop the killings.

It's a step, nonetheless. Let's take it and then look seriously at how we can stop these crimes on our own streets, in our own communities, so that the deaths of James Byrd, Jr. and thousands of other American hate crime victims will not have been in vain.

Contact your senator about the Hate Crimes Prevention Act, S.1529, at the United States Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510 or your congressional representative at the United States House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515.

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

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