

Thousands of Minnesotans rally to revive spirit of activism

By Brandt Williams
Insight News

MINNEAPOLIS — A March for Freedom and Justice held in front of the Capitol here early this month was more than a reaction to Gov. Jesse Ventura's failure to appoint any African-Americans to his cabinet, march participants said.

Though some in the crowd of more than a thousand people held signs which read "Jesse the racist Ventura," the overall atmosphere created by the march organizers and speakers was that of a civil rights revival, and a resurrection of the old-time activism made famous by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. March co-organizer and longtime activist Spike Moss reminded eager participants of the importance of the blend of religion and activism.

"Everything we are and everything we had came from the preachers and the church," said Moss before introducing the Rev. Bishop Stanley Frazier presiding bishop of the Minnesota jurisdiction of the Church of God I Christ.

"Many of our children don't know that. All we had was a church and all we had was a preacher and all we had was a God all the way through everything we've been through."

The line-up of speakers at the rally was a who's who of activism: the Rev. Jerry McAfee, Minister James Muhammad, Queen Mother Liz Samuels, Keith Ellison and the Rev. Oliver White.

The Rev. Ian Bethel gave a fiery address criticizing the governor's attitude and reminding the crowd of the community's responsibility to question authority.

"We are here today because we are going to have justice, and we're going to hold Jesse and all of those who sit on the inside of this building accountable!" Bethel said.

"And, we've come today to say by any means necessary, you will be held accountable."

"We are standing up on the power of our ancestors," said the Rev. William Smith, III, pastor of African Wellspring Church.

"We're standing up on the blood of Martin

Luther King. We are standing up on the blood of Jesus."

Smith said that attendees should go back to their communities and churches and be inspired to become better people and more involved in the crucial issues which face Black Americans.

Before he left the podium he warned the governor.

"We've come to serve notice on Jesse Ventura — if you body slam us, we will put a neck-breaker on you!"

William McGee, chief public defender for Hennepin County, gave a passionate address about how the criminal justice system is contributing to the destruction of African-Americans.

"We need to understand that 41 percent of the individuals in prison in Minnesota are African-American," McGee said.

"There are 5,300 people in prison in Minnesota that means 2,200 of them are brothers and sisters just like me and you."

"Brothers and sisters, that is unacceptable."

Affordable housing activist Neva Walker encouraged participants to get involved in their own neighborhoods and form groups around issues that concern them.

"If you can't get into working on housing, if that's not your thing, we've got CODEFOR (the City of Minneapolis' get tough on crime program) going on, our children are failing in the schools, you need to figure out what your issue is and get involved," said Walker.

Other activities included the reading of a letter of support sent by Sen. Paul Wellstone who could not attend the rally because of the illness of his father, a demonstration of unity between Willie Mae Wilson, president and CEO of the St. Paul Urban League and Clarence Hightower, president and CEO of the Minneapolis Urban League, who delivered a joint message and an appearance by singer Billy Steele who lead participants in a version of "This Little Light of Mine."

Brandt Williams is executive editor of the Insight News in Minneapolis, Minn.

Candidates

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elected officials and the city government. When the 75 hundred acres project becomes a reality we are going to be dealing with three different areas of North Las Vegas instead of two, which will increase the need for better communications between the different areas of our city.

Chris Montanez (City Planning Commissioner)- I have been City Planning Commissioner for almost 3 years now. Government agencies are overzealous in our policies and we don't work well with the local business communities.

I would like to open up

lines of communication between City Hall and the small business community. I want to see our city be more like one city.

I bring to the table a well-planned, well-balanced community.

Laura Perkins (student liaison at University of Nevada School of Medicine)- I believe in a balance of residential areas, businesses to support those residents and light industry to promote jobs.

I would like to see safer communities and a comprehensive master plan to achieve those goals.

William Robinson (incumbent)- Experience. I don't try to break things that

don't need to be fixed. I'm responsive to the citizens. (I provide) quality leadership.

My record speaks for itself. North Las Vegas has grown from 40 to over 100 thousand (residents) during my terms. One issue I'll focus on is getting the BLM (Bureau of Land Management) to give us 75,000 acres of land and develop it into a master plan community.

I will also focus on keeping the city safe and (projecting) the perception of our city as a safe place because people don't come if they think it's not. I want to put more people (police officers) on the street and give them more pay.

Tony White (MIS/DP

Technology Specialist)-I feel we need a greater diversity of housing types. We need upscale housing in North Las Vegas and there are steps that need to be taken in order to create an environment where we will attract a wider variety of housing types.

The citizens in North Las Vegas have the highest taxes in Clark County yet we are

provided with the least public services.

Stan Vaughan (Professional Chess Master/Teacher)- I am the only libertarian in the race therefore, I bring a much different view than the rest of the candidates.

Government at all levels, including the local government is too expensive,

too large, woefully inefficient, arrogant, intrusive and downright dangerous.

I recently procured the past and present copies of the city budget and I see a lot of ways where my accounting background will help to improve the city's management.

Connie Glass could not be reached for comment.

Police

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former prosecutor. Said Ron Daniels, head of the Center for Constitutional Rights, a New York-based civil rights group, "We know we have a bad problem out there. We just don't know exactly how bad."

"Anywhere I've gone in this country, 15 minutes into the conversation we are talking about some police brutality," Daniels said. He organized a national anti-police brutality march in Washington in early April after four officers from New York's elite street crimes unit fired 41 shots at Diallo, an unarmed West African immigrant, hitting him 19 times. The officers have been charged with second-degree murder.

For years, civil rights groups have urged the Justice Department to collect nationwide data on excessive force cases. The collection of data was authorized by the 1994 Crime Act but not

funded. "So far we only have anecdotal information," said NAACP President Kweisi Mfume.

Last week, Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., reintroduced a bill requiring the Justice Department to collect data on traffic stops by local police.

"Stopping our citizens to be searched on account of their race is an unacceptable activity on the part of law enforcement," he said.

San Diego requires that police record the race of people they stop in order to assess whether officers rely on racial profiling in making traffic stops. Some of the 35 police chiefs and activists who met with Attorney General Janet Reno last week discussed adopting such a plan elsewhere.

But, generally, police officials are wary.

"If passed into law, the (Conyers) bill would place a burden on the police and lengthen traffic stops," said

Robert Scully, executive director of the National Association of Police Organizations, which represents 4,000 police unions and associations. He said officers are vulnerable to attack during such stops and pausing to collect data "would make a dangerous situation worse."

"It's ironic that in the quest for a colorblind society, some people want us to keep track of people by race," said Jim Pasco, executive director of the Fraternal Order of Police, the nation's largest police labor organization, with 277,000 members. "We're opposed to any kind of racial tabulation," he said, opposing proposals to accumulate data on police brutality cases.

Pasco said that police brutality hasn't been increasing. He notes the number of federal prosecutions of abusive cops has stayed at about 30 a year while the number of officers has sharply increased.

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