

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

# Salvo fired in war on high drug costs

The White House deserves credit for extending a hand to South African President Thabo Mbeki in his country's earnest attempt to rein in sky-high prices for drugs used to treat AIDS.

But the Clinton administration need not gloat over the recent announcement — made last week during Mbeki's first official visit to the United States during which the South African president dined with the Clintons and met with Vice President Al Gore.

South Africa — and Africa in general — has been decimated by AIDS and the HIV virus. (AIDS infects one in 10 South Africans. Nearly 70 percent of the world's 33.6 million HIV-infected people live in sub-Saharan Africa). Price-gouging drug companies have exacerbated the problem by ratcheting costs up so high that most South Africans can't afford to purchase the medicines. Many hospitals refuse to buy the high-priced treatments, thus preventing the drugs from getting to the people needing them the most.

It's estimated that it would cost \$2.2 billion to administer AZT, a common treatment, to the infected and afflicted. South Africa doesn't have that kind of money. That the country would even have to produce such an amount is a human rights travesty.

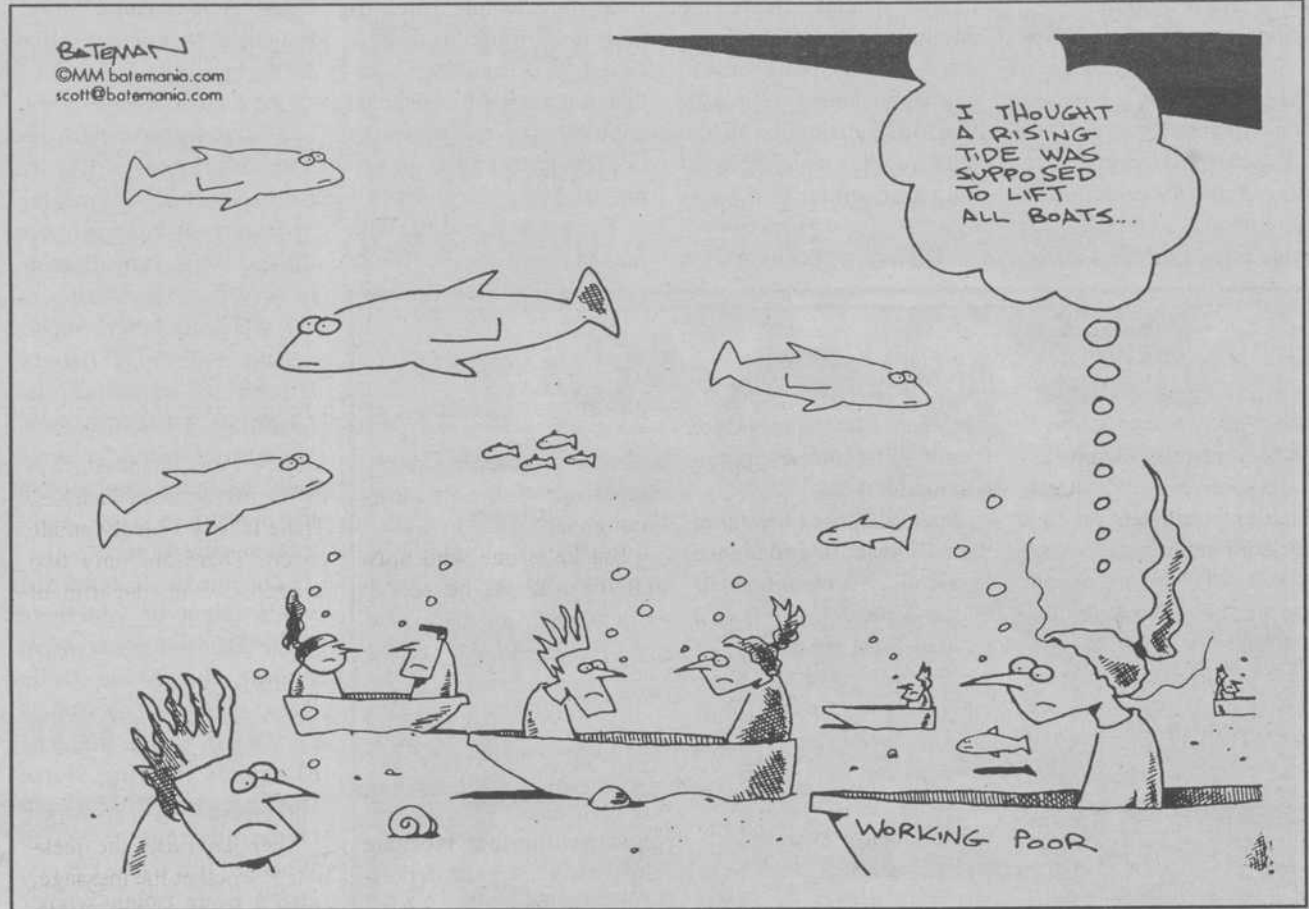
"We've got to get them to him. He's got to be able to afford them," Clinton said. "You've got these big five pharmaceutical companies now that say they're going to help. The next couple months we'll see if we really can get a victory."

In the next few months, we'll be able to weigh the impact of Clinton's executive order signed earlier this month increasing the availability of drugs and lowering costs. Companies developing AIDS vaccines could receive tax incentives if Congress backs Clinton's proposal.

Mbeki has bristled — and rightly so — at the pharmaceuticals industry's tacit attempt at conciliation. Several companies have agreed to offer cut-rate drugs, but also nixing patients' options at shopping for cheaper generic brands. For years, companies have imported generic versions of drugs for which they patent.

South Africa wants — and needs — access to the best, most affordable treatments. Uganda, another country tethered by AIDS, is the testing ground for an oral vaccine set to undergo human tests in 18 months or less. Developed in an institute run by Dr. Robert Gallo, who co-discovered AIDS, the vaccine would cost \$1 per dose or less. The vaccine, which uses salmonella bacteria, is being trumpeted by the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative, which is funding \$3 million over three years to complete research and development.

The money-grubbing pharmaceutical industry needs to evaluate itself. If companies continue with a profits-over-people attitude, theirs will be a legacy steeped the blood of lives that could have been saved.



# Black GOP activist resigns from party

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WASHINGTON (Special to NNPA) — Politicallyblack.com commentator and Republican activist Faye Anderson publicly resigned from the Republican Party March 28. She had been a national vice chair of the Republican National Committee's New Majority Council and worked in the 1988 and 1992 presidential campaigns of George Bush. She was also a policy advisor to Bob Dole's campaign when he ran for the White House in 1996.

Anderson said her resignation "comes in the wake of a pattern of racial blunders that I cannot dismiss as mere 'mistakes.'" She cited the 1999 refusals of congressional Republicans to support a resolution condemning the Council of Conservative Citizens (CCC), a white supremacist group, and Republican presidential candidate George W. Bush's refusal to condemn the flying of the Confederate flag over the South Carolina Statehouse, as well as his failure to speak out against Bob Jones University's ban on interracial dating. Anderson was interviewed by FOCUS editor David C. Ruffin.

RUFFIN: Do you see your resignation as emblematic of

the Republican Party's difficulty in retaining Black support?

ANDERSON: I believe that 25 percent of Black folks could be added to the Republican base. But the people who are running the party are not convinced they can get the Black vote. It's no coincidence that the Black vote for Republican presidential candidates hovers around 10 percent. The problem is, those same blue suits who have been hanging around the Republican Party for the last 20 to 25 years don't know how to put together a message that would appeal to Black voters.

RUFFIN: What do you mean by blue suits?

ANDERSON: I mean white political advisors and consultants to Republican candidates. They don't see the Black middle class, so when they talk about reaching out to Blacks, they don't see the Black professional class, the entrepreneurial class, or the upper class for that matter.

They only see poor folks. So where do Republicans go when they start talking about reaching out—the inner city, because that's all they know. The Republican Party is not the party of poor white folks, it's the party of the middle class, the small businessperson. So why is it, when it comes to Black folks, the only Black folks they talk about are the poor?

RUFFIN: Why do these miscalculations continue?

ANDERSON: Those of us who know better say, don't

waste your time there. But we are not present when those decisions are made. I'll give you a good example. In '98, the National Republican Congressional Committee made a big deal out of "Operation Breakout" to focus on minority voters. There was a \$37 million advertising budget. Not a dime was spent on Black radio or Black newspapers, which have very inexpensive ad rates. You can't say you are serious about wanting to reach out to Black voters, but you never deliver the message where Black voters are likely to hear it.

RUFFIN: Do you think Texas Governor Bush is doing a better job of reaching African-Americans in his presidential campaign?

ANDERSON: When George W. Bush came out of the box last year to run for president, he was a blank slate to the American people. He could have been anything he wanted to be.

He was able, at least in the beginning, to pull off the idea that he was a compassionate

conservative. Then he got in trouble when he surrounded himself with the blue suits.

RUFFIN: What kind of trouble?

ANDERSON: Well, we saw it in the South Carolina primary. Bush didn't condemn the confederate flag. He went to Bob Jones University. He snubbed 6,800 minority journalists at the Unity '99 Convention in Seattle last year. These were not only Black reporters, editors, and columnists, but also Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans.

He couldn't put minority journalists on his schedule, but we learned later he found time to meet behind closed doors with John Carlson who was the chairman of Initiative 200 [Washington state's anti-affirmative action initiative]. Bush said he's a different kind of Republican who will be able to attract a broad base of support, but then he does the same things old-school Republicans have done. His advisors have to be (See Interview, Page 14)

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