

COMMENTARY

Corrupt practices pervade county offices

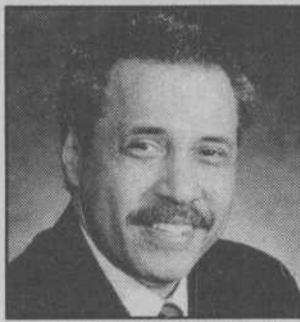
By Louie Overstreet

Special to Sentinel-Voice

A short time ago, I shared with you the fact that high level public-sector positions were being "wired" for certain individuals. Also, I noted that the selection of firms to perform professional services for governmental agencies were "rigged" processes as well. What I did not know at the time was that I would be provided with two concrete examples so quickly.

Did any of you follow the news stories on the "dude" the Clark County Commission has "wired" for the job of county manager? What about the stories about the Clark County School District requiring employees to report to work as early as 4:30 A.M. in order for the school district to avoid paying for on-peak power consumption between 1:00 P.M. - 5:00 P.M.?

The foregoing are para-



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gones to the levels of inept and discriminatory conduct that exist in a number of public agencies. Certainly this type of corrupt behavior over the years has contributed mightily to the labeling of Nevada as "The Mississippi of the West."

Clark County is an organization that contains 34 departments, over 6,000 employees, and annual operating and capital budgets totaling nearly three billion dollars a year. The county manager's job pays upwards of \$150,000 a year. The county manager is respon-

sible for providing management oversight of McCarran International Airport, county courts, jails, parks, roads, water and sewer systems.

Understanding the array of services requiring the budgeting of human and capital resources which then must be coordinated and managed at a daily operational level, several commissioners would have you believe a 40-year-old white male with a Ph.D. in sociology is the best person for the job. They believe this to the extent that they are scheduled to offer him the job at its June 19th meeting. If this guy is the "cream of the crop, then God bless the skim milk."

Hell, this guy has not even distinguished himself in his chosen field of endeavor in that he has not obtained the rank of full professor of sociology at UNLV. Yet, the county commissioners stand ready to double, if not triple

his salary. To all the persons that have technical backgrounds and years of management experience, the county commissioners are not interested in learning about your expertise — it already has selected the "best man for the job." Since you were unable to see me as I was writing this column, let me share with you the fact that my tongue was firmly lodged to the inside of one of my cheeks, when I wrote the preceding sentence.

Persons of color that are reading this column, you know the drill. If you have the education, they are looking for someone with more experience. If you have the experience, they are looking for someone with more education. If you have both, then you are over-qualified for the position.

In Las Vegas, even this old illogic does not apply. Here, people in charge of

wiring selection processes are not concerned about being fair. They are concerned with knowing you and also feeling comfortable with your ability to "kiss their butts."

Now let us turn our attention to the grossly mismanaged and discriminatory Clark County School District. The District's proposed management solution for solving the cost impact of rising energy prices, is to have summer employees come to work earlier.

Man, the genius that thought up this solution is wasting his time at the school district; he should be devoting his talents to finding a cure for cancer.

The reason the school district is faced with an operating budget crisis is that the Trustees continue to allow the rigging of the selection process for architects to design new schools. So do not go for the "okey-dokey" that

the per-kilowatt hour cost of electricity on peak to serve year round schools is causing the problem.

The 15% of us that vote have authorized the district to spend billions of dollars to solve the problems associated with growth.

The problems of doubling shifting or year round schools could have been solved years ago, if the Trustees demanded that more than the same four architects receive all the contracts to design scores of needed new schools.

The reason the problems still exist is that with no one demanding a change in how the district operates, the Trustees continue to feel comfortable in choosing the path of discriminatory cronyism to that of equitable inclusion.

My question is who will "let the dogs out" on these Western Mississippi folks, so that they can eat up their biased attitudes and behavior?

Early roadblocks aplenty in Sharpton's presidential bid

By Ronald Waters

Special to Sentinel-Voice

When the news broke a few days ago that Rev. Al Sharpton was thinking of seeking the 2004 Democratic presidential nomination, it evoked snickering and derision in a number of quarters.

But given the fact Sharpton won 25 percent of the Democratic nomination for the Senate race in New York in 1994 and one-third of the vote in the 1997 New York mayoral race, it could be a serious proposition. And while the media is attempting to bait some in the Black community to take sides in what they perceive will be a great Sharpton-Jesse Jackson fist fight, it is better that we avoid this trivial level of analysis and consider the merits of the case.

The most immediate question is whether a Sharpton candidacy would be reminiscent of the 1972 presidential bid of former congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, who was eminently popular in New York City but was unable to establish a national constituency. While the answer to this question will undoubtedly stimulate efforts to assess Sharpton's national appeal (partly out of curiosity and partly out of fear), the testing of his credibility as a candidate will begin within

the Black community. And here, comparisons to Jackson are unavoidable for obvious reasons.

The most serious question Rev. Sharpton would face is whether Black leadership would rally around him or leave him isolated as they seek their own deals with another of the major White Democratic candidates. It should be remembered that in 1984, despite the fact that few Blacks had reached the upper echelons of Democratic Party institutional structure or the Congress, most members of the Black Congressional establishment and the Civil Rights leadership supported Walter Mondale rather than Rev. Jackson.

Today, breaking rank would be harder for some Black leaders, such as Charlie Rangel (D-N.Y.), who is ranking member on the House and Ways and Means Committee and a power in the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. The fact that he has raised considerable sums of campaign cash for other Democrats makes him a key party leader who many White politicians will depend on in the coming elections. Under these circumstances, could he support someone other than one of the party insiders? Then part

of Sharpton's tease to the press about possibly running for president was based on the fact that the Democratic Party ignored the disenfranchisement of Blacks in the Florida election crisis last year.

In the interim, however, the party has created a new institution, the Voting Rights Institute, headed by former Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson. Jackson has already begun to exercise leadership by spearheading a hearing on Florida in Palm Beach last May 7, the first of several others around the country. Will this show of concern, though belated, be enough to keep the balance of Blacks within the party fold? One simply doesn't know, but it is certain that Maynard Jackson would have a very difficult time supporting Sharpton, given his new role, his proximity to the Democratic National Committee chairman Terry McAuliffe and his voice in party affairs.

The same could be said for members of the Congressional Black Caucus, many of whom are currently in the process of making deals with other members of their congressional delegations for help in the process of redistricting that would result in keeping their seats. Could (See Presidential, Page 13)

Wright right on energy crisis

By Emory Curtis

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Make no mistake about it; California has a real energy shortage. At peak demand times we need more electrical power than we can buy and that naturally results in power being arbitrarily withheld from some users (a blackout) so the rest of us can go about our daily business. Those arbitrary energy blackouts create immediate problems that range from annoyance to life threatening.

For instance, during a blackout on a Sunday afternoon, I missed about 45 minutes of a Lakers basketball game—an annoyance at worst. For someone on a life-support system at home without a backup, it is life threatening at best.

The immediate negative impacts of California's electricity blackouts are minor in relation to the impacts it will have on California's economic future. Because of the impact of an electric energy shortage on business operations, many businesses will seriously consider other alternatives to expanding their California operations or establishing new operation in this state.

That means a loss of jobs in California. It also means an economic slowdown for the rest of this country. We African-Americans ought to be concerned about that because as the economy slows, we will lead the parade to the unemployment office.

In this knowledge-based economy, manufacturing, transportation and communication technology allows businesses to operate successfully with major divisions located in various areas of the world. That's why how California solves its electric energy deficit problem is a key to California's future capability to match its job production capability to its natural population increase.

Credit California's energy deficit problem to a Democratic controlled legislature and a Republican governor who proudly put into law an energy deregulation scheme that required major investor-owned utilities to buy power on the open market and sell it to users for a limited price. Since the gap was small between the available power on the market and California's power needs, the door opened for power producers to get grand theft dough from the state for the last megawatts of energy needed to avoid blackouts.

Grand theft dough is exactly what gas and electric power producers got from gas and electric power sales to California. At the same time, utilities piled up a mountain of debt (over \$13 billion) paying the high costs for energy and getting only a fraction back from users of the energy. With those debts, Southern California Edison and Pacific Gas and Electric's credit became poorer than most of my readers.

California's three major investor-owned utilities are in a fix; one is in bankruptcy court now, another is about to crack the bankruptcy door open and the third is on the steps of the bankruptcy court.

To keep the state from having a major energy Blackout, state government bought power for the utilities. So far the state is \$7.7 billion in debt and expects that debt to reach \$13 billion before the energy crisis ends. That final cost is a guess. As far as I can see, the solution is not in sight.

Just as California's electric energy problem began with actions by the legislature and governor, only they can solve it. The legislature is just finishing its first extraordinary session to solve the energy crisis.

To me, the session was not a problem

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