

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

# Bioterror fears

Anthrax. The word's mere mention provokes fear in many Americans. For years, the U.S. Defense Department has known about and prepared (although not particularly well) for bioterrorist attacks on America. Indeed, defense officials have often said that biological warfare—using insidious chemical agents that can wipe out millions way before health officials could mobilize efforts to deploy the nation's paltry sum of vaccines—is the form of combat that worries them most.

With recent discoveries of anthrax and citizens infected by the bacterium, America's fear of bioterrorism has sprung anew, fomented in no small part by the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the East Coast. Citizens and military experts alike fear the perpetrators behind the attacks would like nothing better than to add to the carnage of Sept. 11, which left thousands in New York City and nearly two hundred more at the Pentagon dead. What better way to increase the carnage than unleashing deadly spores, and there's no better way to stir mass hysteria about the threat of bioterror than by sending anthrax to mainstream media organizations such as NBC.

That said, the Black media can not and should not think that because outsiders view it as marginal, it should ignore the threat. Make no mistake, the terrorist attacks were an assault on all Americans, regardless of color or creed. The thousands who perished when the World Trade Center towers collapsed after being rammed by hijacked planes represented a rainbow coalition. Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, Asians, Christians, Muslims, Jews— you name it, the WTC towers had it. Terrorists rarely discriminate.

As such, the Black media should remain cautious, even though history indicates there's little reason to worry. To wit: Long relegated to the bottom of the media totem pole—due mostly to mainstream America's refusal to validate its worth and to penny-pinching by corporate America—the black media has never been viewed as an entity of record, except by Black America. So, the thinking goes, black media outlets probably aren't high on a terrorists "to-do-away-with" list. Dump that logic.

Whether we like it or not, America is in the midst of war. Whether you think the U.S. military bombs Afghanistan into submission in hopes of capturing Osama bin Laden, many people think the attacks were payback for years of American-styled global policing. One thing remains certain: bin Laden and the boys aren't playing around, and until he is captured, killed or neutralized, threats of more attacks remain. It's for that reason that Black media, in fact all media, must be wary. Being wary doesn't mean being fear-stricken, it simply means exercising more caution, as you would in responding to a home invasion. Unfortunately, the terrorists have lumped all Americans together: we're all expendable. Ironically, it's a dose of our own medicine. For decades we have bombed and sanctioned our enemies, not realizing nor caring that, in the process, we've hurt thousands.

## Start giving now

KCEP-FM, 88.1, deserves recognition for kicking off a drive to help the needy as the holiday season draws nearer. Although its "Stuff the Bus" campaign isn't directed toward helping the estimated 30,000 workers laid off since terrorist attacks caused the local economy—which was already sputtering—to nosedive, the donations will almost certainly help some of those disaffected workers.

Now it's time for more groups geared toward African-American interests to join KCEP. People are in need.



# Keeping our eyes on the prize

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Amid the shock and dislocations of the past month, and our on going sense of loss, one can't be blamed for sometimes, just for a moment, wondering if there's really a future worth fighting for.

That giving in to sadness and despair must only be temporary, however—a way of taking stock where American society is, where it needs to be that gets us moving again to the goal of helping more Americans climb the ladder to an expanded, more inclusive mainstream.

That's why the technology leadership grant of more than \$2.7-million in software the Microsoft Corp. has just given the National Urban League is so significant: it's a tangible demonstration that Americans from all walks of life realize that the goals worth pursuing before the tragic events of September 11 are still worth pursuing—and in fact worth pursuing now more than ever.

One of those goals was, and remains, closing the so-called digital divide—the gap between those who have access to computers and the Internet, and high-level technological skills, and those who do not—that exists between blacks and whites.

In recent years there's been much justifiable concern about the gap. Last year one major study estimated it's size at 14 percentage points: 50 percent of whites had Internet access compared to 36 percent of blacks.

However, as the journalist Joel Dreyfuss pointed out in an essay, "Black Americans and the Internet: The

## To Be Equal

By Hugh B. Price  
President  
National Urban League



Technical Imperative" in our recent policy journal, *The State Of Black America 2001*, studies showed that Latin Americans had surpassed white Americans in computer use, and that African-Americans were fast closing the gap.

That narrowing, Dreyfuss wrote, was due in part to Black families responding "to debate as other groups had. They bought computers to assure their children would not be left behind, for their home business, and for private use."

In addition, Dreyfuss pointed out, many private companies, like Microsoft, have organized and invested in programs to close the gap.

These two groups—individuals and families, on the one hand; private companies, on the other—have seen that technological literacy and ready access to technology are essential if we're to close the digital divide and prevent low-income communities from being frozen out of an increasingly technology-driven society.

Microsoft has been a leader in increasing access to technology for poor communities and supporting community organizations, having given last year more than \$36.6 million in cash and

\$179 million in software to more than 5,000 nonprofit organizations. Indeed, it's capacity-building grant to the Urban League is one of eight given to a broad range of nonprofit organizations this year which total more than \$7.6 million in software.

Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer, meeting with me at out Metropolitan Seattle affiliate, said that "Microsoft is excited to be able to help the National Urban League deliver greater digital opportunities to undeserved communities nationwide and to reach its organizational goals.

This meaningful way that the Urban League will use these resources exemplifies the spirit" of Microsoft's high-tech philanthropic efforts.

The software from the

grant, which follows a similar grant Microsoft made to us four years ago, will enable the Urban League to do both "foundation-building" and "direct-service" work in more than 70 of our 111 affiliates in 34 states and the District of Columbia

Put simply, that means more of our affiliates can now operate at the highest levels of technological competence: they'll be able to more efficiently help the more than two million people Urban Leagues serve find affordable rental housing, or get mortgages to buy a home, or find affordable daycare for their children.

Even more important, the Microsoft grant means that affiliates will be able to help residents in the low-income communities they serve and develop basic and intermediate technology literacy skills through our "Digital Campuses."

These technology centers are typically equipped with 25 state-of-the-art computers, on-line courseware for children and adults, a laser printer, a network server, and high-speed internet access.

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