

COMMENTARY

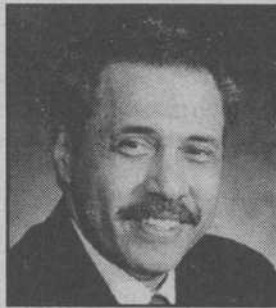
Government, by, of, for people and politicians

By Louie Overstreet
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Does the current state of government affairs at the national, state and local levels give you cause for concern? Do you wonder why our governing bodies have strayed so far from the concept of "government of the people, by the people, for the people," as stated by President Lincoln in his Address at Gettysburg in 1863?

Have we, as the governed, allowed things to become so bad that we now feel powerless when trying to petition our government for redress? In fact, if memory serves me correctly, was it not the inability of citizens of the colonies to seek redress from your boy, King George III, that led to a Declaration of Independence from England being issued on July 4, 1776?

The current sorry state of affairs is the direct result of the fact that elected officials are no longer free to act as unencumbered representatives of the people. Today, too many kindly Dr. Jekyll citizens, once elected to public office, metamorphose into dreaded political Mr. Hydes. This change comes about as a consequence of a decent person initially seeking to represent the citizenry and then being seduced into consuming the inebriation of power willingly paid for by



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special interest lobbyists.

You can readily tell the state of morphosis elected officials are experiencing by listening to how they are referred to by the citizens they are supposed to represent. If they are referred to as councilperson, commissioner, assembly-person, state senator, congressman, U.S. Senator, or governor, these persons are still in the early stages of change. However, if the people you know constantly refer to an elected official as being nothing but a *politician*, this is a sure sign that the elected official has been totally metamorphosed.

Check this out: here in Nevada the range of pay for the foregoing referenced elected positions is from \$15,000 to \$150,000 a year. Assuming a given election race will be competitive, the amount of money it takes to run a campaign can range from \$100,000 to upwards of \$10,000,000.

You do the math, and then ask yourself the question, why would a politician need to raise and spend an amount of money that is many times that which he or she will earn during a two, four or six-year term in office? The simple answer is that an alarming number of them no longer share "Honest Abe's" vision of whom our government

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Education bill doesn't embrace vouchers

By Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

One of the more interesting things happening under our very noses is that the Republicans have ditched vouchers in the new education bill working its way to the desk of President Bush. This is great news because a new study questions whether they are all that effective.

A bi-partisan bill that reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act has just come out of the House-Senate conference that will more than likely be signed by the President with great fanfare as a "victory" for his leadership. But this bill does not embrace the strategy Bush and Secretary of Education Rod Paige championed during the 2000 election. At that time, they were strong supporters of vouchers as the salvation for "failing schools" and the lynchpin of their system of accountability. But vouchers are nowhere in the current legislation. This is the case because, insofar as fund-

ing vouchers takes funding away from public schools, even some Republicans have been reluctant to support vouchers because of the strong ties their constituents maintain to their own public schools.

It should not be forgotten that one of the most important reasons White parents left the inner cities was to escape racial integration of the public schools, driven by the fear that it would corrupt their children's education. Public opinion polls show the public schools they fled to they still strongly support. The so-called "troubled schools" to which everyone refers are still largely perceived to be in the inner cities of America.

The bill that has come out of conference is a tolerable piece of legislation. It allows states to define a minimal level of proficiency in math and reading, but states will all use the National Assessment of Educational Progress to report on the progress of their systems by race, sex and learning disability annually.

As for accountability, parents of children in "failing schools" will have the option of placing their children in successful public schools or in after-school tutoring programs run by the schools, non-profit groups or corporations. However, a group led by Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) was successful in getting an extra \$3.7 billion for schools in poor neighborhoods-known as Title I schools-to assist them in achieving the standards. Governors are not given great latitude, under the guise of "flexibility" or "experimentation," to gut Title I funding, since only five percent of the appropriation would be allowed for this purpose.

Dodging vouchers in this bill makes good public policy and good sense. A recent analysis of the existing studies on vouchers by one of the most prestigious think tanks in the country, the Rand Institute, found that only three had shown slight improvements in educational levels

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Nondescript group focuses on black economic strength

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Have you heard about the Black American Family Christian Agenda? If not, you will very soon; BAFCA is coming to a city near you. Founded by Bishop Frank L. Stewart, founder and president of Zoe Christian Fellowship of Los Angeles, Calif., and author of the book, "Together, We Stand Stronger," BAFCA's mission is to coordinate the tremendous leadership within the strongest and oldest Black institution in this country: the Black Church. BAFCA's emphasis is economic and ethnic wellness principles. It focuses on a moral and social agenda through which a unique church commonwealth is created to build, support, and enhance the Black economy, both here and throughout the Diaspora.

BAFCA is moving about this country offering seminars to Black pastors. After its initial meeting in Memphis, Tenn., at a Black-owned hotel, I might add, BAFCA moved on to New Orleans and then to Philadelphia,

where I had the opportunity to moderate a panel of experts who discussed my favorite subject: economic empowerment. The main speaker was none other than Dr. Claud Anderson, founder of the Harvest Institute, who teaches the workshop based on his books, "Black Labor White Wealth" and "PowerNomics."

Bishop Stewart spoke to his constituents, fellow pastors, about their unique position within the Black community, which gives them the opportunity to provide vital information to facilitate change. He encouraged them to speak proudly from the pulpit about the economic principles and good stewardship of our resources. John Brown, an investment banker and associate of the Bedford Group, a Los Angeles development firm, and former treasurer of the Richard Allen Foundation, gave a passionate dissertation on investing in our own people. He stated that in order to succeed we must be willing to risk failure. We must not let this risk keep us from supporting our

brothers and sisters in business.

During lunch, sister Ernestine Henning, founder of Visions 2000, provided an update on the collaboration among key economic empowerment organizations that began in Livingston, Ala. last spring. She was her beautiful self, dressed like an African queen as usual.

Then came Ken Bridges, co-founder of the MATAH Network, who informed the gathering of the value of a Black-owned and operated channel of distribution. And then the surprise of the day, he introduced the nationally celebrated founder of the One Church-One Child Program, Father George Clements, who also introduced the One Church-One Channel Program to the MATAH Network.

No, that's not all. We were honored to have Pastor Thomas Ritter, colleague of Dr. Leon Sullivan, address us. The entire meeting was capped-off by Dr. Jerry Louder, president of the U.S. Pastors' Association. There

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Ashcroft seeks to revive ghosts of COINTELPRO

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Attorney General John Ashcroft has made a public pitch to dump the guidelines put in place in the 1970s that ban FBI spying on domestic organizations.

Ashcroft says the guidelines are obsolete and hinder the hunt for domestic terrorists.

Eliminating them would give the FBI carte blanche authority to surveil, and plant agents in churches, mosques and, of course, political groups. It would also permit FBI agents to interrogate individuals. They could do all this without having to show probable cause of criminal wrongdoing.

The FBI would again have unbridled power to determine what groups and individuals it could target.

Ashcroft is banking that most Americans and public officials have a short or no memory of the colossal havoc the super-secret, and blatantly illegal, counter-intelligence COINTELPRO program wreaked on the lives of thousands of innocent Americans during the 1950s and 1960s. The mandate of the program, spelled out in one of the piles of secret documents released by Senate investigators in 1976, was to "disrupt, misdirect, discredit, and neutralize" groups and individuals the FBI considered politically objectionable. Those targeted were not foreign spies, terrorists, or suspected of criminal acts.

The FBI patterned COINTELPRO on the methods used by its Counter-intelligence Division and Internal Security Sections during the 1940s and 1950s. The aim then was to nail spies, saboteurs and individuals and groups that advocated overthrowing the government. The arsenal of dirty tactics included non-court authorized wiretaps, undercover plants, agent provocateurs, poison pen letters, Black-bag jobs, and the compiling of secret dossiers. Local FBI offices were given wide discretion to pick its targets and the tactics they could use.

In those years the FBI's favored targets were the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party. But this changed in the mid-1960s. Driven by a grotesque mix of personal racism and paranoia, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover kicked the program into even higher gear. His goal was to demolish the Black Muslims, Black Panthers, civil rights organizations and leaders, and especially Martin Luther King Jr. The FBI assembled a small army of more than 7,500 "ghetto informants" (known) and hundreds of FBI agents in a deadly national campaign to harass and intimidate thousands of African-Americans.

The FBI listed the individuals targeted under categories variously called, "Rabble Rouser Index," "Agitator Index" and the "Security Index."

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