

C O M M E N T A R Y

Calif. recall gives new meaning to reality TV

By Bill Fletcher Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

I have never been particularly fond of California Gov. Gray Davis. The man seems to stand for very little, and also goes out of his way to appease political conservatives, as if that will keep the dogs away from his heels.

As the recall petition proved, Davis was too cute by half. He appeared no one and his arrogance has tended to infuriate much of the electorate, including his own political base.

That said, the current recall effort, rather than enhance democracy, does everything to undermine it. Consider for a moment. Gray Davis, whether you love him or despise him, was elected for a four-year term of office. Not even Davis' harshest critics will allege that he has done anything that is illegal or would justify criminal or civil charges. The bottom line is and has been that if one does not agree with a standing elected official, one campaigns against him/her in the next election or builds a movement to force that person to resign.

Yet in California we have a scenario of those who were defeated in the last gubernatorial election having the right to move a recall petition. To put it another way, they have a second bite of the apple. To add insult to injury, this recall petition would have gone no where had it not been heavily funded by a wealthy politician.

How should one put it? Perhaps, that we have the best democracy money can buy? The issue in the upcoming California election should not be a referendum on Gray Davis, but actually a referendum on de-

mocracy. Does a defeated minority have the right—as long as they have sufficient cash—to mount an effort which may cost the already broke state of California around \$70 million? Do they have a right to mount recalls as often as they want depending solely on whether they have sufficient funds in order to pay people for collecting signatures?

Unfortunately some people of good will in their anger with Davis have become thrilled with the possibility of a political mobilization to oust him and put in his place—God willing—someone more progressive. I can only hope that if the recall succeeds that this will be the outcome, but it is just as likely that Arnold Schwarzenegger will become governor, or, perhaps even one of the myriad of other colorful candidates who were able to obtain the necessary signature to get on the very long list of potential successors. In that sense I believe some good progressive folks have missed what is really going on in the state and the terrible precedent it sets.

The reality of politics, including progressive politics, is that some difficult decisions will always need to be made by elected officials. Some of those decisions will be very unpopular, but at the end of the day, an elected leader will need to be judged on the totality of their program. That judgment comes either at election time or when masses of people encourage the resignation of said leader. Opening up the door for recalls, however, when there is no criteria other than getting enough signatures, makes every decision a further perversion of the

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March on Washington needed more drums

By George E. Curry
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In one of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s most memorable speeches, he described himself as a drum major for justice. Had he still been alive and at last week's 40th anniversary commemorative March on Washington, he would have been a drum major without much of a band.

That's not a dream—it's a nightmare. And an embarrassing one at that.

As Congressman John Lewis, the youngest person to speak at the original march, reminded those who bothered to show up last week, the 1963 March on Washington, which attracted 250,000 demonstrators, was organized without all the conveniences of fax machines, e-mails, cell phones and other modern technology. Last week, with all of those devices at our disposal, less than 5,000 people came to the Lincoln Memorial.

Forty years ago, the "Big Six" civil rights leaders delivered speeches at the march. Last week, there were many big people talking, but few of them from our major civil rights organization. Jesse Jackson was there. And so was Martin Luther King III, now president of his father's organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and his family.

However, neither NAACP President Kweisi Mfume nor Board Chair Julian Bond was present. Marc Morial, the new president of the National Urban League, was absent. Noticeably missing was Minister Louis Farrakhan, the Nation of Islam leader who convened a march of 1 million Black men in 1995. Dorothy Height, head of the

National Council of Negro Women, did not address the rally. Wade Henderson, executive director of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, did not speak. Trade union leaders, such as William Lucy, did not appear. Instead of the crowd listening to a who's who of African-American leaders, it was more like a who's where?

As I sat on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, looking into a crowd that I futilely hoped would expand as the hour grew later, I wondered if we, as a people and as a country, have lost our commitment to civil rights. Perhaps there are more people out there than we realize who agree with conservative talk show host Armstrong Williams, who argues that as long as we have been marching, we should be wherever we were going by now.

Jesse Jackson was not surprised by the low turnout.

"Those who have the capacity to convene this are not conveners," he explained. "The conveners of '63 were organized labor and mainline [religious] denominations—groups that had institutional strength. Those forces are not involved directly here."

Before last week's march had even started, Jackson was already looking ahead to another one.

"I feel that by next Labor Day, they [groups not present last week] will be here," he told me. "We want to have a massive get-out-the-vote/voter registration rally here on that day. That will be the countdown for the presidential election."

In the meantime, organizers of last

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Blackout another way to financially milk U.S. masses

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Do you believe the recent blackout of New York and other areas of the country was caused by a lightning strike? Do you believe a fire at a power station caused it? How about the one that suggests consumer demand caused the outage? What about mismanagement? Whatever you believe to be the cause of the blackout, the largest in the history of this country—maybe the world—please add this to your thoughts: Economics, namely, the economics of deception and the tremendous wealth that can be obtained from deceiving the people of this country. We have seen it throughout our history, especially when it comes to war; and we saw it during the Enron scandal and all the other corporate shenanigans. Are we seeing it again with this blackout?

If you have not noticed, the first thing that came out

after the blackout, amid all of the blaming and finger-pointing, was the fact that this latest incident was going to cost billions to fix. Say what? Billions? And who is being tapped to pay those billions to upgrade a system that was supposed to have been maintained by greedy, dishonest, deregulation-crazed, rip-off artists like Enron's crooked executives? I'll give you one guess: Consumers, of course.

They don't know what caused the problem, but you'd better believe they know it's going to cost a whole bunch of money to fix it. They know our utility bills are going to rise because of this problem. They know that the same companies that ripped people off during this period of deregulatory madness now stand to make billions because of the blackout. They know that.

This reminds of the war in Iraq. Prior to Bush ordering the bombing, he asked

Saddam not to blow up his oil wells. Immediately after the troops entered and occupied Baghdad, the oil wells and pipelines were secured, and the black gold was flowing once again. Giving food, water and medicine to the people had to wait. It was all about the oil anyway, so why are we surprised? It's always about the money; it's always about economics. Just take a look at gasoline prices, and now because of the blackout, they will rise even more. In military parlance that would be called "mission creep."

So, let's review this situation. First of all, can you say Dick Cheney? Can you say Halliburton, the company he presided over before taking that fantastic job called Vice President? Anytime I hear anything having to do with energy, I think of Cheney, the guy who refused to release the minutes of his meetings with the energy czars. And then I think of George

Bush, oilman and friend of Ken Lay and some of those other energy crooks. Then there's our girl, Condoleezza Rice, who sat on the board of one of the largest oil companies in the world and has an oil tanker named after her. Energy = Bush Administration.

So now we have the blackout, an energy-related fiasco, and the first thing they really know is that it's going to cost a few billion dollars to fix and consumers will have to pay for it. I'm sorry, but once bitten twice shy. Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me.

Until I am convinced this latest taxpayer rip-off started by a company in eastern Ohio, or a fire in a transformer, or a lightning strike, I am leaning toward the conspiracy side of things. I cannot believe this blackout, one the experts say should not have moved throughout the grid the way it did, was the result

of what we are hearing right now. But, I could be wrong.

Here's the bottom line. Ever since the Bush-masters came into office, energy-related incidents have occurred. Cheney, after leaving Halliburton (the company getting those non-competitive contracts in Iraq), conducts meetings on energy policy and refuses to disclose what was discussed.

Ken Lay and his posse rip off thousands of Enron (an energy-related company) employees for millions of dollars, and let's not even talk about energy in California.

Bin Laden does his thing in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania, and all of a sudden we are chasing Saddam and oil in Iraq. (By the way, in December 2000 Saddam changed the currency Iraq accepted for its oil from dollars to euros.) Home heating oil skyrockets; gasoline is as expensive as ever;

and Nigeria, with its fifth- or six-largest oil reserves in the world, becomes the last stop on Bush's tour of Africa. There are more peculiarities, but I will stop here.

I don't know about you, but I am a little gun shy right now, especially when it comes to believing anything I hear on energy-related crises. There is a lot of money to be made from energy, and I have always been told that a leopard cannot change its spots. Once an oilman, always an oilman.

Just because the lights went out for a while doesn't mean we have to stay in the dark, where the establishment wants to keep us. Do you know how to grow mushrooms? You keep them in the dark and feed them a lot of B.S. Are you a mushroom? Wake up, America!

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