

## C O M M E N T A R Y

# Separating needy from perversely greedy

By George E. Curry  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Judging by the worldwide reaction to the tsunami tragedy, one might get the impression that generosity abounds. Schoolchildren have donated their allowances to victims of the disaster.

Governments and major corporations have pledged millions of dollars. The American Red Cross and other charities have provided food, money and clothing. Churches around the world have taken up special collections. Millions of dollars have been raised over the Internet.

But don't be misled. According to a report by Oxfam International in England, the world's richest countries donate an average of \$80 per person to eradicate poverty, the equivalent of a weekly cup of coffee. Even more disturbing, the wealthier these countries have become, the less they have given in aid.

The disturbing findings are from a recent report titled, "Paying the Price: Why rich countries must invest now in the war on poverty."

It observes: "Rich countries today give half as much, as a proportion of their income, as they did in the 1960s. In 1960-65, rich countries spent on average 0.48 percent of

their combined national incomes on aid. By 1980-85 they were spending just 0.34 percent. By 2003, the average had dropped as low as 0.24 percent."

Wealthy nations realize that it's in their best interest, as well as that of the affected countries, to help eliminate global poverty. In 2000, the leaders and heads of state of 189 countries signed a Millennium Declaration that established a series of goals to reduce poverty by 2015.

The key targets were to: 1) Halve the proportion of people living on less than \$1 a day as well as the proportion suffering from hunger by 2015, 2) Ensure that all children complete primary school by 2025, 3) Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and in all levels of education by 2015; 4) Reduce the mortality rate of children under 5 by two-thirds by 2015; 5) Reduce by three-quarters, the ratio of women dying in childbirth by 2015; 6) Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of HIV/AIDS and other major diseases by 2015; 7) Halve by 2015 the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and



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basic sanitation and 8) Develop a non-discriminatory and rules-based trading system, provide more generous aid and deal comprehensively with the debt problem.

"A vital aim of these goals is that the poorest countries will have the finance needed to achieve them," the report notes. "To do this, rich countries have promised to provide a very small fraction of

their wealth — just 0.7 percent of their national income — and to improve the way in which they give aid, to make it work best for poverty reduction, and to end the burden of debt which means that low-income countries must pay out \$100 million every day to their creditors. For rich country donors, making this finance available is not simply an act of charity: it is both a moral obligation and a matter of justice..."

Those are noble goals, but like many noble goals, the rhetoric exceeds reality.

"...Progress has been unforgivably slow," the report observes. "Only one goal — halving the income poverty — has any chance of being met, but even this is due to progress in just a handful of countries. The first target —

enrolling all girls in primary and secondary school by 2005 — is certain to be missed. The poorest people will pay the price for this failure. If the world fails to act to meet even these minimal goals, and current trends are allowed to continue: 45 million more children will die between now and 2005, 247 million more people in the sub-Saharan Africa will be living on less than \$1 a day in 2015, 97 million more children will still be out of school in 2015 and 53 million more people in the world will lack proper sanitation facilities."

Although the UN established the goal of allocating 0.7 percent of national income for poverty reduction in 1970, only five of the 22 major donors — none from the seven most powerful nations — are meeting the goal. Donating just 0.14 percent, the United States is the least generous donor in terms of aid as a proportion of its wealth. At the current rate, the U.S. will not reach the 0.7 percent goal until 2040.

Before we dislocate our elbow while patting ourselves on the back for the way we've reacted to the tsunami crisis, let's rise to the challenge of reducing world poverty when the international spotlight is not on graphic disaster.

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## Hey Armstrong Williams—What did you mean by 'it?'

By James Clingman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

"I wanted to do it because it's something I believe in." Those were the words of Armstrong Williams, so-called "Black conservative" and former aide to U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. When it was discovered he had been paid \$240,000 to promote George Bush's education reform law, he framed his response very carefully and skillfully, just like the person he vehemently criticized a few years ago, Bill Clinton. The former president stated in response to a pointed question, "That depends on what the definition of 'is' is." Just like his buddy, Alberto Gonzales, during his confirmation hearing, Armstrong also used the tried and effective political phrase, "I do not recall..."

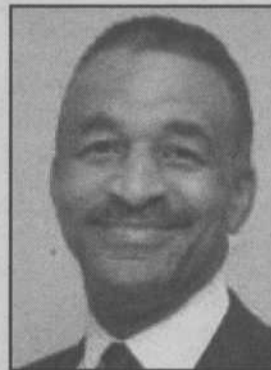
There is much criticism being leveled at Williams, the self-proclaimed ethical, moral, and family values proponent who apparently attended the William Bennett school of virtues, or took a "You can do it" course from his partner, Stedman Graham.

The Black darling of the Republican Party will likely face some shallow inquiry regard-

ing his latest "use me" scenario; he'll have to answer some softball questions and then go back to business as usual, working as a lackey for his bosses. Not bad for \$240,000. But, check it out. Armstrong said he understood that critics could find the arrangement "unethical." To borrow another tired phrase, "Negro, please!"

I wonder if Armstrong broke off a piece of his \$240,000 for Steve Harvey who, at Armstrong's request, had Rod Paige on his radio show twice. Surely that was worth about "50 stacks" to Brother Steve, don't you think?

But seriously folks, this is merely another example of why we must never lose sight of what is really behind the rhetoric we hear from guys like Williams and others who are only being used by the establishment to achieve their goals. We must never overlook the fact that money drives the political chicanery we see and do not see. Armstrong is just



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the latest to get caught with his hands in the cookie jar. With those kinds of payoffs though, I guess it's worth the risk — to some folks.

Considering the Bush, Cheney, Condi Rice oil and energy connections, the billions being channeled to Halliburton, and the pilfering of retirement accounts by corporate crooks, we should know that any time there are large sums of money in the game, our "leaders" and our

"opinion leaders" will figure out how to steal most of it. They have no shame, no conscience, and no regard for ethics, morality, and virtues — although they constantly trumpet those ideals in their lectures, interviews and commentaries. They also fail to heed the Biblical admonishment to avoid all "appearance" of wrongdoing. Armstrong said he knew that what he did would appear to be unethical. Thus, we should not be surprised at the latest disclosure involving our 21st century Hayward Shepard. I can hear Williams now: "Hey boss, is we sick?"

This situation with Armstrong Williams reminds me of the recent disclosure about one of his mentors, Clarence "Who's your uncle" Thomas, who accepted "gifts" valued at \$42,200 from his "friends", the most on the high court.

The next highest amount was a mere pittance: \$5,025 received by Sandra Day O'Connor. Thomas, apparently getting his reward for his silent acquiescence to the Florida debacle in 2000, and for casting his vote for Dubya, is the favorite among the Supremes. Someone even gave him \$1,200 worth of tires. I guess Armstrong figured he would get some of that action too, but he outdid Thomas — by a long shot. I guess Thomas and Williams are both living examples of Reginald Lewis' question, "Why should White guys have all the fun?"

What else should we expect from Strom

Thurmond's protégé? An editorial in January 2003, in the *Black Commentator*, referred to Williams as the "Personnel Director of the Republican Party." The writer said Armstrong Williams had "talked himself into the center of the ruling party's money stream." How prophetic was that? Armstrong, the water boy for the GOP, took his job very seriously. He found his niche and jumped head-first into the fray, arguing, insulting, defending, and anything else he thought his handlers wanted him to do. They said, "Jump, Armstrong, jump," (Reminiscent of Dan Rice's "Jump, Jim Crow, Jump"); and instead of asking how high, he'd ask, "How long you want me to stay in the air, boss?" Armstrong really knows his role.

So what do we make of this latest money move by the folks who run politics in this country? Well, just ask Armstrong. First, you can ask him if the Freedom of Information Act were not in effect, would he have publicly disclosed his windfall of \$240,000? Then you can ask him what he meant by the word "it"? He said he did "it" because "it's" something he believes in. Hey Armstrong, what did you mean by "it"? Promoting education reform or taking our money for doing so?

In response to his wrongdoing, Armstrong Williams once again drew from the tried and true political well of contrite condescension. He said he made a "mistake," but he had learned from it, and it would not happen again. However, he went on to tell us he was not about to give the taxpayers' money back; after all, he had earned it.

Yes, you earned every penny of it, Armstrong; and judging from how quickly your boy, George, and his administration made their disclaimers by blaming the Education Department, which is headed by their other Black water carrier, Rod "Lame Duck" Paige, you're going to need every penny of that filthy lucre.

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## La Grande

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ing to provide the access to capital that we have been denied for so long and that is essential to developing and growing our communities.

In the 1960s, we were fighting for a quality education for our children. In 2005, in Las Vegas, our children have the lowest standard scores and the highest drop out rate. Black and Hispanic children have CRT scores of 71 percent and 74 percent respectively, below the national average.

Where do we go from here to ensure a quality education for our children?

- We visit our children's schools.
- We pack the Clark County School District Trustee meetings to support Shirley Barber as she fights for the rights of our children.

• We have our children removed from a class and placed in another class when we aren't happy with their progress.

• We closely monitor a superintendent who gets paid more than a quarter of a million dollars a year to mis-educate our children. (All of the scores are low and he just received a raise).

• We play an integral part in our child's educational development; be proactive and be visible.

It has been 293 years since great-great-granddaddy Willie Lynch proposed his slave containment method, and we are still being contained. When do we rise up and live out the scripture? (Matt: 20:16) that says, "The last shall be the first, and the first shall be the last."