

GOP hypocrisy on display in Schiavo case

By Ron Walters
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I must admit to not having paid a great deal of attention to the Terri Schiavo case, in a world where one must constantly decide how to distribute limited time among the most important priorities. However, like many people it was thrust upon me to the point that I could not ignore it, not only because of the hype of the media but because of the gyrations of conservatives who pushed every button to get government to act — and they did.

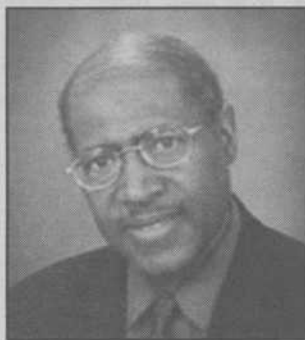
To watch the House and Senate of the United States of America spend precious legislative time when the budget has not been done, on a matter that affected only one family, or a minuscule number of other citizens was perverse. In the first place, it gave Republicans an opportunity to feed something to their conservative base that they cared about. Even George Bush weighed-in with his sound-bite that since he supported a "culture of life" his feelings were on the side of prolonging Terri Schiavo's life.

I and others have pointed out before that the ideology of a "culture of life" has serious limits. These same people who believe in a "culture of life" believe fervently in the death

penalty where they use the power of the state to kill individuals, some of who are innocent of crimes. They believe in limiting programs that contribute to a "culture of life" by using the power of government to expand social programs that feed hungry children, reduce poverty or deliver health care for most of the American people.

I have always thought that conservatives are really not anti-government, in the sense that they believe government should leave people alone, should get out of the bedroom and out of their private lives. To the contrary, we have seen a steady and serious departure from this aspect of their ideology where, most recently: they have wanted a constitutional amendment to prohibit same sex marriage; and to use government to promote excessive punishment for people who, in their judgment, commit crimes or otherwise violate their cultural standards.

The use of governmental power to reshape the world in the image of the conservative movement means that they are worried less



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about the size of government than about who uses its power for what. As long as it does what they want, they appear to not only want to use government power but even want to expand the role of government. Bush, like Reagan, has had no problems expanding government power in the directions that his movement desired, such as in the direc-

tion of military spending and war-making, funding faith based institutions to deliver social services, and the like. Now that conservatives have a monopoly on the use of power, they vigorously pursue their interests, even if it means an intrusion into the most private realm of life.

The Schiavo case, then, has provoked a power struggle between the conservative movement and the law, and I have been surprised, quite frankly, that the law was not changed to suit the movement, as it has been numerous times in other incidents. Nevertheless, the sad thing about this case is that the concern of decision makers with ideological struggle has prevented people from getting to some of the more central issues.

For example, as someone whose own mother had a Living Will at the end of her life, I was amazed at the extent to which officials in the hospital that treated her seemed to have their own interests in how long she lived. Since then, I have seen it happen several times: the intervention of the hospital not to change Living Wills but to exert pressure on the dying, to let them go. Nearly all hospitals have an interest in cost containment, which means that they often are not on the side of taking measures to extend the life of a patient to the point that many members of the family might want. I wondered: around the country how many poor Black families who don't have Living Wills or who may not be medically savvy were the subjects of such pressure when decisions of life and death were at issue for their loved ones.

So, as much as the media loves a life and death drama being played out publicly, with elements of power politics thrown in, we should think about the deeper issues involved, and notice the hypocrisy with which some are able to change horses in the middle of the stream to suit their ideologies.

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Letter to the Editor

The passing of Johnny Cochran

I am very saddened by the death of Johnny Cochran on many levels. Thus, I feel compelled to share my personal experiences with Johnny in that I was fortunate to meet and spend some time with him, in early 1994 and before he received national notoriety with his involvement in the O.J. Simpson case. Also, I feel Johnny Cochran's true impact on society is overlooked.

Long before Johnny became nationally known, he was well known and respected by many African-American lawyers. To most of us, he was our role model.

In early 1994, as chairman for the Las Vegas Chapter of the National Bar Association Scholarship Committee, my goal was to invite Johnny to Las Vegas as one of the featured speakers for our annual scholarship dinner-dance. Also, I knew Johnny was a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc. In my initial inquiry with Johnny Cochran's office, I made sure he was cognizant of our fraternal bond.

Surprisingly, Johnny Cochran responded personally and was quite excited about coming to Las Vegas. The weekend of the event, I had an opportunity to meet Johnny, along with his lovely wife Dale, at the airport and transport them to their hotel. Johnny was extremely gracious at all times during his weekend stay in Las Vegas.

During dinner, I remember Johnny commenting on the fact that he was recently contacted by the O.J. Simpson defense team and was seriously considering becoming part of what lawyers and the media would later refer to as the "dream team."

The rest is history, and Johnny will be remembered by most because of his role in the O.J. Simpson case. But, in my opinion, the O.J. Simpson case is not Johnny Cochran's only legacy.

Johnny Cochran has left a great legacy that, in many respects, is very subtle but of great impact to American society and the African-American psyche. It is my impression that before Johnny Cochran and the O.J. Simpson case, opportunities for African-American lawyers were limited in private practice. When confronted with serious legal problems, African-Americans — and society as a whole — many times would look elsewhere for legal representation. But Johnny changed all that.

Today, skin color or ethnic background is no longer the criteria utilized by many to select their lawyers. Now, the inquiry focuses solely on honesty, competency and skill level. Also, before Johnny Cochran and O.J. Simpson, very few, if any, African-American lawyers were utilized as legal commentators on national televi-

sion news networks. Today, regardless of the legal issue, African-American legal commentators are common on every national news television network.

Lastly, before Johnny Cochran and O.J. Simpson, no daytime court shows featured African-American judges. Today, Judge Joe Brown, Judge Greg Mathis and Judge Glenda Hatchett have nationally syndicated court shows.

It is not a coincidence that these opportunities for African-Americans occurred after the nation became captivated with Johnny and the O.J. Simpson case. For the first time in the history of this nation an African-American lawyer was thrust by television into the homes of America. It didn't matter whether you lived, in the inner-city or the suburbs, everyone watched and was under his spell. Johnny Cochran, an African-American lawyer, shined. Johnny's passion, preparation and skills were apparent and shown to an entire world.

As an African-American lawyer, Johnny Cochran, will always be my role model. After Johnny Cochran and O.J. Simpson, Johnny Cochran became the role model for a nation of African-Americans and people color. Johnny will be missed. But his legacy will live forever.

Timothy C. Williams, Esq.

Farmers

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Tobacco quota holders don't have to be tobacco farmers, live in tobacco growing regions or in the U.S. to benefit from the buyout. The top state for buyout payments is North Carolina, which will receive 40 percent of the funds — totaling over \$3.8 billion. North Carolina is also the top state for buyout recipients among African-Americans. Approximately 3,780 Black farmers in North Carolina will receive an average \$75,044,288.

In addition to paying farmers for their crops, the buyout will also include provi-

sions that will establish a trust fund to provide payments to quota holders and traditional growers and give grants to universities for research on ways to help farmers shift to crops other than tobacco. Buyout payments won't begin until the end of the June sign-up deadline.

"We have a couple months to get our people in there, but it's going to be pretty hard getting the word out," Boyd said. "We plan on holding several forums in tobacco growing states to explain the buyout to Black farmers, and we will continue to fight for equal treatment."

Clingman

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Here is the recommendation. In addition to supporting and growing our local Black businesses, we must adopt a consistent, continuous, habitual movement centered on buying from ourselves.

Every Black household should have Black-made products coming in at least once per month. Goods and services that we use on a regular basis, offered by Black producers, must find their way into our homes continuously.

The call has gone out not for 1 million men but for 10 million men and women to participate in the next march. Imagine the economic impact of 10 million, even 1 million Black people buying just one Black-made product.

Consider this: Black folks like to talk about how much money we spend per year; well get with this statistic: \$900 million+ on laundry detergent. How much of that do you suppose we are spending on detergent made by Blacks? If we would simply commit to buying our own laundry detergent, produced by a Black company, and distributed via the MATAH Network (www.matah.com), we could literally create a billion dollar business. If you are serious about economic empowerment, ask yourself, "Who's washing my clothes?" Why not commit today to purchase

one or two items from the MATAH Network each month, and by the time we get to the next Million Man March, we will have already accomplished one of its goals. Why wait until October to do something we can do right now?

Here's the goal: Let's have a Billion Dollar March, and let's start right now by redirecting \$1 billion back to ourselves by October 16, 2005, via the MATAH Network. Let's use our beauty and barber shops, our Compro Tax offices, and our bookstores as local distribution centers and retail outlets for products distributed by the MATAH channel. Let's get on the Internet and order MATAH products on a monthly basis via the Autoship Program. Ten million people spending \$10 per month — you do the math.

Ten million Black folks standing on the Mall in D.C. will be a great sight, but it will have an exponentially greater impact if we are also standing on the solid foundation of self-determination by redirecting \$1 billion. Not only will everyone else know we are serious about economic freedom, most importantly, we will know it, and our children will know it.

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