

Gary meeting might sharpen Democrats' focus

By George E. Curry
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WASHINGTON (NNPA)

George L. Brown has been the kind of Democrat the party has always been able to rely on. Fifty years ago, he was elected to the Colorado House of Representatives.

A year later, he won the first of five terms as a state senator. And in 1974, he became Lieutenant Governor, the first African-American elected to that post in the nation's history. In 1972, he co-chaired the Party's credentials committee with the late U.S. Rep. Barbara Jordan (D-Texas.)

"I've been a Democrat for a long time and I don't see a lot of hope in the Republican Party," he said in an interview.

"But I am getting to the point where I don't see a whole lot of hope in the



Left to right: Former Lt. Gov. George Brown, comedian Dick Gregory, former Gary Mayor Richard Hatcher and former Denver Mayor Wellington Webb are meeting in Gary, Indiana.

Democrats." That's why he is co-chairing the National Black

Peoples Unity Convention next March 9-12 in Gary, Indiana. He is co-chair of the convention with former Gary Mayor Richard Hatcher. They were part of the team that put together a similar Gary gathering in 1972.

"You can't ignore the fact that the underlying accomplishment of Gary was that the Democratic Party and the Republican Party, to a lesser degree, changed after Gary in terms of access," said Hatcher. "Up to that point, Blacks did not serve on committees. Very few Black del-

egates went to national conventions. The role of Blacks within the Party was extremely restricted. After Gary, a lot of that changed."

So did the political landscape, according to Brown.

He ticks off a list of Black office-holders: One Black U.S. Senator, 43 members of Congress, 168 Black state Senators, nearly 400 Black state Representatives and more than 9,000 locally-elected officials.

"All of those, if you want to be truthful about it, came as a result of Gary," Hatcher

said. "One of our purposes was to increase our political power." Even in political circles, problems still remain, said Hatcher.

"We have seen an increase in the number of elected officials in the country, but our issues have moved to the backburner," he explains. "So, while we have a greater presence as elected officials, our people are still suffering."

He said next year's agenda will be expanded.

"The one will have more than political power on the table," he explains. "We're certainly going after economic empowerment because that underlies everything. And we're not going to stop at Gary [convention]."

Of course, they said that in 1972. The plan was to meet every two years. But that ended in 1976. Both Brown and Hatcher attribute that to an overemphasis on long-range goals.

Hatcher said it is a mistake for Democrats to presume that African-Americans will continue to turn out for them unless they have a clear message of inclusion.

"There is an alternative and I've seen that alternative for the last 20 or 25 years — declining votes," Hatcher states. "If Blacks had come

out in the numbers that they potentially have, Bush would not be president. From that point of view, that's the alternative."

He quickly adds, "We're not advocating declining participation. There ought to be more participation. But it ought to be on a quality basis."

And so far, that's lacking, in Hatcher's view.

"The biggest knock on the Democrats is they don't have a message," he said. "One of the reasons Democrats don't have a message is because those issues that are important to people of color are also important to the country. They [Democrats] have chosen to turn their backs on many of those issues. The Republicans always turned their backs on those issues."

Unlike 1972 when there were delegates, next year, anyone who registers for the convention can participate.

Brown thinks the convention can have a profound impact on Democrats, who receive more than 80 percent of the Black vote in every election.

"We got to come out of Gary with a voice that is loud and clear," Brown said. "We can get a voice strong enough for them to listen. They're already losing everything they try."

Executed woman getting pardoned

ALBANY, Ga. (AP) - The only woman ever executed in Georgia's electric chair is being granted a posthumous pardon, 60 years after the Black maid was put to death for killing a White man she claimed held her in slavery and threatened her life.

The Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles has decided to pardon Lena Baker and plans to present a proclamation to her descendants at its Aug. 30 meeting in Atlanta, board spokeswoman Scheree Lipscomb said Monday.

The board did not find Baker innocent of the crime, Lipscomb said. Members instead found the decision to deny her clemency in 1945 "was a grievous error, as this case called out for mercy," Lipscomb said.

Baker was sentenced to die following a one-day trial before an all-White, all-male jury in Georgia.

"I believe she's somewhere around God's throne and can look down and smile," said Baker's grandnephew, Roosevelt Curry, who has led the family's effort to clear her name.

John Cole Vodicka, director of the Georgia-based Prison & Jail Project, a prison-advocacy group that assisted Baker's descendants with the pardon request, said he was elated with the decision.

"Although in some ways it's 60 years too late, it's gratifying to see that this blatant instance of injustice has finally been recognized for what it was — a legal lynching," Vodicka said.

During her brief trial, Baker testified that E.B. Knight, a man she had been hired to care for, held her against her will in a grist mill and threatened to shoot her if she tried to leave. She said she grabbed Knight's gun and shot him when he raised a metal bar to strike her.

After Baker's execution in 1945, Baker's body was buried in an unmarked grave behind a small church where she had been a choir member. In the late 1990s, the congregation marked the grave with a cement slab.

Supporters have gathered at Baker's grave every year since 2001 to mark the date of her execution, and Curry, along with a few dozen surviving family members, hosted a Mother's Day ceremony at the graveside in 2003, the same year he requested the pardon.

State records indicate that 20 women have been executed in Georgia, 19 by hanging and Baker by electrocution. One woman sits on Georgia's death row today.

Farrakhan: Fox right on Blacks, jobs

MILWAUKEE (AP) - Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan said Mexican President Vicente Fox was right to say that Mexican immigrants take jobs "that not even Blacks want." Although Fox was sharply criticized for his remarks by some Black leaders, Farrakhan said Sunday that Blacks do not want to go to farms and pick fruit because they already "picked enough cotton."

"Why are you so foolishly sensitive when somebody is telling you the truth?" he asked the crowd at Mercy Memorial Baptist Church. He said Blacks and Latinos should form an alliance to correct differences and animosity between the two communities.

Civil rights leaders including Jesse Jackson and the Rev. Al Sharpton have called on Fox to apologize for the remark. Fox has said he was commenting on the contributions that

Mexicans make to the United States, and did not mean any offense.

Farrakhan, who spearheaded the 1995 Million Man March that drew hundreds of thousands of people to Washington, D.C., was in Milwaukee to promote the Millions More Movement, which has scheduled a rally Oct. 15 on the National Mall.

The march is billed as a more inclusive successor to the Million Man March. This time, organizers have encouraged women and gays to attend.

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