

Katrina adds urgency to Millions More event

By Ron Walters
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Moving into position like a huge battleship on rough seas, coming to confront and destroy the damage done to Katrina's victims, is this week's Millions More Movement. Destiny seems to have planned this mobilization in juxtaposition to the havoc of death and destruction that has left so many people homeless and destitute, it calls for the MMM to respond.

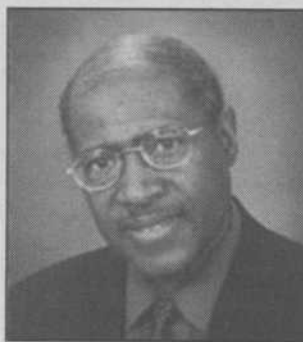
Although the purpose of the Millions More Movement is not only the challenge of Katrina, it can respond from the stage that it is building to receive hundreds of thousand of people from across the nation, including much of the leadership of the Black community. In other words, this march has been given an urgent politics either by an accidental quirk of history or by the benevolent design of the Creator to intervene in a system that is bent on another round of destruction.

The greatest challenge is to use the mobilization to make a demand that the federal government do justice to the displaced people of the South who were damaged by this disaster. We don't have to repeat all the issues here because, regardless of the issues, what we must have is a megaphone loud enough

to make sure that the American people, the politicians and the media, through us, hear the cries of the dead and the needs of those who have survived.

I can envision speaker after speaker telling the truth to power, calling George Bush, FEMA, the House and Senate into accountability for the racism they have accommodated in the response to Katrina and for the billions they have spent on war rather than on humane priorities. The MMM is the stage they will stand on and the megaphone through which that message will come.

The second greatest challenge here is to nationalize the startling example of poverty and deprivation that the crisis has unearthed. Katrina is all of us; such poverty is rampant in every major city in America, and now is the time to make America remember that there is a great unfinished business seen in the eye of this storm. The conservative movement has successfully pushed this issue off of the national agenda and into the closet of our minds, but the MMM gives us a chance to fight back, posing the contradiction of White poverty, too, and tax cuts for the



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wealthy, as a corrupt position.

We also need to put some of those conservative Black brothers and sisters on the stage and let them tell us now why we should follow George Bush and how the issue of gay marriage trumps his response to Katrina. We need to call some of our Black ministers to the stage who have become drunk at the trough of faith-based money and ask what they will do with the FEMA reimbursements and whether that is a contradiction to their Christian mission to feed the hungry — without the motive of raking in the cash.

Speaking of money, the Millions More Movement needs to raise millions of dollars with this mobilization, not only to help address the Katrina crisis, but to establish an independent secretariat, with a staff, to be able to do something after people leave the Mall to implement all of the great things that will be said.

Once and for all, we need a follow-through strategy that works, which alone will make what is said at the March credible in the eyes of our community.

Money

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- The government website devoted to disclosing all agency contracts in compliance with federal law currently lacks Katrina information from the Army Corps of Engineers and FEMA — the two agencies awarding the most contracts — because of time delays and other glitches.

- The website for contract offers has little Katrina information because disclosure requirements were initially waived for the disaster.

- Because only new contracts must be disclosed, agencies need not reveal information when awarding no-bid work to politically connected companies such as Halliburton subsidiary Kellogg, Brown & Root that have pre-existing government contracts. Vice President Dick Cheney headed

Halliburton from 1995 to 2000.

Responding to initial criticism, Army Corps and FEMA officials say they will strive to post weekly updates of awards on their websites. Other agencies, such as the Defense Department, are issuing daily contract announcements or submit their data to the government databases.

"We're committed to making that information available," said Larry Orluskie, a spokesman for the Department of Homeland Security, which oversees FEMA.

But a Government Accountability Office audit last month found the primary database, known as the Federal Procurement Data System, was inaccurate and incomplete, citing in part repeated delays by the Pentagon in

switching to a new system that would allow the department to report its awards in real time.

"In the absence of timely and accurate data, that makes effective oversight more difficult," said Bill Woods, a director at GAO, the investigative arm of Congress.

Keith Ashdown, vice president of Taxpayers for Common Sense, spent a week trying to put together an authoritative list of contracts and found himself checking no less than a half-dozen agency sites and sources, many of which posted conflicting if not inaccurate information.

Among his findings: a FEMA contract with Red River Computer Co. of Lebanon, N.H., for 1,000 Gateway M460G XGA laptops at a total cost of \$1,457,200 — or \$1,457.20 per machine.

On the Gateway website, the computers sell for \$1,151 each, a price that would have saved taxpayers \$306,200.

"I have better things to do than hunting around for where the money is hidden," Ashdown said. "We would rather the government be doing this, creating a one-stop shop. Is that really too much to ask?"

Scott Amey, general counsel of the Project on Government Oversight, said his group compiled its own database of contractors with a history of spending waste or other misconduct and said some of the culprits — politically connected Fluor, Bechtel and Halliburton — were among the biggest initial winners of Katrina contracts.

None of that information can be found on government lists.

Clingman

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billionaire privileged executives will go to their graves thinking their money will be their salvation. They will continue to overcharge and rip people off in the midst of devastation. They will pass laws that negatively affect the poor and disenfranchised, while increasing their own assets. They will stand before us and lie to our faces, eat caviar and drink champagne, and watch thousands of their brothers and sisters wade through infested waters trying to survive. They will shake their heads and wag

their fingers at poor people ripping off abandoned Walmart stores, while they rip off entire countries for their oil and other valuable resources.

Privileged executives, buoyed by executive privilege, are just plain greedy, aloof, and despicable. They do flyovers rather than parachute drops; they do press briefings instead of pressing into action; they read from Teleprompters rather than speak from their hearts (if they have hearts); they are patronizing rather than patriotic; they are rhetorical instead of real; they are sarcas-

tic rather than sacrificial; they are condescending rather than conscious; they are evil rather than good.

We had better awaken from our comatose state real soon, brothers and sisters. We may as well accept the fact that we are not high on the agenda of those who run this country. We must deal with the fact that some of our more prominent brothers and sisters have sold us out and continue to do so, as they follow and praise a guy like George Bush, despite all that he has done and now in the face of what he has not done.

We may as well deal with the fact that some of our Black preachers are closely tied to Bush and continue to support his sinfulness simply for money and the "privilege" of dining with him.

We must face these realities and move with whom ever we have to assure that Black people in the U.S. do not become extinct. Look at New Orleans and ask yourself: "Do we have a choice?"

James E. Clingman is an adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati's African-American Studies Department.

Rebuilding

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firmed and people will get to see why I put her on the bench," he said. Mrs. Bush was asked if she shared her husband's conviction. "Absolutely. Absolutely," she said.

"She's very deliberate and thoughtful and will bring dignity to wherever she goes, but certainly to the Supreme Court. She'll be really excellent," Mrs. Bush said.

Asked if she believed some of the criticism reflected possible sexism, she responded: "I think that's possible."

On other subjects, Bush:

- Predicted the Oct. 15 Iraqi elections on a new constitution would be marked by violence from "a group of terrorists and killers who want to stop the advance of democracy." And, Bush said, "I also expect people to vote."

- Expressed confidence that the government would develop a plan "to handle a major outbreak" of bird flu if it spreads to this country.

- Declined to discuss a federal grand jury investigation that includes an inquiry into the role, if any, that top adviser Karl Rove played in disclosing the identity of an undercover CIA agent. "I'm not going to talk about the case. It's under review. Thank you for asking," Bush said tersely.

Bush was asked about criticism by some Democrats that while Iraqis were not required to repay money they have received from Washington, hurricane victims were required to do just that under recent relief legislation passed by Congress. "What Congress has said is, you'll have five years to repay plus an additional five years to repay. And so I think it's the kind of package that Congress was comfortable with giving and I was happy to sign it," Bush said.

Mrs. Bush was asked how her husband was holding up personally under the strains of recent major crises and setbacks. But before she could answer, Bush interjected: "He can barely stand. He's about to drop on the spot." Laughing, Mrs. Bush said: "He's doing great. He's got big broad shoulders."

Bush's motorcade wended its way through the pitch dark, down Covington's largely unscathed streets, to the brightly lit Habitat site — a small patch of land amid a still-sleeping, modest neighborhood turned into a makeshift TV set.

Bush focused here on the vexing issue of how to house — temporarily and then permanently — the hundreds of thousands who lost homes in the storm six weeks ago. From Covington, he was heading to Pass Christian, Miss., a hard-hit coastal town that has been "adopted" by ABC's "Good Morning America." Bush was to attend the re-opening of Delisle Elementary School before returning to Washington.

I can still see Danny Glover and Harry Belafonte, not only artists of tremendous conscience, but men of substance who raised \$200,000 for the Katrina crisis and then eloquently told America why it was needed. They should have a role on the stage that we are building in order to raise the money needed from the thousands that will come. We should have had enough by now of simply designing marches, the greatest economic effect of which is to make other people rich. The average travel expenditure of \$300 for each person coming to Washington, D.C., multiplied by 1 million equals \$300 million — money given to airlines, hotels, restaurants and vendors.

By that standard, we should be able to raise millions for Katrina victims and have plenty left over for other priorities.

As a member of the planning committee for the MMM, I know that these thoughts have been in the minds of the executive committee and others. So, I have the utmost faith that some of what we need to do will, in fact, be done. We should not and can not miss this great juxtaposition that Destiny has given us. It may not soon come again.

Ron Walters is the director of the African-American Leadership Institute.