

# Fruitful Black-Hispanic meld possible

By Ron Walters

Special to Sentinel-Voice

In between the reticence of the Black leadership to fully discuss the problem of immigration — especially as it affects the demands of the Hispanic population and the resentment of their constituents to those demands — is the necessity to consider rationally the content of an agenda that will unite the potential power of both.

Thus far, the voices of civil rights and political leaders are either silent or they are in support of a progressive approach to immigration that does not take into consideration the resentment of the rank and file Black working class. Their acknowledgment of the civil and human rights of Hispanic is, therefore, considered one-sided and incomplete by many of their constituents. My task is to propose measures that would construct the other side of the agenda, so that the progressive content of Black support for the Hispanic mobilization could be respectful of Black interests as well.

To begin with, Blacks should strongly support the current mobilization of Hispanics for measures that would result in the legalization of their status as workers and citizens, whether as proposed in the Kennedy-McCain Bill or the Bush proposals, or by some other process. But public opinion polling also indicates that Blacks favor limiting further illegal immigration, though one would doubt by the means proposed by Bush that favors

militarizing the U.S. border.

In exchange for Black support, however, three considerations might be addressed to the Hispanic community.

First, limiting further illegal, low-wage labor should not be focused on criminalizing those who cross the border, but those who provide the incentive for them to come. Employers are practicing racial discrimination against Blacks in the labor market, which was prohibited by the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Title VII. Blacks are excluded from work opportunity by employers seeking low-wage workers, and since, in the process, they sanction the exclusion of Blacks from the labor force, as such, they should be prosecuted for such violations.

Second, Hispanic managers who procure workers should be made sensitive to the necessity — and legality — to secure Black workers. In some areas, I have seen them include Black workers as a part of groups they hire for jobs in hotels, restaurants, construction or other day jobs, but not frequently. More often, such managers are part of the system of racial segregation of the labor groups delivered to employers.

Third, Hispanic laborers should push for higher wages and benefits through unionization. A great model exists in the efforts of the Service Employers International Union



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a new force for state campaigns to achieve living wage and minimum wage legislation, where such legislation has been blocked on a national level. This could also assist Blacks and other low-wage populations to enter jobs at wages that, though they may not be sufficient, would more effectively contribute to family budgets and consequently to the viability of their members.

The stakes of developing a respectful coalition between Blacks and Hispanics is that rank-and-file Blacks who are resentful of Hispanic gains could be brought along if they see them fighting for a common agenda that lifts their own access to opportunity.

But leadership is necessary in crafting such an agenda, not in denying that a problem exists. Leadership is vital because the stakes in developing a strong and effective coalition based on an agenda, respectful of both interests are so high.

For example, right now, in the fight against

(SEIU), a group that has enrolled thousands of Hispanic service workers. Hispanics could re-energize the American labor movement if they take the newfound courage to protest and demonstrate not only into the ballot box, but into the labor halls as well.

Fourth, Hispanic leaders and civic activists should organize their constituents into

poverty, the welfare program, known in most states as the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program or TANF, has essentially pushed off most of 52 percent of former welfare clients into low-wage jobs. They are trapped in such jobs, or lose them to others competing for the same jobs, and neither group is the beneficiary of a system that gets them out of poverty. If the outlined actions are taken, both sets of workers could play a powerful role in lifting Blacks coming off welfare into jobs, and those Hispanics competing with them, out of poverty.

Speaking of the political stakes, I continue to emphasize the point that Blacks and Hispanics constitute 25-30 percent of the population in 13 states and that those states represent 43 percent of the electoral vote for president. That power, though, is only potential right now, because Hispanics vote at about half the level of Blacks (11 percent to 6 percent) in national elections. When they begin to vote at the same level of Blacks, perhaps in the not too distant future, the combination will constitute one quarter of the American electorate.

The increase in the Hispanic vote between 1998 and 2002 was 10 percent. If that continues, as is likely from the mobilizations taking place, it could match the turnout of Blacks this fall. And if the Bush administration's favorable numbers are still low, Black and

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## Katrina exposes holes in child mental health

By Marian Wright Edelman

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"In countries where there truly is no backup, you just have to hang in there and wait for the next flood to pass, wait for the next drought to pass. But what is disturbing here is that we are in a country with major backup... It takes [just] 30 days to mobilize for war, so when you've got a war within your own country, it is amazing that we were so dumbfounded, like deer in the headlights."

This is what actress CCH Pounder said after a May 8 meeting with parents and children who survived Hurricane Katrina. She was in New Orleans as part of a delegation of prominent Hollywood and Washington, D.C., women, including Reese Witherspoon, Jennifer Garner, and Cicely Tyson, who were there on a Children's Defense Fund-sponsored Katrina Child Watch visit to shine a light on the acute mental health, health, and education crises of children traumatized by the storm nine months ago. We invited a group of parents to tell us what life has been like for their families in the weeks and months after the hurricane, and the stories they shared

broke our hearts. We saw that the slow mobilization and response after the storm had devastating consequences for these families. And nine months later, many are still struggling without adequate backup and help.

One problem that kept coming up was the difficulty they have had getting the health and mental health care their children need. One mother told us that it took her family five months to receive the nebulizer machine her daughter needed to take her asthma medication. A father described the stomach problems his young son began suffering because of stress and how he had to fight to get his son referred for immediate care. A mother cradled her disabled son in her lap as she explained how difficult it was getting the right therapies for him after they evacuated, because that usually required referrals from a primary care physician, and their own doctor had also fled the storm. She was having a hard time finding new caregivers and getting them up to speed on her son's special needs, including managing seizures.

A mother who is a pediatrician herself shared how relieved she was when she was

finally able to come home to New Orleans to try to reopen her old office; but, as she tearfully explained, she still doesn't know where many of her patients are now. Meanwhile, when her own young son began showing signs of trauma just after the hurricane, his new school had no counselors available and, instead, simply handed parents a list of psychologists' names, leaving them on their own to try to find a good one who was taking new patients and might accept their insurance. This pediatrician knew that if she had trouble finding doctors and doing simple things like filling her children's asthma medication prescriptions after the storm, other parents with far fewer resources and connections must really be struggling.

It's unconscionable that these families and thousands like them who have already gone through so much trauma are having such a hard time simply getting the health and mental health care they desperately need. That's why the Children's Defense Fund is calling for immediate national leadership to get introduced in Congress and to enact Disaster Relief Medicaid for 24 months to cut through

the complex 50 state bureaucracies and different eligibility requirements — not only for Katrina survivors still scattered across the country but to prevent similar suffering in future disasters that could strike anyone at any time. Many of the parents we met told us how frightened their children still get whenever it rains or they hear news stories about the continued danger to the levees and the city, and how much they dreaded the beginning of the new hurricane season on June 1. They have suffered enough and need health and mental health care now.

CCH Pounder also said, "I have a feeling that [someday] you're going to thank Katrina. You're going to thank that wind and that water, because she's revealed something that has nothing to do with nature... The system that's in place is the real story, not the weather system." Once again, she was absolutely right. Hurricane Katrina exposed profound flaws that need repair — indeed, overhauling — in a number of America's current social systems, including the way we care for our citizens when disaster strikes. That the

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open at two or three o'clock in the morning is some legs or some trouble.

Anyone who gets shot on the street is one too many. But at what point do we understand that it is a universal problem and not just an individual problem? Do we wait until it is our child to get an understanding?

Why not be proactive and save a life? Parents and community members alike must take a more active role in their children's lives. If we don't show them love, the gangs will, and where will their loyalties lie then?

In the first half of last century, sociolo-

gist Abraham Maslow proposed that all humans have universal needs, and those needs could be categorized and predicted.

He broke his theory into five differing levels of human needs with those at lower levels needing to be met prior to those at higher levels.

Right in the middle is love and belonging needs, the bridge between the higher level needs and the lower level needs. The love and belonging needs require an affiliation, closeness, a sense of belonging with family, friends, community or group.

In many cases, the physiological needs,

the lowest, that provide an individual with the ability to earn an income in order to pay for basic survival, and the next lowest, safety and security needs, which again can be provided via employment, have already escaped a number of Black men and youth.

Since many of them have been ostracized in this area, which has caused them to be disconnected from society, at the very least, we could love them and nurture them and make them feel like they belong so that they can become productive citizens in society instead of heathens.

Because if we don't, we don't just have a

block party shooting, we have World War III on the streets of Las Vegas.

That is what we are headed for if we aren't careful and if we continue to act like the gang violence is not in my backyard. That it only happens in someone else's community, certainly it couldn't happen in my neighborhood.

We had better wake up and get our heads out of our proverbial behinds. Those were innocent people that were killed the other day, and there is nothing to ensure that your child, or my child, or you or I will not be next. If we don't do something fast, it could be an incredibly long, hot, violent summer.