

Vote not in on election validity

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - With Tuesday's heated election now history, activists across the nation say it will take much more than new standardized voting machines to increase the confidence of African-Americans in the electoral process.

"The number one thing that African-Americans are going to have to start doing is exercising voter vigilance," said Barbara Arnwine, executive director of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law, the organization that founded and initiated the "Election Protection" program after the botched Election 2000.

"We have to demand of the very candidate that we support, 'What are you going to do about electoral reform?' 'Where are you on

early voting?' Where are you on registration?' 'When are you going to be on getting rid of the 'you gotta vote at the right precinct' laws, knowing that that's going to disenfranchise thousands and thousands of voters?'"

Increasing the level of activism that holds politicians accountable to the Black community will engender the confidence needed beyond Election Day to force lasting change — not only in elections — but in America's democratic process, says Arnwine.

"Since people fear our particular political dynamic so much, the only anecdote is for African-American voters being as vigilant as they can be," she said. "We've got to become the number one voice in the fight for election reform."

According to the "Help America Vote Act," called

HAVA, every state in the nation was to have thrown out the antiquated punch card or lever voting systems by last January 1.

These were the machines that embarrassed America in front of the world on Election Day 2000 during which more than a million African-American votes were not counted through malfunctions and, in some cases, political mischief.

Black civic leaders have watched every election since that one closely. But, even that activity can no longer be enough said Stephanie Moore of Kalamazoo, Mich., a coordinator for Black Youth Vote.

Her group helped register 7,000 new voters in West Michigan, where Blacks mobilized against the anti-affirmative action Proposal 2 on Tuesday, election day.

Black organizations that have traditionally focused on educating about issues must also get a better grip on education about the electoral process, said Petee Talley, coordinator of the Voter Protection Coalition in Ohio, which anticipated a larger than normal turnout Tuesday amidst confusion over false information that voter identification cards must have current addresses.

"Clearly our traditional groups — like the NAACP, the Urban League, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, the A. Philip Randolph Institute, all organizations that help to get out the vote — I think, can step up a little bit more to really have that discussion at the community level within the African-American community about our need to take very seriously the administration of

elections," Talley said.

That stepping up includes stepping inside the polling stations.

"Maybe now we have to adjust some of our historical strategy and get inside the polling locations to ensure that our votes are actually going to be counted because we're going to create a system that's going to recruit and train and retain good qualified poll-workers on an ongoing basis," Talley said. "This way, we know the process, we know what we're doing, and we know how to challenge back if someone says, 'No, you're not allowed a regular ballot.'"

Being volunteer poll workers is one thing, but being appointed to the boards of election is another, said Helen Butler, executive director of the Coalition for the People's Agenda, based in

Atlanta, Ga.

"We must learn how to use the national policies in our local elections," Butler said. "We have to become involved from the bottom up."

Decades after the outlawing of poll taxes and rigged literacy tests, there are still obstacles remaining to having fair elections, says Vincent Sylvain, a leading activist in New Orleans.

"People want to see evidence of fair and honest elections, not witnessing a replay of the presidential race [2000]," he explained. "That's something that would give African-American voters the confidence that we have improved this system such that no one is denied the opportunity to cast their ballot and have their vote actually counted."

New Orleans council approves watchdog

NEW ORLEANS (AP) - The City Council voted unanimously last Thursday to create a government watchdog office to oversee the spending of billions of dollars in federal aid to rebuild the city after Hurricane Katrina.

For months, supporters of the plan — citing the city's reputation for political corruption — have pushed for the creation of an inspector general to send a message that the city can be trusted to spend the aid properly.

There has been debate about who should hold the office — a New Orleans insider or an outsider — and what powers the office should have.

The measure still needs approval from Mayor Ray Nagin. The office is expected to cost \$400,000 a year.

Kenya Smith, director of intergovernmental affairs for Nagin, said: "Our hope is there will be enough money to get it off the ground, but it's a work in progress."

At a council session last week, some residents accused the council of racism for pushing the measure during a Black mayor's administration. Some worried an inspector general might indiscriminately launch investigations targeting Blacks.

The council is made up of four Black and three White members. Two of the measure's most outspoken supporters, Arnold Fielkow and Shelley Midura, are White.

"I am no racist; this is not racially intended," Midura tearfully told the audience just before the vote. Midura opened the debate by invoking writings on unity by Martin Luther King Jr. and was heckled.

Concerns were raised, too, about the accountability of an inspector general. Under the measure, some records generated by the office could be withheld from the public.

Harry Connick, a former Orleans Parish district attorney and father of entertainer Harry Connick Jr., said creating an inspector general's office was like telling law enforcers that they're not doing their jobs. He said the council essentially was creating a prosecutor, a "predatory-type creature."

"This is extreme," said Connick, who advocated clear limits for the job.

Another resident, Pamela Steeg, said, "If there is a racial issue here, it's who suffers from corruption. It's the poor."

Court hears arrest case

WASHINGTON (AP) - Andre Wallace spent more than eight years in jail before Illinois courts ruled his arrest was illegal, reversed his murder conviction and caused prosecutors to drop charges against him in 2002.

He filed a federal civil rights lawsuit a year later against the Chicago police officers who arrested him. Federal judges told him he had waited too long and dismissed the suit.

Twelve years after Wallace's arrest, the Supreme Court is taking up his case to determine whether the lawsuit can proceed.

Wallace had two years in which to file his civil rights claim. The question before

the justices is, did the two-year clock begin running at the time of Wallace's arrest in 1994, when he was released from custody in 2002, or some point in between?

The 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said Wallace should have taken some action in the two years following his arrest. In similar cases in other parts of the country, appeals courts have said false arrest claims can't be filed until convictions are nullified.

Wallace was 15 when Chicago police officers Kristen Kato and Eugene Roy brought him in for questioning in the murder of John Handy in January 1994. In the course of an interrogation

that went through the night, Wallace said he was subjected to a "good cop/bad cop" routine that included being slapped and kicked. In the officers' account, Wallace was free to leave at any time.

Eventually, Wallace confessed. He tried and failed to have his statements thrown out on the grounds that he was arrested without probable cause and that his confession was coerced.

He was convicted of first-degree murder in 1996 after a trial in which Wallace claimed he shot Handy in self-defense or, alternatively, in mutual combat, attorneys for the officers argued in court papers.

Wallace appealed the con-

viction. The Illinois Appellate Court ruled in 1998 that the arrest was made without probable cause, but still ordered a lower court to determine whether the confession could stand.

The court said it could, affirming the conviction. The Illinois Appellate Court considered the case again and this time, reversed the conviction.

Prosecutors at that point decided not to try Wallace again, but would reinstate the murder charge against Wallace if they get additional evidence, the officers' lawyers said.

The legal case is referred to as Wallace v. Chicago Police Officers, 05-1240.

Recap

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attend those [council] meetings. I'm not going to hide." And, I only had \$5,000; I think I did pretty good."

In contrast to the Republican women's fate, African-American Democrat, Debbie Conway, won her bid for Clark County Recorder with 49 percent of the vote.

Conway is finance manager in for Clark County's Division of Business. She has promised to make filings of documents more efficient.

On the state level, incumbent Supreme Court Justice Democrat Michael Douglas won his continued position with 49 percent of the vote.

Douglas, an African-American, was appointed in

2004 to the Supreme Court, to finish out the term after the death of Justice Myron Leavett.

Douglas' career started in 1985.

He was formerly a district court judge from 1996 to 2004. Douglas was an assistant district attorney, in both the civil and family divisions for 11 years from 1985 to 1996.

Similarly, District 7 State Assemblyman Morse Arberry, an African-American Democrat, won his reelection bid with 61 percent of the vote.

In addition, incumbent District 6 State Assemblyman, Democrat Harvey Munford, ran unopposed.

In the nonpartisan race for District 1 Board of Regents, Cedric Crear, an African-American candidate, won with 58 percent of the vote.

Crear said, "We put a lot into this race, and we got a lot out of it."

Crear is a former Station Casino executive.

On the state level, Democrats swept the vote for secretary of state; attorney general; controller and treasurer.

In a close race, Dina Titus lost her bid to be Nevada's governor to Republican contender Jim Gibbons.

The Gibbons win came as a surprise to some because Gibbons just before election time came under police and public suspicion after being

accused by a 32-year-old woman of assaulting her and making sexual overtones after a night of drinking and flirting.

In addition, Gibbons has admitted to taking a \$14,000 vacation from friend and businessperson Warren Trepp, while he allegedly steered federal government contracts to Trepp's company eTreppid Technologies.

Gibbons, who beat Titus with 47 percent of the vote said, "The people have spoken, and I'm humbled."

Titus said, "He will not have an easy time in office. There are scandals. We will keep our momentum going to take back the state in 2008."