

CBC unleashing its power, within limits

By Ron Walters

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Every year about this time, when the annual weekend gathering of the Congressional Black Caucus arrives, a variety of views are expressed about its record and its competence without understanding that the context within which they operate often does not allow them to act as independent Black Power leaders.

In fact, there are several important limitations on Black legislative power both in Washington and at lower levels of government.

First, most Blacks are Democrats and, therefore, legislative power in the body to which they are elected depends upon the number balance between Democrats and Republicans; in other words, which party controls the institution.

Second, in most legislatures, the agenda, which governs the session, is determined by the House or Senate leadership, such that sometimes even members of the governing body do not get their pet agendas taken care of.

Third, there is usually a pecking-order that is determined by the power of committee chairs and the seniority of members; therefore, many members of even a governing party who do not have substantial seniority or an important committee post are vulner-

able to not being heard.

Fortunately, many Blacks are now becoming part of the leadership in the national and state legislatures because re-election has given them seniority. In this sense, the competing agendas of members may often cancel each other out.

Fourth, if the chief executive (president, governor) is of a party other than those who control the legislative bodies the members will always be weary of the veto. Moreover, members in the House will also be weary of whether votes exist in the Senate that they need to pass legislation up to the chief executive.

Right now, for example, U.S. House members need 60 votes in the Senate to pass legislation stopping the war, but they have only 52 Democratic votes. So, the House has not voted impeachment or stop the war legislation, measures sure to be opposed by Republicans.

Finally, the political context is important because the Democrats are banking on the 2008 elections to give them the White House and 60 Senate votes to govern. In that context, since Blacks are poised as chairs of important committee provides they may have



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the maximum historical opportunity to "unleash our power." But I do not see how they can do so any time soon.

Despite the fact that the CBC is not all-powerful, they are not impotent and has attempted to service the agenda of those who need government most: Blacks, the poor, those without healthcare, without housing, etc., even within the institutional constraints of a parliamentary body.

For example, they have: led the effort to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act, obtained extra funds for Katrina, opposed the War in Iraq, voted against spending for the "surge" in Iraq, 100 percent supported child health insurance, 100 percent supported farm bill that aids Black farmers and increases child nutrition; supported a jump in Pell Grant for higher education, advocated for the Jena Six and the release of Genarlow Wilson; supported the passage of Hate Crimes bill; called for the resignation of Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, and many other things.

This is why it is difficult to assess members in a legislative body on the strength of a one-issue agenda, because this listing shows that overwhelmingly the CBC is on the right

side of the Black political table. Nevertheless, I know people who marched in the 1960s and who will criticize Black legislators, who may vote, but never pick up the phone or go to a meeting to demand accountability to an issue.

Some don't even know who their congressional representative may be or where their office is located.

This is important because if you feel that more accountability is required from Black elected officials at any level, then become part of the process that determines how they act. The resources on which any politician depends are: money, votes, campaign volunteers, experts, staff, etc.

As a citizen, you can write members of Congress, show up at CBC sponsored forums, such as the annual Weekend of symposia, regional institutes, and training sessions, and other events and voice your opinion.

From this vantage point, you can advance a more legitimate position about what you feel the CBC (or other Black legislators) should be doing.

But if you just want to criticize without substantive engagement, then keep throwing stones; they will land on shallow ground.

Dr. Ron Walters is a director of the African American Leadership Center.

One million strong in '95: Where are they now?

By James Clingman

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Having seen how Black people are mistreated in country, not only historically but presently, I thought about that gloriously perfect day on which more than one million strong Black men stood on Washington's Mall loving, trusting, and respecting one another.

I thought about those I met that day, not having seen them since, and relished the notion of over one million strong Black men coming to the rescue of our children, as in the case of the William Mayo, who has sat in a Georgia prison for 15 years for something he did not do; I smiled at the thought of us standing up for Genarlow Wilson, also in a Georgia jail; I beamed as the image of our brothers taking up the mantle of the Jena Six shot through my mind. Where are they now, I wondered.

In the 11 years since "The" Million Man March, or the MMM, we have seen many events that continue to let us know our lives are less valued than the lives of others. We have seen murders, abuse, beat-downs, abandonment, injustice, and intimidation by the authorities and by regular citizens of this country against Black people.

Curry

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group of White men with AK rifles loaded with high capacity magazines should close in on the troop of howler monkeys from all sides and compress them into a tight group, and then White men in the buildings on both sides of the shitskinned hominids shall throw Molotov cocktails from above to cleanse the nigs by fire."

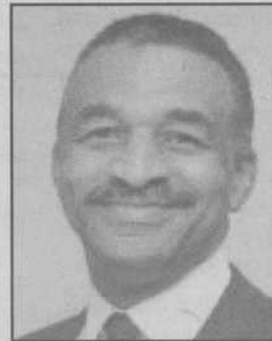
It was signed "NS Cat." Robert Moore, the leader of another racist site, Stormfront.org, said prior to the march: "If they DO start rioting and looting and burning and raze the town to the ground, White

We have been put on notice by the courts and the penal system that we count for nothing more than another occupant for an \$80,000 prison cell and \$30,000 annual upkeep. We have been given a reality check, and the point has been made, repeatedly and with emphasis, that we do not count.

Even when we returned from the MMM, the media said we were only 425,000 strong, obviously they were still counting each of us as three-fifths of a man. Where are those men now?

The abuse of Black life is not waning, rather it is on the rise, from both outsiders and insiders, those who hate us and those among us who are acting just plain foolish and trifling. We are being killed and imprisoned at an alarming rate while we stand idly by in our respective cities and do little or nothing to curtail the violence against ourselves and the violence perpetrated against us by this evil corrupt system under which we live.

Where are the million strong? The newest and latest weapon of choice for zealous police officers, which is also the huge money-



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Pride Construction will be there the next day to help them rebuild."

The Southern Poverty Law Center, in one report, observed: "In fact, Moore's company, started in 2005, has done a great deal of post-Katrina rebuilding on the Gulf Coast — a truly remarkable thing, given that its name includes a widely known racist slogan."

In a democracy, little can be done to ban the rantings of racist idiots. But knowing about them gives us time to prepare if they try to carry out their threats.

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making machine for crooks like Rudi Giuliani's boy, Bernard Kerik and others, the infamous 50,000-volt "portable electric chair" known as the Taser, has killed Black folks across the country.

We failed to come out by the millions to protest this cash cow, this so-called less-than-deadly weapon, and now there are actually laws on the books that allow it to be used on 7-year-old children. I must admit though, now that a couple of White folks have been abused by it, one in Washington DC and the other in Warren, Ohio, there may be something done about these police "toys." But you know the saying, "Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak up."

Sooner or later, if you do not speak up for others, trouble will find its way to your door. "Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, will also cry himself and not be heard," Proverbs 21:13

In light of all of the dreadful statistics relating to Black people in this country, as pointed out in recent article by NNPA Editor-in-Chief Hazel Trice Edney, if we ever needed a million strong Black men (and women) we definitely need them now. Where are they?

Here is the call. If you attended the MMM, if you supported the MMM, if you wanted to go to the MMM and could not, if you participated in some of the post MMM initiatives, if you were a young man and could not attend the MMM because of school, I want you to do something now.

You are 10 years older and, I trust, 10 years wiser, 10 years more experienced, 10 years more committed, and 10 years tired of the rhetoric regarding "what we need to do."

Whether you know it or not, or even believe it or not, you are part of the group that

will take Black people to a higher level of responsibility, respect, and commensurate action vis-à-vis those statistics Sister Edney wrote about in her article.

I want you to go two websites: www.overonemillionstrong.org or call 1-866-200-3174 and www.bringbackblack.org and begin the process of recapturing the strength and resolve of one million Black men who were so intimidating that the federal government virtually shutdown the day we came to town.

This time, however, I want us to demonstrate that same strength by turning it into real power, not just influence but genuine power. How?

First by registering and letting us know who you are, where you are and what you are doing. Second, even though it's late notice, consider coming to the national "gathering" at the Dudley Manufacturing and Convention Complex in Kernersville, North Carolina, on October 12-14. Call 773-779-3334 for information or see the Bring Back Black website.

Finally, I want you to recommit, not only to the spirit of what we had in D.C. 11 years ago, but also to the actual charge to leave that place and do something to help our people.

The first step in that "doing" phase is to reconnect and then stay connected, followed by an action that will demonstrate that Black is Back!

Surely one million of us can do something collectively by aggregating our resources in support of one another, by sharing information and working cooperatively to take control of our destiny, and by standing up to this unrighteous system and not only saying "enough is enough" but really showing that we mean it. Where are the million strong? Where are you?

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