

OUR VIEW

Numbers Game

Pity the next president. He (or she) will have a heck of a time trying to right this staggering economy. Everywhere you look, the numbers are depressing.

According to a Reuters and the University of Michigan survey (as posted on money.cnn.com): More people are feeling worse about their finances than at any time since 1982. There's more. According to the study: only one in five households expect their finances to improve, the worst in 50 years; 75 percent of respondents expect that U.S. economic doldrums will spill into the next year, the highest level since 1980; they think the unemployment rate will jump to 6 percent by December from the current rate of 5 percent.

According to a Conference Board study: 13.4 percent expect their incomes to rise in the next six months, the lowest level since the study began 41 years ago.

According to the Consumer Price Index: Food prices rose 5.1 percent in the past 12 months; April's 0.9 percent rise was the largest in 18 years.

According to AAA: Gas hit its highest recorded price of \$3.937 on Monday, a 21 percent jump from a year ago and 9.7 percent over the past month.

According to the S&P Case/Shiller Home Price Index, which tracks 20 of the largest markets: Home values fell 14 percent in the past year, the sharpest drop in 20 years.

More numbers for you to digest: The Standard & Poor's 500 index is down nearly 9 percent over the past year; the value of Americans' stock and mutual fund holdings fell by \$186 billion in the first quarter, the first drop since 2003's bear market, and the percentage of their disposable income that goes toward debt payments is at 14.3 percent, near the all-time high.

Into this economic firestorm, the next president will step. That person may be Illinois Sen. Barack Obama, who was here this week talking with — and trying to feel the pain of — locals who are struggling in this depressed economy. Should Obama win the Democratic presidential nomination, he'll need to work quick and fast to assemble the type of economic braintrust that will allow him to exploit Arizona Sen. John McCain's weaknesses on the economy and to prove that he heard — and heeded — our cries for help.

Honor a Pioneer

Las Vegas, your presence is requested. It is requested this Saturday. It is requested that you come to the corner of Martin Luther King Boulevard and Carey Avenue between the hours of 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. to celebrate history.

Anyone with a cursory knowledge of how this town has treated African-Americans knows that we've had to fight tooth and nail for everything we've gotten. In the late '30s, we had to fight for the right to live in West Las Vegas which, then, was an area dominated by Whites. In the '50s, we had to fight for the right to sleep and recreate in the hotels in which our celebrities performed and our fellow brothers and sisters toiled. In the '70s, we had to fight for the right to equal access to quality educational facilities in the Clark County School District. In the '80s, we had to fight against the ghettoization of our neighborhoods in the form of disinvestment, redlining and heavy-handed police tactics. In the '90s and in this millennium, we've had to fight for a place at the economic table — getting our share of casino contracts — and have had to battle for the refurbishing and replacement of outdated, crumbling elementary schools in West Las Vegas.

It ain't been easy. Which is why Saturday's opening of the \$18 million Dr. William U. Pearson Community Center will be such a momentous occasion. The 40,000 square-foot center will feature a gymnasium, learning center, fitness and exercise room, among other offerings.

So, come out on Saturday and honor a man who was not only one of the first Black dentists in Nevada and not only one of a select few politicians to serve on the Las Vegas City County and the Clark County Commission, but who was a credit to his race and the human race.



Black business alive in Alaska

By Harry C. Alford
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Who would have ever thought it? Taking members of the National Black Chamber of Commerce to the "Last Frontier," Alaska, to partner with businesses of like minds and go after significant federal contracts.

A little over one year ago, I was fighting these Alaska Native Corporations. Today, I am clicking my wine glass with them and discussing strategies of getting government business — and eventually foreign trade — together! Today, the possibilities and future look very positive and bright. We are no longer enemies but allies with the mission of working together and joining our mutual interests. The late Parren J. Mitchell and Art Fletcher must be in Heaven looking down and chuckling, "Harry has gotten some of the anger out of him." They would approve. In fact, Art Fletcher spent some good time in Alaska working opportunities associated with the establishment of the great Alaska pipeline. He was an active 8a contractor.

The 8a program was written by Congressman Parren J. Mitchell as a development tool to be managed by the Small Business Administration dedicated to minority-owned firms. Sen. Ted



HARRY C. ALFORD

Stevens, R-Alaska, added an amendment to the legislation that included firms owned by Alaskan tribes, aka Alaska Native Corporations. These firms became eligible, not only with the basic tenants of the minority business program, but also had exemptions, such as size requirements (small and disadvantaged), sole-source contracting (without competition) and no protests (no other business could write a complaint or challenge the procurement).

Things remained quiet for a while until the Clinton Administration began certain activity and the ANC's blew up.

Vice President Al Gore invented his "bundling procurement" and small business, especially minority business, took a back seat to federal procurement.

Procurement agents got caught in a bind as they needed to make 8a contracts and other minority numbers

but were pressured to wrap procurement up into billion dollar packages. The ANC's not being restricted to size requirements became the quick solution. Beginning in 1995, sales volume for traditional 8a businesses began to drop at a rate of \$1 billion per year.

At the same time, volume for Alaska Native Corporations began to enlarge. Soon it began replacing and compensating for the lost revenue by traditional minority firms. The ANC's became our competitor or replacement.

Alaska tribes would pool their resources from the royalties they received from oil, gas and other minerals from the federal government and invest into businesses.

They sent their kids to prestigious colleges and then put them into businesses, their businesses. Before long,

you had companies with the names of Nena, Chugash, Chenega, Eyak-Tek, etc. establishing themselves as major players in the 8a program. All the while, Black and Hispanic corporations were being pushed outside and now looking in with bitterness.

Before long, our members were complaining big time, and it was showing on our "radar" like a big "vulture" picking away at something that was once ours. It was time to fight. We began formally complaining to the SBA, Congressional Black Caucus, the Senate and House Small Business Committees, White House and anyone else who might listen.

I personally made congressional testimonies that were scathing against the ANC's. Hurricane Katrina (See Alford, Page 9)

NEVADA'S ONLY AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER
LAS VEGAS Sentinel Voice
GRIOT COMMUNICATIONS GROUP, INC.
1700 SOUTH MAIN STREET, SUITE 200, LAS VEGAS, NV 89102

Nevada's only African-American community newspaper.
Published every Thursday by Griot Communications Group, Inc.
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Member: National Newspaper Publishers Association
and West Coast Black Publishers Association