

OUR VIEW

Fourth Estate

The sudden death of NBC journalist and "Meet the Press" host Tim Russert on Friday has dominated the news cycle for nearly a week. Russert, who died of a heart attack, was arguably "the" Washington journalist, whom heads of state either feared, loathed or both. Politicians who sat across from him on Sunday mornings knew they'd better bring their "A" game or in be in for a nationally televised skewering. Perhaps there's no greater testimony to Russert's import than the high-profile people who attended his wake on Wednesday in Washington, D.C.

President Bush, presidential hopefuls Barack Obama (a Democratic senator from Illinois) and John McCain (a Republican senator from Arizona), along with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., Maria Shriver (of the Kennedy clan), former New York Mayor Mario Cuomo, legendary anchorman Tom Brokaw and many others came to the Kennedy Center to pay respects to the 58-year-old Buffalo, New York, native.

The outpouring of emotion over Russert's death should prompt us to evaluate the both the importance of Black journalists and the value that Blacks see in journalism.

For the past few decades, the American Society of Newspaper Editors has advocated for more diversity in American newsrooms. "To cover communities fully, to carry out their role in a democracy, and to succeed in the marketplace, the nation's newsrooms must reflect the racial diversity of American society by 2025 or sooner. At a minimum, all newspapers should employ journalists of color, and every newspaper should reflect the diversity of its community," reads the ASNE's mission statement.

Toward this end, the ASNE conducts an annual census of employment of Asian-Americans, Blacks, Native Americans, Hispanics and women in the newsroom; assists editors in recruiting, hiring and managing diverse newsrooms; supports foster newsroom diversity and has 3-year benchmarks for measuring progress. The benchmarks aim to increase the number of minorities in journalism education/news-editorial sequences, reduce the number of newspapers that employ no minorities, lower turnover among minorities in newsrooms, boost the number of minority scholarships and internships, lift the number of newsrooms that have diversity plans and develop programs that support minority youth interested in journalism careers.

Unfortunately, the reality hasn't matched the rhetoric. According to the Poynter Institute, the total number of minority journalists working at daily newspaper fell from 7,400 to 7,100. Nearly twice as many minority journalists left newsrooms (671) as were hired to their first full-time newsroom jobs (392).

The 2006 Radio and Television News Directors/Ball State University report notes a 1 percent increase in minority representation (to 22.2 percent) last year. This resulted from an uptick hiring Asians and Hispanics; meantime Black representation dropped 0.8 percent. And the slight increase in Black representation in radio newsrooms is counterbalanced by an 8 percent decline in minority representation over the past decade.

Clearly, the media isn't serious about diversity. But are we serious about the importance of Black journalism? Russert's prominence was due as much to his skill as to the fact that America came to see him as "the" Washington journalist. Do Blacks respect the Fourth Estate enough to put one of their own in a similar position? Tavis Smiley is perhaps the person we trust most. This despite the fact that Black journalists have been winning Pulitzers for reporting since 1994, are among America's most respected scribes (Malcolm Gladwell) and publish more than 200 Black-owned newspapers — including this one — that publish stories that mainstream periodicals ignore.

If the mainstream media often gets more criticism than it warrants and less credit than it deserves, Black journalists and the Black Press get less of both. The future of Black journalism is in our hands. Either you encourage it as a noble profession and support the personalities and outlets that give you a platform and a voice — e-mail your favorite writers, pick up Black newspapers/magazines and listen to Black radio — or continue letting the mainstream media define and distort us. You choose.

YOUR STIMULUS CHECK

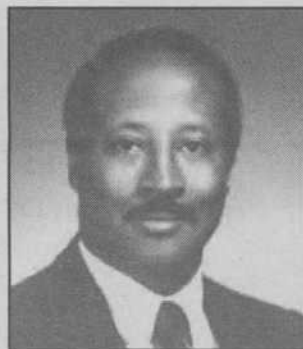


Get a grip on energy costs

By Harry C. Alford
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Have you had enough yet? Gasoline is over \$4 per gallon and appears to be nowhere near the end of this testament to our mismanagement of resources. Just wait for your heating costs this winter. Global climate change appears to be quite real, and we do nothing as it festers right before our eyes. No one disagrees that we have had enough of this reckless and free-falling attitude by our leaders and policy makers. The following is what America needs to do to ensure energy supply and affordable prices while protecting the environment at the same time.

Oil and Gas Supply: God has blessed this nation with some of the largest pockets of crude oil and natural gas. Due to political pressure and agitation from certain groups we have limited the utilization of these plentiful reserves and have become dependent on sources that are not at all friendly to the United States nor have any vested interest in our well-being. It's like sleeping with the "enemy," and no good can come from this. When it comes to pricing, the basic law of "supply and demand" is supposed to prevail. That is not the case here. Despite ample supplies of oil from



HARRY C. ALFORD

our trading partners, speculators and other social/business ill contents are manipulating the markets and we are paying unnecessary skyrocketed amounts for our basic energy needs. That is indeed the situation we are in.

The great singer Billie Holiday once wrote "God bless the child who has his own." That is the case here. We, the United States, must begin utilizing the massive reserves we have under our own land and ocean shores. We must begin new drilling in a massive fashion. Alaska, West Coast, Gulf, East Coast and about 20 of our total 50 states should be utilized for drilling both oil and gas. At the same time, we must start building new refineries.

We have not built one new oil refinery in this nation during the last 30 years. It's a terribly flawed strategy if you can even call it a strategy. The Alaska Pipeline is only at 30 percent capacity. Let's start new drilling and

start building new refineries with a vengeance. While this will jumpstart a big rise in our economy — jobs, lower prices, etc. it will also not have any adverse effect on our environment. Remember, during and after Katrina, our oil facilities did not have one spill or accident. If they can get through Katrina they are indeed safe.

If we do this right, our price of gasoline should drop at least 50 percent. The impact will be substantial and to the benefit of our safety and security.

Power Generation: Sit down and brace yourself — let's go nuclear! There has been a phobia against nuclear power generation. All the while we have been resistant; our friends in France have transformed their whole nation into a nuclear generated source of power.

Eighty percent of France is now powered through nuclear facilities. These facilities are clean, efficient and safe. Even Greenpeace and the Sierra Club can't criticize France for what it has done.

The United States is rudimentary when it comes to nuclear facilities, and we need to begin catching up by building nuclear plants as fast as we can. This energy is absolutely clean, and the wastes can be stored very efficiently. We have the perfect model in France. Each nuclear facility will bring about 1,500 jobs to a community, and the average salary for these jobs will be \$150,000. What are we waiting for!

While we start building nuclear facilities, we can also implement the new technol-

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Telephone (702) 380-8100
Email: lvsentinelvoice@yahoo.com

Contributing Writers:
Shirley Savage
Lés Pierres Streater
Kanika Vann

Ramon Savoy, Publisher, Editor-in-Chief
Don Snook, Graphics
Ed & Betty Brown, Founders

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