

Black, rights leaders have wish lists for Obama

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Despite the clear mandate that America's new president prioritize the reparation of the economy, jobs and tax-related issues, many other issues deserve top billing, say Black political observers.

Judicial appointments, voting rights, international relations and education are among other issues on a wish list for African-Americans and civil rights advocates.

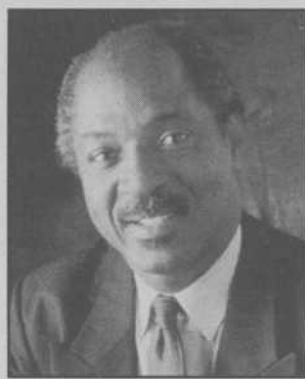
"The retreat on diversity in [federal courts] in recent years has made the issue more important for the next president," said Leslie Proll, director, Washington Office, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. "There will be much work to do just restoring some diversity to many courts, let alone improving upon it."

Supreme Court justices get lifetime presidential appointments, but due to possible retirements, as many as three justices may be appointed by the new president and hundreds to lower federal courts, to make decisions on race-related issues from affirmative action to civil rights.

Some not only see racial and cultural sensitivity, but racial diversity as a key to fairness in judicial appointments. The Bush administration has appointed few Black

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2008 is one person one vote, so many people — and particularly Black people — find themselves in the same position of their parents and grandparents whose efforts to vote were frustrated," Ogletree says. "Dr. King and Justice Thurgood Marshall fought valiantly for the right to vote. If the experiences of people of color in Florida in 2000 and Ohio in 2004 tell us anything, it is that the precious right to vote is as much an issue in the 21st century as it was in the 20th century."

Prospective voters found that to be true in this year's election as tricks were played and misleading information was distributed; including a flier in Virginia that read, "Get out the vote on Nov. 5," — the day after the election.

As much as domestic issues are on the minds of Black leaders, the new presidential administration must also focus on America's relationships in the world in the

the aforementioned while countering weapons of mass destruction proliferation — especially amidst the hostilities, peculiarities and sensitivities of the Gulf Region, Pakistan and North Korea. Further, he must develop a viable exit strategy for removing U.S. troops from Iraqi soil."

Sawyer also points out that the confidence of Americans in their own government must be restored as terror-fighting mechanisms, such as the USA Patriot Act — which allows some telephone and email surveillance without search warrant or court-order — seems to have gone too far. Specifically, she points out the "unauthorized" random surveillance of U.S. citizens under the Bush administration," that civil and human rights experts have viewed as breaches in American rights to privacy. But it's the every day so-called "bread and butter" issues, such as culturally inclusive educational curricula that's on the mind of Dr. E. Faye Williams.

African-American educational experts, including Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu, author of "Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys," have contended that the more Black children learn about their noble African heritage, the better their chances of healthier self-esteem, which will cause improved educational performance.

But, often, the contributions of African-Americans are not fully included in classroom teaching of American history.

"After dealing with the economy, it is imperative that cultural education gets a lot of serious attention in our schools — and many of us have done it without hate and anger," said Williams, chair of the National Congress of Black Women, Inc. "We must teach the true history of our nation — the good, the bad and the ugly — and resist the urge to label anybody unpatriotic for pointing out and wanting to change what is not good."

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judges, only 25 out of his 324 judicial appointments.

The lack of appointments of African-Americans, coupled with retirements of African-Americans from federal benches, has caused a decline in Black judgeships across the nation, despite past gains.

The fight for civil rights is still not over despite the historic nature of this year's presidential election. Harvard Law School Professor Charles Ogletree underscores civil rights — even the right to free and fair elections — as a key issue that must be dealt with early in the new administration.

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Educational issues were at the top of the list for several African-American rights advocates, interviewed by the NNPA News Service.

Dr. Julia Hare, co-founder of the San Francisco-based Black Think Tank with her husband, Nathan Hare, who have co-authored a book, "The Miseducation of the Black Child," says the new president would do well to advocate the incorporation of the entire community educational programs by creating "success activities" for children instead of "failure activities" that so often distract and engage them.

"So rather than a new round of tests standardized on middle-class White kids and testing Black inner-city children on things they haven't been taught, we would be taking back control over our children's minds and their socialization," said Hare. "Right now we have lost control of our children's minds. We've lost the authority to discipline, at home and at school, and we are no longer able to give our children a clear core to their personalities or to prepare them for what we want them to be or become."

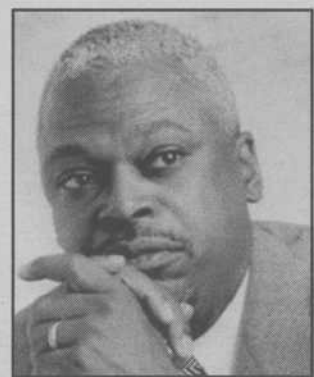
The quality of education across the board must be addressed, according to Wade Henderson, president and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. However, citizens must realize that it's the community — not just the president — who must do most of the work.

"Unfortunately, the president's role in education is limited as it is not a civil right provided by the Constitution," Henderson said. "Our job in the civil rights community is to make the country aware that quality education is a right for all, and that if states won't act, the federal government should step in... For the Black community, there is no more important issue on their

minds." Henderson concludes, "Access to a high quality public education is still a fundamental right upon which all others depend; and yet 50 years later, the promise of Brown remains unfulfilled. Inequality is rampant by almost every measure. We as a nation spend more money on our public education system than any other country in the world, yet we are still miles behind in educating our children. Spending that money more effectively and reauthorizing "No Child Left Behind" to make it work for students, parents and schools — not against them — is the most [critical] civil rights issue the next president will address."

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