

OUR VIEW

NAACP Rebirth

The names have yet to change on its website, but the Las Vegas chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is under new leadership. Members of the local chapter, whose roots date to 1928 (the group recently celebrated its 50th anniversary of formal activity in Las Vegas) recently elected ex-Las Vegas City Councilman Frank Hawkins as its new president.

We should take a certain comfort in Hawkins' election. Naysayers might quibble about Hawkins' history, whose political career was cut short over ethics allegations. They may say he doesn't represent the change the NAACP needs to restore its luster. And they would be wrong. In the same way President-elect Barack Obama's choice of veterans from the highly successful Clinton administration reflects positive momentum—after all, they'll be expected to carry out his "change" agenda rather than perpetuating Clinton-era dogmas—Hawkins' election could very well be the right prescription for the NAACP.

Let's not forget that Hawkins helped spearhead one of the NAACP's most successful initiatives: a collaboration with U.S. Bank that yielded the Community Economic Development Center. According to a 1996 article in the *Las Vegas Sun*, in a two-year span, the Las Vegas center "provided financial counseling to more than 600 individuals, conducted more than 30 seminars and workshops and facilitated the disbursement of more than \$16 million in home and minority-owned small business loans."

In 2001, the collaboration yielded a community, Whispering Timbers on the northwest corner of Lake Mead and Martin Luther King Boulevard, of 208 homes that replaced the Gerson Park housing projects. Three years later, in 2004, another Hawkins project, the Harry Reid Senior Community, just off Stewart Avenue on 11th Street in downtown, provided housing for seniors. Hawkins was also one of the leading voices calling for MGM Mirage and other gaming companies to commit to diversity in management and minority business procurement.

Because of this track record, Hawkins certainly deserves a chance to inject much-needed life into the Las Vegas NAACP. He won the election fair and square which, if you're familiar with the local NAACP's troubles in the late '90s, is something of an accomplishment. Its most recent leaders deserve credit for steadying the ship after mismanagement, scandal, infighting and meddling by regional and national officials made the group a laughing-stock in the late '90s. Perhaps Hawkins, with his history of accomplishment (a star wrestler in high school, a standout football player at the University of Nevada, Reno and a Super Bowl champion with the Oakland Raiders) can help the group turn the corner and reclaim its mantle as the best civil rights organization in America.

Morals Bailout

As they say, desperate economic times call for desperate measures. And nothing can be more desperate than a state wallowing in the economic pits. If you haven't heard: gaming revenues from October were the lowest in 25 years; visitation that month experienced a similar, record-breaking decline. Harrah's Entertainment, the world's largest gaming company, and Station Casinos, the dominant name in locals gambling, are angling to stave off filing bankruptcy. Las Vegas Sands Corp. executive Sheldon Adelson had to pump hundreds of millions of dollars into his holdings just to prevent further uncertainty.

Into this climate, state lawmakers stepped. On Monday, in a special session in Carson City, they cut \$341 million from a budget that has already been sheared to the tune of \$1.2 billion. In addition to taking a line of credit from local governments to the tune of \$160 million, lawmakers agreed to a \$5 million cut in the Millennium Scholarship trust fund, emptying the \$25 million Indigent Accident Fund, taking \$3.5 million from the Low Income Housing trust fund, reducing grants to public health non-profits by \$851,000, shearing \$11 million earmarked for mental health medication clinics and \$375,000 from military-style academy for troubled youth. Lawmakers decided to heap more strain on the constituencies least able to defend their needs. Monday was indeed a sad day.



Biggest inauguration of all

By Harry C. Alford

We have a presidential inauguration every four years. This one (on January 20, 2009), like no other, promises to be the most magnificent and well-attended event in history. It's for the first African-American president of the United States, and he obviously will be one of the most intelligent and well-organized executives this nation has come to know.

Barack Obama is different. He has been on a unique development path, and it appears that it is pure destiny that brings him to us at this very difficult and critical time.

The whole world has hope and high expectations. We are all seeking a new style of leadership and believe that Barack Obama is it.

The Presidential Inaugural Committee, the PIC, has been selected by the President-elect. William Daley, Penny Pritzker, John W. Rogers, Patrick Ryan and Julianna Smoot — all Chicago confidants of Obama — have been assembled. Emmett Beliveau is the executive director and will handle the daily duties, which are enormous.

A typical inaugural celebration will bring an additional 300,000 visitors to Washington, D.C. This time, the expectations are over 3 million. It will be the biggest event in the history of this nation.



HARRY C. ALFORD

According to Beliveau, "I can tell you that we're already hard at work making sure this inauguration will be the most open and accessible in history, in keeping with President-elect Obama's and Vice President-elect Biden's commitment to change business as usual in Washington."

He goes on, "For the first time in history, the entire length of the National Mall — from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial — will be open to the public on Inauguration Day. We believe that as many Americans as possible should be able to come together in celebration of our common values, shared aspirations and the hope and optimism that brought us to this moment of change."

JumboTrons and an audio system will stretch from the steps of the Capitol, where President-elect Barack Obama will be sworn in, to the Lincoln Memorial; an unprecedented arrangement.

The inauguration is free to all attendees. There will be a roped off part up front, and

you must have a ticket (free) to enter. The PIC will print 240,000 of these tickets and distribute them to Congress and federal employees.

It is illegal to sell a ticket. Check with your senator or congressperson to see if they have any available. Other than that, just come on out to the Mall.

Then, of course, there are the numerous inaugural balls and other events. Oprah Winfrey is filming her show at the Kennedy Center throughout inaugural week. Aretha Franklin is giving a free concert at the Kennedy Center on Monday evening, January 19.

There are official balls and unofficial balls. The official balls are managed by the PIC and they occur on the evening of the inauguration. These official ones are: Commander-in-Chief Ball, Constitution Ball, Democracy Ball, Freedom Ball, Indepen-

dence Ball, Liberty Ball, Patriot Ball, and the Stars and Stripes Ball.

The president and first lady will pay a quick visit and perhaps do a dance for the attendees at each of these balls. They are placed throughout the District.

The unofficial balls, et al, are still popping up. They will begin on Sat., January 17 and go through January 21. Right now, there are 47 such balls listed.

Like the official balls, there will be a ticket price usually devoted to a particular fundraising event. Ticket prices are ranging from \$125 - \$2,500 right now. Some prices are to be announced later.

I am proud to announce that the National Black Chamber of Commerce is joining with the National Newspaper Publishers Association Foundation to pro-

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