EDITORIALS

John J. Oliver, Jr.
Chairman of the Board

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President

THE VOICE OF BLACK AMERICA SINCE 1892

Is drug bill needed?

On January 17, the Baltimore City Council returns to session, with a new proposed anti-loitering measure high on the agenda of matters to be accomplished.

In simple terms, the law would prohibit loitering and using any public or private place for the purpose of buying or selling illegal drugs.

According to the City Solicitor's office, current drug enforcement laws allow police to arrest and search suspects only after seeing an illegal drug in the possession of the suspect.

The proposed new law is geared to plug the loopholes in existing measures. It is still too early to delve into the whys and wherefores of the laws—this will come to light when the hearings and discussions begin.

But already, battle lines are being drawn. At least one councilperson's office has indicated opposition to the measure, while some others have heartily endorsed the proposed measure.

We call attention to the matter, for it is believed that the ramifications of the bill — if passed — strike to nether reaches of the black community. It can not be ignored — and merits careful study and assessment.

Thank You! Mrs. Santa

When the former director of the AFRO Charities Mrs. Santa Campaign left to take a new position, the program stalled, prompting the proposition that there would be little help available for those who have been beneficiaries of the program.

Thus it was that Mrs. Ida Peters was importuned to step into the breech and work her usual magic on this most vital of AFRO Charities prorams.

The program was a roaring success. More than $22,000 was raised, and more than 5,000 families helped during the holidays. And — it was accomplished in the ultra-short span of just 5 weeks.

We salute Mrs. Ida Peters — may her wonders never cease.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Suspended from School: the principal's version

The recent front page article titled, "Suspended from School: What should a parent do?" contained several inaccuracies and misleading information. The following facts are therefore offered to set the record straight.

1. The correct spelling of the suspended student's name is Cherese Rogers.

2. Mrs. Valerie Gaither is Cherese Rogers' grandmother, not her mother.

3. Teachers, the school counselor and three administrators worked closely with Cherese to insure that her matriculation at Lemmel was successful. However, our intervention was not successful and Cherese Rogers was suspended from Lemmel for violation of a school system rule. She could possibly be expelled for her actions.

4. Mrs. Gaither was informed on the date of the proposed suspension that there could be a 10-day waiting period prior to her conference with staff in the suspension services office. Moreover, she was given the name and telephone number of the supervisor of the suspension office to see if she could secure an earlier appointment.

5. Cherese was not sent home on proposed suspension. Cherese left the school without permission at 3:10 p.m. The principal was walking Cherese to the office prior to taking Cherese outside the building to get her grandmother when Cherese left.

Mrs. Gaither picks Cherese up from school daily.)

Once Mrs. Gaither saw the condition Cherese was in, she got out of her car and came into the school. Mrs. Gaither, the parent of the other concerned student, the school police, the assistant principal, the principal and several students who were witnesses remained in conference concerning the school infraction committed by Cherese for more than 45 minutes after Mrs. Gaither entered the building.

It is unfortunate that Mrs. Gaither feels that the professional staff at Lemmel had preconceived feelings and attitudes about Cherese. Staff did its best to relieve Cherese's stress level about repeating grade 7 by assigning her to a team different from the one she was assigned to during the 1987-88 school year. Counseling services were provided and the grade level administrator had several problem solving conferences with Cherese and Mrs. Gaither.

School staff supported Mrs. Gaither's request for a transfer and demonstrated this support in a memorandum attached to Mrs. Gaither's transfer request. However, prior to action by staff in the Student Placement Office, Cherese's behavior was such that the administrative action taken was necessary.

Principal

Kweisi Mfume
U.S. Congressman

Partnerships to prevent teenage pregnancies

President-elect George Bush says that our, "national character can be measured by how we care for our nation's children." It appears that our national character will be determined in part by the Cabinet officer responsible for the health and welfare of our children.

The new Administration has nominated Morehouse School of Medicine president, Dr. Louis W. Sullivan. If confirmed, and there is every reason to believe that he will be, one of Dr. Sullivan's responsibilities will be to address the American dilemma of adolescent pregnancy.

Much can and should be done to help our children because in America on any given day 2,753 teenagers become pregnant, 1,099 teenagers terminate their pregnancies, 367 teenagers miscarry, and 1,287 teenagers give birth.

In keeping with the anticipated approach of President-elect Bush's Administration, Dr. Sullivan will undoubtedly emphasize the role of the private sector in addressing national issues.

Both Republicans and Democrats agree that government alone nor the private sector alone can solve the problem of teenage pregnancy.

Like most of our social problems, but especially in regards to our children, the concerted efforts of parents, schools, local neighborhoods, churches/synagogues, all levels of government, industry and business are necessary to find solutions and implement them.

Much ink has been spilled by experts and pundits on the causes and effects of teenage pregnancy on our society. There is general agreement that it is in our best interests as a society to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies.

To get the attention of business and industry the teenage pregnancy problem must be looked at in economic terms.

Economically, we are already feeling the detrimental effects of a work-force unprepared for the business and industry requirements in high technology, communications, service, medicine and management.

Fifty percent of all these new jobs in the year 2000 will require more than a high school education.

Since most teenage mothers leave high school to care for their new born infants there could be a crippling employee deficit by the turn of the century as the work-force capable of handling the increasingly complicated jobs continues to decrease.

Leaders in business and industry fully realize the magnitude of the impending crisis when there will be jobs available but too few adequately trained women and men to fill them.

Government, business and industry can act now to preserve the size and quality of the work force. First, by increasing the participation of high school students in all aspects of business and industry.

Baltimore's Lawrence Pacquin High School is a national model of what a cooperative partnership can do to raise student's self-esteem while learning necessary job related skills by challenging them to overcome the obstacles they have encountered through parenthood.

Such successful programs do indeed expand a student's familiarity with the principles of the working world while building self-esteem and developing personal discipline. Low self-esteem is often a contributing cause to premature promiscuity.

Another way to build self-esteem is for schools, industry and business to increase the participation of students in career planning programs such as "job shadowing," internships and apprenticeships.

Secondly, a partnership of government with the private sector should promote healthy family-life for current employees. This will benefit both employer and employee by increased productivity and stability while reducing the cost to companies for medical insurance and compensation.

Develop employee wellness programs to provide resources for family counseling, so that, workers/parents can more appropriately deal with the pressures, demands and stresses of adolescents in their homes.

An investment in the parents of today will break the cycle of inadequate parenting skills and so preclude the expenses needed tomorrow for problem children.

America needs the cooperation of the public and private sector to generate national support in caring for adolescents by preventing pregnancy. A partnership of government, business and industry can work with schools and parents to provide job training opportunities to teenagers that would reinforce responsible behavior in all areas of life.

Let us make adolescent pregnancy a national priority so that we can insure the health of our economy, our international competitiveness and the wellness of our families and communities.

G. James Fleming
Educator

Soon it will be President Bush

With the inauguration of George Bush as president of the United States, just a few days off, the expedition with which the president-elect corralled his cabinet is worth noting.

Except in the case of the Secretary of Defense, the cabinet appointments have been clean-cut, unencumbered, and have given evidence that Bush had thought them over, had set the parameters of each position, and had made up his own mind.

Only as to Senator John Tower, eventually named to the defense post, was there vacillation.

Outstanding in the appointments, so far as an outsider can tell, is the experience factor which Mr. Bush had stressed so often in his campaign. This "experience," of course, had to fit conservative Republican models and was personalized in a cabinet of all white males, with the addition of one Black male and one white woman and, for the first time, one Hispanic-historic tokenism.

* * *

One surprise appointment—a surprise to the general public—is that of Dr. Louis Sullivan, of Atlanta, as secretary of Health and Human Services. His was not a household name, he did not belong to the black power structure, he was not a shouting Republican, as far as is known. He was not even a successful lawyer.

Those who know Dr. Sullivan more closely credit him, however, with being an outstanding medical administrator, a builder and a no-nonsense "brains."

A plus for Dr. Sullivan, also, is the fact that he has known George and Barbara Bush for sometime, since Mrs. Bush is a member of the board of trustees of the Morehouse College Medical School, of which Dr. Sullivan is the founding president.

* * *

The other two surprises are white. One unexpected appointment is Representative Jack Kemp, of New York, as secretary of Housing and Urban Development. A veteran in public affairs, he was an opponent of Bush in the rough and tumble presidential primary. Surprising for a victor to reward a former challenger, but not unique.

From the point of view of the public good, Jack Kemp gives promise of bringing vitality, daring and leadership to the Department of Housing and Urban Development. He knows urban America, he is deft at the wheeling and dealing of Washington, and he should not be afraid to match his talents and his wits with the bureaucrats and the conservative power brakers.

The homeless and the underhoused can only hope that Mr. Kemp will not allow himself to be totally shackled by the administration which appointed him and by his conservative fellow-travellers.

* * *

Labor circles must have been very much surprised when Elizabeth H. Dole, the former secretary of Transportation and wife of the minority leader of the Senate, was given the plum of Secretary of Labor.

Not that the lady is not quite capable in many areas (some people thought she should have been the candidate for president, instead of her husband), but here, again, there was a reward to a former opponent, even if indirectly.

Surprisingly, there has not been a whimper from organized labor over the Dole appointment; not a hint from the AFL/CIO that some one more closely associated with labor should have been given that spot.

Black Bush backers believe that the new president will include several Blacks in other positions in the administration—as under-secretaries and assistant secretaries in the several departments, judgeships, and in other substantial positions, including the White House.

Most of all, however, Blacks will evaluate the Bush years by the nominations he makes to the Supreme Court, by his relations with the Congressional Black Caucus and by the overall "tone;" which he exudes over the nation.

COMMENTARY & OPINIONS

Walter E. Williams
MINORITY VIEWPOINT

Visons

Liberals and conservatives constantly argue, and decent people in both camps walk away mad. Differences in values may explain part of the conflict, but competing visions of how the world works explains more.

Suppose I contend that the world is flat while you believe it is round. I would contend India could not be reached by sailing west from Spain. You would argue the opposite position.

Given our initial assumptions, the internal logic of either argument is impeccable. After all, if the world was flat you'd fall off since India is to the east of Spain.

Decent, intelligent people reach a similar impasse on a wide range of issues because the debate focuses on the internal logic of their arguments rather than the initial implicit or explicit assumptions on how the world works.

How can people, who care about the welfare of low - skilled workers, come up with opposite policy proposals: some calling for minimum wage increases; others steadfastly in opposition?

It is easy. If you assume that an employer needs a certain number of workers, say 10, to do a job, then enacting a minimum-wage increase will benefit those 10 workers. The employer simply gives up profits or passes the higher costs on to customers who buy the same quantities of the product at the higher price.

But suppose you believe when wages rise employers will substitute technology for workers, or higher prices will lead customers to seek cheaper substitutes domestically or internationally, then you might be suspicious about the benefits of upping the minimum wage. You will conclude some of those workers will lose their jobs.

The logic of both arguments is internally consistent if we accept their initial assumptions.

The only way out of the impasse is to examine — not the logic — but the assumptions. Do employers substitute technology for labor to combat higher wages? Do consumers seek cheaper substitutes when prices rise?

Some people see low wages as employer exploitation; others see them as a result of low productivity. The former's emphasis will be on legislated wages; the latter's is on education and training.

However, those with the exploitation vision tend to join those with the low - productivity view in the international arena of low wages. I have never heard anyone propose Ethiopian or Bangladesh workers could become wealthy like American workers if they would only enact minimum wage laws.

We will see a similar conflict over taxes this year. One camp sees higher taxes as a way to increase revenue to fight the deficit; another sees leaving taxes as they are, and possibly lowering them, as a means of increasing revenue.

If it is your vision that, when taxes are raised, people will work just as hard, have the same investments, and the same tax compliance behavior, then you will see tax increases as a way to generate higher federal revenues.

But suppose your vision is that higher taxes reduce work incentives, give people inducement to invest in activities with a low productivity but great tax write-offs, cause economic activity to go underground and make for less honest taxpayers, then you'll see the trade-off and possibly come out against increasing taxes.

Therefore, the conflict is resolved by asking which assumption regarding people is more accurate. Of course, we can't oppose all taxation but, taxes must be viewed as stifling.

Public policy conflict among decent and honest people will abate once we begin to examine our assumptions about how the world works. Let's do it.

Parren J. Mitchell
Former U.S. Rep.

I could not watch Roots

The first time Roots was shown on television, I started watching it but after a half hour, I turned it off. The treatment of black people at that time; the horrors of slavery; the bestial brutality of whites; created an anger in me that made my body shake spasmodically.

The anger was irrational, perhaps, but it was uncontrollable. I have some white friends and, I fear, had they been around me at that time, I would have lashed out at them despite our friendship.

There was a horror film some years ago which was advertised by a voice saying, "It's only a movie, it's only a movie, it's only a movie." Yes, "Roots" was a television drama, only a movie, but it was based on real American history. The story of the flogging of black men; the mutilation of black male slaves; the evil, systematic, omnipresent attempts to crush the manhood, the personhood of black slaves.

During this second showing of Roots, the satanic brutality of white slave holders was shown over and over again during the first one-half hour, sickening me to the point where I felt nauseous.

What incarnately evil forces could make whites treat human beings so cruelly. I am told by the end of the drama, viewers would be inspired and uplifted by the perseverance of blacks, by the unconquerable desire and quest for freedom. I missed the uplifting part because I could not take the degrading part.

My anger has now subsided, and I can think about the most recent showing of Roots from another perspective.

John Jacob
TO BE EQUAL

What's ahead in 1989?

This is the season for crystal-ball gazing, but rather than make predictions about what the next 12 months will bring, I prefer to look at some areas requiring hard decisions crucial to sustaining economic growth and improving our society.

Two of those areas are under heated discussion in Washington today — the federal budget, and its twin, the huge deficit.

The failure of President Reagan's economic policies is seen in a deficit that keeps interest rates high and handcuffs proposals for constructive programs to help the poor, whose numbers have grown dramatically.

Despite President-elect Bush's insistence on no tax hikes, it is hard to see how they can be avoided. Past budgets have sliced social programs far past the levels needed to maintain previous inadequate services.

The only place left for new spending cuts is in the swollen defense budget. The Russians appear to be signalling the end of the Cold War, and we could see the way paved for drastic cuts without endangering our national security.

Combined with carefully chosen tax increases, that would free enough resources to cut the deficit sharply and to initiate important new programs that help people out of poverty and open new opportunities for low-income families.

The President-elect should view such new initiatives as long-overdue improvements in the nation's human resource infrastructure.

It is generally recognized no society can sustain a viable economy without an infrastructure—the roads, the waterways, electrical grids and other physical attributes of an industrial economy that fosters the production and movement of goods.

But the infrastructure of an advanced service economy is people with the skills and education to produce high tech goods and services. That means investing in training and education, and in providing the jobs, housing, and health care that enable people to be productive.

Past policies have failed to do that, with the result we are in danger of losing out in today's global economic competition.

President-elect Bush can demonstrate his wisdom and his leadership by focusing national attention on the need for new policies that unleash the rich human potential now buried in poverty and hampered by discrimination.

In 1989, we will have to begin to close the dangerous gap between the races. The most glaring evidence of that gap is the widespread worry the economy may be heating up while in the black community the prime considerations are the struggle for survival and skyrocketing unemployment.

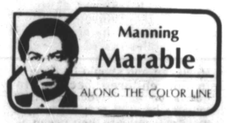
The big dangers looming before us in 1989 include:

— Continued federal indifference to the widening gap between whites and blacks, and the affluent and the poor.

— The threat of Supreme Court rollbacks in civil rights. The Court will rule on key affirmative action cases and on whether to reopen past civil rights decisions.

— Growing desperation in the poorest ghettos, driven by economic chaos and the drug plague.

The big opportunity in 1989 is for national leadership to demonstrate it understands the problems facing the black poor by doing something about them. For starters, a national employment and training program, and community-based health care and housing programs should be implemented.



Manning Marable
ALONG THE COLOR LINE

The Rainbow choice: The man or the movement?

Throughout black political history, there has been one central weakness which has undermined the power, impact and longevity of our activist organizations. That one weakness can be termed, "the messiah complex."

The messiah complex probably stems from a political reading of the Old Testament stories of Moses, who led the oppressed Hebrews out of Egyptian bondage, and of Joshua, who brought them into the Promised Land.

The political style and discourse of black America is heavily identified with the church, and it is no accident that most of our political leaders have been Christian ministers or religious figures. The messiah complex is characterized by the emergence of an articulate, religious - oriented, charismatic black male leader, who builds a strong protest organization around himself, and leads a fight to advance the interests of the poor, working people and the oppressed.

Many of the greatest black political activists can be characterized in these terms. Marcus Garvey was a black nationalist messiah, a dynamic and bold defender of African people, "at home and abroad." His Universal Negro Improvement Association mobilized millions during the 1920s.

Martin Luther King, Jr., was the personification of the civil rights movement of the sixties. Malcolm X, the most gifted and visionary black nationalist of our own time, inspired millions to advocate Black Power.

But with the political demise or death of these individuals, their respective organizations suffered and movements declined. In Malcolm's case, none of the other black nationalists who were to emerge in his aftermath—Maulana Karenga, Stokely Carmichael, Imamu Baraka—were able to exercise his political influence.

Malcolm's political group, the Organization of Afro-American Unity, disappeared after his assassination. The group was too heavily oriented behind the activism and ideas of a single individual.

The Messiah complex creates a number of problems for black political organizations. The groups usually reflect a pyramidic, top-down organizational structure. Key decisions are invariably made at the top. The leader and his coterie of political lieutenants make most if not all the decisions.

The branches or local organizations recruit new members in large measure on the popularity and charisma of the national spokesperson, rather than on the basis of an agenda or political program. Eventually, the second-tier leadership is selected largely on the criteria of loyalty to the leader, and not on the grounds of their political or technical ability.

But the greatest single danger occurs when the leader dies or is removed from power. The death, arrest or demise of the leader freezes his organizational lieutenants, who can no longer think independently. It disorients most loyal rank and file members, and creates a pessimistic feeling that no one could ever replace the former leader.

After Martin's assassination, for example, Ralph Abernathy, Hosea Williams, Andrew Young and other SCLC leaders could not accept Jesse Jackson or anyone else as King's "political heir." Even today, the well-publicized tension between Coretta Scott King and Jackson stems partially from a refusal to accept the "Country Preacher" as King's logical successor.

The Rainbow coalition now stands at a decisive turning point. Unless its local leaders and activists take immediate action, it may also succumb to the contradictions of the Messiah complex, perhaps degenerating into an ineffectual lobby on the Democratic Party's left wing.

For months, there have been disturbing signs within the Rainbow, complaints of organizational disorganization and disorientation. After the November election, President-elect Bush invited Jackson to attend a private meeting, and a well-publicized photo opportunity occurred.

But Jackson didn't consult key members of the Congressional Black Caucus, or many prominent state leaders inside the Rainbow before speaking with Bush. The next logical question is: Who is in charge of Jackson's political schedule, and what formal accountability does he have to the Rainbow's national board?

Even more questionable, in retrospect, was Jackson's single - minded pursuit of the vice presidential nomination in June and July. After the California primary, it was virtually certain that Dukakis was going to select a conservative Democratic running mate, and that Jesse wasn't going to be selected.

The Rainbow might have been better served by demanding that key black and progressive figures, such as Mary Berry or Randall Robinson, be selected for top administrative posts. Or the Rainbow could have seriously explored the option of running an independent campaign in the general election.

Given the magnitude of Dukakis's defeat by Bush, an independent Rainbow campaign would not have been responsible for the Democratic ticket's demise, and it would have expanded the Rainbow's base of supporters. Jackson's seven million primary election votes could have easily become 15 to 20 million.

But this political discussion, which should have taken place before the Atlanta convention, never occurred. The vital political enthusiasm and momentum from the caucuses and primaries was lost.

To be critical of Jackson's role is not for one moment to minimize his crucial contributions to the ongoing battle for democracy and social justice.

He is articulate, inspirational, and a powerful orator. But Jackson has never been a team player, neither in the SCLC nor any other civil rights organization. Operation PUSH in the 1970s was a prime example of a top-down, charismatic-led political formation.

What must be done next? We need a better organized Rainbow Coalition, with a national newspaper and a simplified, accessible and democratic membership structure. We need to finance several small regional offices, and hire field organizers to recruit members.

We must identify youth organizers to begin recruitment on college campuses, building a new version of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. And most importantly, we must begin to redefine our primary political tasks in nonelectoral terms.