

The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

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EDITORIALS

Take more, give less to CMS board

Limiting panel's charge to establish school policy is best for the district

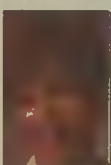
It's no secret that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education has been dysfunctional for quite some time. Last week's doubleheader of sheer lunacy with charges of intimidation, challenged manhood and calls for security only added to the ugliness and calls for wholesale change. The fearsome foursome of Vilma Leake, Kaye McGarry, George Dunlap and Larry Gauvreau should carry themselves with some modicum of professionalism, but that's almost beside the point. It's obvious they don't care to know better. Meanwhile, public confidence continues to slide in public education.



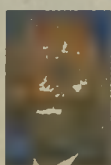
Gauvreau



Leake



McGarry



Dunlap

While voter indignation is appropriate, we believe there's a larger issue to consider: the role of the school board in governing the state's largest school district. As the one elected board with the charge of overseeing the education, safety and development of children, this panel should be limited in scope, primarily of a budgetary nature. The real challenge of education should be left to professional teachers and administrators who have the training and background to provide optimal results. We also believe that the role of superintendent should be given more far-reaching authority to set policy for the district and put in place people and facilities that will make CMS a more nimble operation, which it has struggled to do since 2001 when court-ordered busing for desegregation was ended.

Serving on an elected board is never easy, and school board is the toughest job in Mecklenburg politics. It's thankless, and these days confrontational to the point of embarrassment. We don't doubt the sincerity of CMS's board, but let's be real. Without taking the egos and finger-pointing out of the equation, very little will be accomplished during a period of unprecedented growth and government-required achievement standards.

However, this board spends too much of its time micro-managing the process. Their time and the districts patience would be better served if they concentrated on budgetary matters and on hiring a superintendent.

In most government entities, there are checks and balances to steer them to the ultimate goal. We are of the opinion that this district can best improve education by giving teachers and administrators the latitude to be creative and innovative when necessary. The board, of course, would still be a major partner by working with them as well as the community to push CMS forward.

Balance history with some financial common sense

Grace AME Zion Church is historic and represents a unique chapter in African American history. It's also for sale, and its status is uncertain.

Grace AME Zion's congregation has moved to a new building, and the AME Zion Church wants to get the most it can for the old structure, its historic legacy notwithstanding. The Historic Landmarks Commission would like to buy the church for preservation purposes, but church officials are rightly determined to sell for as much as they can get. If the new owners want to preserve the building in First Ward, that's their call. If they tear it down, the church doesn't have a restriction against that action. The HLC wants Mecklenburg County to replenish a revolving fund that would be used to buy the site for nearly \$950,000 at minimum.

That would be a mistake, even at market value.

History is important, but so is oversight of taxpayer dollars. If Grace AME Zion can be preserved with a program that can be economically feasible, that's worth government intervention. But to let the building languish for the sake of history cheats the county that paid to save it from the wrecking ball.

Charlotte has a well-deserved reputation for turning a blind eye to its history, but making up for past oversights by going overboard with tax dollars is counterproductive. Public-private ventures, or preferably, private development would preserve the community's historic sites while giving them another chance at a productive life. Keeping history alive requires sacrifice. AME Zion's leadership will make out just fine once the building is sold. For the county, any possible investment should be weighed against the benefits of preservation.

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Fumbling over Donovan McNabb

The national president of the NAACP is involved in a public brouhaha with the president of the Philadelphia chapter. Are they feuding over President Bush's authorization of secret spying on U.S. citizens? No. Is it over the tug-of-war between the House and Senate over the proposed extension of controversial sections of the USA Patriot Act? Nope. Are they fighting over cuts poor people are expected to shoulder in the next federal budget as the wealthy get to enjoy extended tax cuts? Hardly.



GEORGE E. CURRY

Of all the important public issues facing America, NAACP President Bruce S. Gordon and Philadelphia chapter president Jerry Whyatt Mondesire are at odds over whether Mondesire should have criticized Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb in a newspaper column.

Mondesire, publisher of the Philadelphia Sun, a black newspaper, called McNabb overrated and took him to task for what Mondesire described as McNabb's lack of leadership both on and off field. "This week I felt compelled to offer some personal thoughts about your horrific on-field performances this season because at their core is a lie you have tried to use to hide the fact that in reality

you actually are not that good. In essence, Donny, you are mediocre at best," Mondesire wrote.

Gordon, who grew up in Philadelphia, issued a strongly-worded statement that upbraided Mondesire for upbraiding McNabb.

"I have followed the Eagles organization and its players for a long time," he said. "Donovan McNabb is one of the best that they have had. He is a great quarterback, an excellent role model and a class act. Whatever possessed Mondesire to take such a negative position on a positive person like McNabb is beyond me. The NAACP has many civil rights issues that require our attention. Criticizing Donovan McNabb is not one of them. However, in light of Mondesire's criticism it has become a personal priority to offer my apology as well as my support."

Gordon added, "The NAACP is further investigating this matter to make sure these statements were properly vetted and our policies and procedures were not violated."

The last time I checked, NAACP chapter presidents were volunteers. That means they are not NAACP employees and even if they were, they would still be entitled to the First Amendment protection of free speech. Writing as a columnist - where opinions are supposed to be expressed - and going to great lengths to say that he was offering some "personal thoughts," Mondesire didn't need his column "vetted" by Gordon or

anyone else.

I have known Jerry Mondesire, a former aide to Congressman Bill Gray, for many years. He is thoughtful, principled and, as is evident, unafraid to speak his mind. He is said to be considering a run for Congress. If that's true, I admire Jerry even more for speaking up. Surely, he knew that writing that column would not win him any votes.

Many people have asked why Mondesire would offer such a harsh critique of McNabb. All one has to do is read his column and it's pretty clear what set him off (Copies of Mondesire's column and Gordon's statement are posted on my blog, curryingfavor.blogspot.com). He faults McNabb for running less this year and then accusing critics who point that out as engaging in a form of racism.

During the season, Terrell Owens, the recently exiled wide receiver for the Eagles, said that the Eagles would win a Super Bowl if Brett Favre, the Green Bay Packers quarterback, were the team's quarterback instead of McNabb.

"The brash and bombastic Terrell Owens may have committed the unpardonable sin of going public with his put down, but was he fundamentally wrong?" Mondesire asked. "The pressure, the hype, the clock - they all just converged and your nerve collapsed under their combined weight," he wrote. "Mediocre isn't horrible in and of itself. Most of us don't live up to our

dreams. It's when we fake it that most of the rest of us get irritated."

Clearly, Mondesire was irritated when he wrote the next paragraph.

"So, for you to continue to deny we fans (as well as yourself) one of the strongest elements of your game by claiming that 'everybody expects black quarterbacks to scramble' not only amounts to a breach of faith but also belittled the real struggles of black athletes who've had to overcome real racial stereotyping [sic] in addition to downright segregation."

As Mondesire noted, Doug Williams, the only Black quarterback to win a Super Bowl, was not a scrambler. Nor is the Tennessee Titans' Steve McNair, Minnesota QB Daunte Culpepper or Byron Leftwich of Jacksonville. And they are not criticized for not scrambling.

If McNabb, in fact, blamed his sub-par and injury-riddled season on others' purported perception of Black quarterbacks as scramblers, Mondesire is not only correct to call him out on that lame excuse, Bruce Gordon should present Mondesire with an NAACP Image Award. Then, perhaps, the NAACP can concentrate on our real priorities.

GEORGE E. CURRY is editor-in-chief of the National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service and BlackPressUSA.com. He appears on National Public Radio as part of "News and Notes with Ed Gordon."

Prisons foster economic incongruity

An article on Charlotte.com by Liz Chandler, titled "Black contractors used as fronts?" reminded me of an economic incongruity: Black people occupy most of the cells in the U.S. prison system but have very little participation in prison development, construction, and long-term contracts for vending, i.e., supplies, food, equipment,



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etc. Another in a long line of expose' articles on minority programs, the latest uncovering of the prison-building money-pit discloses several issues relevant to the economic disempowerment of black people.

As usual, a history lesson is in order here. Amos Wilson, in his book, "Black on Black Violence," wrote, "Within five years after the Civil War, the black percentage of the prison population went from close to zero to 33 percent. Then, as now, the black prison population performed an economic and political function for the benefit of whites." (Featured in the City Sun, July 18-24, 1990, and written by Clinton Cox, Racism: The Hole in America's Heart.)

Another tidbit of prison his-

tory is found in the 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, that says, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States..." We should pay special attention to the words, "except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted." Need I say more?

It is obvious that black people have been and continue to be the fodder, first for the agricultural industry of the 19th Century, and now for the prison industrial complex of the New Millennium. As I read the article, I thought about our history, and I thought about how we continue to contribute to our own economic demise by serving the new master as front companies, especially in the prison-building industry.

What a shame that some of us would do that, as if black people don't have the capability to stand on our own, collectively, and secure more than front money from prison-building, convention centers, waterfront developments, museums, and stadiums, where there is another economic "Blackout" brewing in Dallas, with the construction of their new sports facility. I am pleased to report

that the two Black firms that were offered "deals" as front companies turned them down and then turned in the companies making the offers.

The article questions whether there are black (or is it minority?) contractors who are being used as front companies, conduits through which miniscule amounts flow to the black company for doing little or no work. These Faustian deals also carry the added benefit of the prime contractor "doing business" with a "minority" firm.

The first problem I saw was the ridiculous notion that women are "minorities." Oh yeah; since when? The U.S. Census says women are the majority population. Thus, when women are declared minorities by "minority programs" they must be referring to white women, right? That's part of the game. In the Charlotte case, "women-owned" businesses received more contracts than black owned businesses - black men and black women combined.

The article stated, "...nearly 21 percent of the prison work will go to minority firms, primarily those owned by women. African American firms, one of the most under-used groups in state construction, are to get 3 percent to 4 percent of the prison work, obtained only after complain-

ing to the state." According to the 2000 census, Charlotte is 33 percent black.

The other problem is something I harp on all the time: black people referring to ourselves as "minorities" in the first place. I have said it as plainly as I can. It's a game, folks. It's a game that we can never win. No one should ever be confused about who we are. The organization fighting against the economic injustice in the Charlotte case is the Carolinas Associated Minority Contractors. Unless this organization comprises Asian, Hispanic, and Indian members, it is a black association.

Bottom-line: The onus is on us. If we can occupy the prisons to such a high degree, why are we not also represented in building them, in maintaining them, in supplying their needs, and in selling them equipment, food, and other necessities? Can a brother get some black-made (and distributed) hair grease and some Shea butter soap and lotion up in here?

We must be more assertive, more aggressive, more determined, and we must build more capacity to take on larger projects.

JAMES E. CLINGMAN is a professor at the University of Cincinnati and former editor of the Cincinnati Herald.