

The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

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EDITORIALS

How to tax for uptown art plan

Consideration of boosting tax on Wachovia property a start; rental-car support is key

Charlotte City Council's decision to raise property taxes to help pay for arts projects surely will set the anti-tax crowd to howling about government's abuse of taxation, but it's necessary to increase the community's quality of life.

City leaders want to get the financing in order for \$150.5 million in facilities that would include new museums and theatres in center city. The catch is they'll need the backing of the car-rental industry, which would've seen its percentage of arts-related taxes rise to 15 or 16 percent. As it is, the city decided to increase car rentals to 14 percent, an increase of only 3 percent that would lower the rental tax's share by an estimated \$11 million.

To make up the difference, the city will tack on a minimum of \$11 million in property taxes earned by Wachovia's South Tryon Street complex. An office tower and several other buildings would include a new Afro-American Cultural Center and Mint Museum, performing arts theater and modern art museum as well as a renovated Discovery Place.

Council members contend going this route is a no-brainer: The extra property tax money will be available because the Wachovia project will be worth as much as \$800 million, more than twice the original projection. That's good news. The bad news is all that conjecture is based on the arts project going up. If Wachovia decides the arts aren't worth the risk and goes strictly with an office tower, the city could lose out on centralizing much of its publicly-funded arts and culture facilities.

Even with those plans, there's still the task of convincing the car rental industry to go along with the plan. It won't be easy. Charlotte visitors don't rent the majority of vehicles here. It's city residents who in essence make the industry profitable. Concessions to the rental industry — including a seat on the tourism and Arts & Science Council boards — are under consideration. No one knows if that'll be enough to win the industry's support.

Wachovia is building a new tower — with or without the arts facilities. We think it's worth the effort to make it possible, because the entire community benefits from programs and services provided by the likes of the Afro Center and Discovery Place. The city's property tax plan has merit and is a good next step to realizing the uptown arts goal. If the rental industry can't be convinced to accept the tax, Charlotte may have to dig a little deeper for financing.

Lawmakers' interests served by staying on speaker's good side

In Raleigh, N.C. politics is always in season, and the fate of House Speaker Jim Black is the topic du jour. But the embattled Mr. Black has support in the Legislative Black Caucus, which staked its position solidly behind him.

Although a handful of fellow Democrats have called for Mr. Black's resignation amidst allegations of campaign finance misdeeds, his African American allies are steadfast in remaining in his camp. Politically speaking, it's easy to see why. Throughout his tenure as speaker, Mr. Black has assigned several African American lawmakers to prominent positions as committee chairs, including Rep. Beverly Earle (Appropriations and Aging) and Pete Cunningham, who as special assistant to Black, is an ex-officio member of every committee. Reps. Earle and Cunningham are from Charlotte; Speaker Black, who is from Matthews, maintains his practice of doing out money to allies through a blank-check contribution scheme funded by optometrists broke no laws.

As a group, the LBC is in good position to leverage its influence. Its 19 House members can be the difference between Mr. Black staying on the job (provided he can avoid prosecution and prison) and being put out to pasture. If there's sufficient momentum to replace him, the caucus could provide the swing votes to pick a successor.

UNC Charlotte political science chairman Ted Arrington put it best last week: "If you jump ship too soon and Black wins, he's going to be (upset). If you stay too long, you miss out on with the (new) speaker. That's a political Catch-22 that happens all the time."

Mr. Black has proven to be a skilled politician who has escaped his share of scrapes. If he manages to wriggle out of this jam, he'll no doubt reward those who've stuck by his side. If not, the LBC had best be ready to look for another benefactor.



Nagin places black voters in a bind

Ray Nagin is in a political bind. A former cable TV executive, he was elected mayor of New Orleans four years ago with strong support from the corporate community. Blacks voted against him and after his first term in office, they remain convinced that they made the right decision.

Entering Saturday's election, the corporate community has abandoned Nagin in favor of two white candidates, Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu and former Chamber of Commerce Chairman Ron Forman. Nagin has no chance of getting re-elected without carrying the black vote, the very people that rejected him four years ago and, many say, he rejected while serving as mayor.

Now the charismatically-challenged Nagin is plastering billboards throughout the city, urging people to vote for "our mayor."

Not only is Nagin in a bind, he has placed black residents of New Orleans in one as well. They are faced between voting for Nagin, knowing that he has not served them well, or helping a white person become mayor of a city with a two-thirds black majority for the first time in nearly three decades.

According to a poll conducted last month by Ed Renwick,

director of the Loyola University Institute of Politics, Landrieu was leading the mayoral field with 27 percent of the vote, followed by Nagin with 26 percent and Forman with 16 percent. More than one in five voters were undecided.

Among Black voters, Nagin led with 41 percent, followed by Landrieu with 28 percent. Forman, who was endorsed by the New Orleans Times-Picayune and is the favorite of big business, received 30 percent of the white vote. With 22 candidates vying for mayor, a May 20 runoff is all but certain.

Landrieu would pose a major challenge for Nagin. His father, the last white mayor of New Orleans, was considered a progressive part of the "New South" and hired African-Americans in unprecedented numbers. Landrieu's sister is a U.S. senator. And more than any other candidate, he has been able to fashion a bi-racial coalition of voters.

Despite early predictions that Hurricane Katrina would wash out black political power in New Orleans, early indications are that black voting strength in this election will be equivalent to what it was four years ago. Although final figures were not available at press time, during the first four days of

early voting last week, African-Americans made up 70 percent of voters. That compares favorably to the 68 percent Black population of New Orleans and 65 percent Black electorate.

To understand the dilemma of black voters in New Orleans, we must remember that it hasn't been all that long that we've had African-Americans control City Hall, even in predominantly black cities like Selma, Ala. and Jackson, Miss. One of the mantras of the modern civil rights movement was: "We want a Black face in a high place."

Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas painfully reminds us that having a Black face in a high place is not enough. If that black face is going to vote against the interests of African-Americans, we're better off with that black face being in a low place. Or, better yet, no place.

For the past month, I have been co-moderating mayoral debates/forums for the candidates in Houston, New Orleans, Atlanta and Baton Rouge. In Houston and New Orleans, Nagin boasted that he is the candidate with the best record and therefore, best qualified to serve as mayor.

He didn't mention that he was MIA for several days, or that he failed to carry out his own evacuation plan for people without transportation. He said simply judge him on his record.

Next step in Hispanic mobilization

The recent mobilization of Hispanics in many cities around the country was an exceptionally important event that has serious political consequences. However, for it to yield the fruit that is intended, there should be some equally serious changes.

First, the mass demonstrations had the advantage of being narrowly targeted to the situation of undocumented workers in a way that tied it to the legislation and provoked clear and direct messages. This movement rejects the attempt to criminalize undocumented immigrants and feels that its contribution to the American economy earns it a place of respect and permanence as citizens in this country.

From my reading of the demonstrations they would accept a guest worker status as outlined in the McCain-Kennedy legislation. This bill, that was approved by the Judiciary Committee 12-6, would allow the nearly 12 million undocumented workers to apply for temporary resident status for six years. Then, they could pay a \$2,000 fine for entering illegally, and if they maintain a

clean work, police, tax and other records they could apply for a green card to work legally and get in line for citizenship.

This bill, however, was derailed by Right Wing Republicans who want to scuttle anything that looks like an amnesty program, which is what they consider the "guest worker" bill. And so, they began offering amendments on the floor to what supporters of McCain-Kennedy thought was a closed deal.

This was evidence that there are two wings of the Republican party that are irreconcilable on this issue: one which favors growers and corporations who exploit cheap labor and the other wing which has an unforgiving (some say racist) "law and order" posture toward undocumented immigrants. This conflict means that nothing is likely to be done.

This puts the Hispanic movement in some difficulty, because what was an advantage of the mobilization risks becoming a liability because it may not result in obtaining a quick legislative victory and thus, the fires of the movement could go out.

This means that the organizing agenda needs to capture the moment and to be broadened in ways that bring on coalition partners, both among documented workers

and Hispanic-American citizens, as well as other immigrants of color and Black Americans.

The stakes are high. Speakers at the rallies said that today they would protest today, but in November they would vote. In fact, if nothing happens to move their agenda, their anger about that should be stoked as the fuel which turns on voter turnout in big numbers.

The real prospects are that a strong Hispanic vote, combined with those of other groups in a coalition, could help to change the political complexion of the U.S. Congress and set up conditions for lightening to strike in 2008 as well.

The possibility exists. Between 1998 and 2002, Hispanics increased their political participation substantially. Registration increased by nearly 20 percent and voting increased 10 percent. If this rate of increase takes place again this year, Hispanic turnout could match black turnout, but the combined turnout of both could add a powerful blow to the political system as it is.

This depends of course, on whether the anger of Hispanic voters causes them to overcome their experimentation with the Right wing sham politics of the Republican party which

The record shows that until shortly before Nagin filed for mayor, he had been a registered Republican. And while in office, he committed political suicide by endorsing an unsuccessful Republican candidate for governor. With his ranting and cursing immediately following Katrina, Gov. Kathleen Blanco, a Democrat, wasn't inclined to work hand-in-hand with a mayor who had sought her defeat.

Now, Nagin wants blacks to trust him to be "our mayor." Yet, he has said nothing on the campaign trail or in his position papers that would indicate that the Ray Nagin today is any different from the Ray Nagin that abandoned African-Americans before and during Katrina.

Nagin shouldn't get a pass simply because he's black. We've gone down that road too often with too many politicians. Let all of them compete for the black vote. Let's hear all of the plans for restoring the Lower 9th Ward and making sure black business owners get a fair share of city jobs and contracts. It should be on that basis that a candidate receives our vote. Not because they have placed us in a political bind.

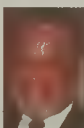
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Black



Earle



Cunningham



RON WALTERS

fooled them and some Blacks with gay-marriage as an issue in 2004, leading Hispanics to give them 45 percent of their vote.

This mobilization might also cause Hispanic men to turnout in big numbers as it did for blacks after the Million Man March of 1995, when the following year, two million more black males went to the polls. Like blacks, Hispanic women vote on an average of 5 percent or more than Hispanic men, but the mobilization that is occurring could become a strong motivation for their men to step up and vote.

I understand the problems that immigration has caused low-wage black male workers. But in some quarters blacks have significant resources and it is possible to negotiate an agenda which would find them supporting Hispanic issues of legalization and access to human rights and Hispanics supporting fair access by blacks to low-wage jobs.

The leadership of both groups and indeed, others that are relevant, need to get down to work. The stake are high.

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