

Congressional Black Caucus theme has it right

I like the theme of this year's Congressional Black Caucus week of events, "Changing Course, Confronting Crises, Continuing the Legacy," because by telling us what time it is, it offers three critical things that we have to do.

• **Changing course.** First, it is necessary that this country change and that the black community help it to do so.

As the favorable ratings of George Bush languish in the political basement with 60-65 percent of the American people saying he is not doing a good job and the same is roughly true of the Congress and the Supreme Court, these are signs that the American people have had it with the conservative era. And although they probably would not say that they are ready to chuck conservatism, they are being pummeled by the issues that the conservative movement has let loose upon the nation, symbolized by the Iraq war, the Katrina crisis, high energy prices, fiscal irresponsibility and a host of other problems.



RON WALTERS

Normally, when people are asked whether the country is on the "right track or wrong track" and they answer in public opinion polls that we are on the wrong track, you can expect some type of change. Normally, when they are asked their view of the Congress, they may say they don't like the Congress, but they like their own representative. Today, they don't like either one. In 1994, when the ratings of both the president and the Congress were low, Republicans experienced a net shift of 52 seats in the House and six in the Senate, causing America to change course. That must happen today.

• **Confronting crises:** It is clear then, that the nation needs to confront the crises that are bringing down the credibility of its leadership, with its perverse direction, both here and around the world. In that, blacks can help as they did in Joe Lieberman's defeat, by leading a vigorous campaign to make the war a voting issue. But blacks themselves must also clean up their own house and change course by confronting the crises of HIV/AIDS, the crisis of black churches that are chasing the dollar, the popular culture that elevates negative images of our people, the failure to save and do sound financial planning, continuing our fear of young black males rather than placing love and discipline in their lives, and other things.

Most of all, we need to create a sense of our own politics with an agenda that we can campaign on, with a program of accountability to our agenda, and with an independent stance from any party. More about that later.



McKinney

Although my take is that the CBC is doing a good job overall, elected leadership can't confront all these matters. We desperately need independent black leaders outside of the political institutions that are free from the restraints of rules governing their behavior. Rules and expectations of behavior that, for example, have thrust Rep. Cynthia McKinney of Georgia from her seat, would be expected and applauded coming from any civil rights leader. So, we need leaders, as Rep John Lewis would say, who can "get in the way."



Gordon

Even Lewis can't do so as effectively as he did 40 years ago because of where he is. And Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, Danny Baskewell, Wendell Anthony, C. T. Vivian, Bruce Gordon, Marc Morial and others can, we hear voices calling them out, wishing they would go away because they are speaking truth to power, disturbing the peace, and in the process, creating some embarrassment for those whose distance from the black community give them the illusion that they are free.

• **Continuing the legacy:** So, we must continue the legacy, but enrich it by the struggles of today and the leadership of a new generation. There is some debate in our community about whether the tactics of old are still necessary, but since that question is most often not ours to decide, we must retain all the arrows in our quiver. For example, if the Voting Rights Act had not been reauthorized, we would have had to go to the streets, opposition to the war cannot take place in political institutions confused about it; forcing Katrina on the national agenda cannot be done just by "making nice."

As we honor the sacrifices of those who have recently passed on: Coretta Scott King, Rosa Parks, C. Delores Tucker, and so many other freedom fighters we also demand that everyone who can, step up into the batter box of history to help Change Course, Confront Crises and Continue the Legacy. In that, I have inordinate faith in what I have seen of the generation coming on that the struggle will continue, until victory is won.

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What difference does a year make?

In the lives of many of the people affected by Hurricane Katrina, the answer is a resounding, "No difference at all!" One year after the levees broke in New Orleans and after the storm surge hit the Gulf Coast, hundreds of thousands are still waiting, still suffering, and still crying out for justice and relief. If a stranger visited some areas of New Orleans, he or she would probably think the tragedy occurred a week or two ago. Yes, it's just that bad.

I had the opportunity to visit New Orleans on the "anniversary" of Katrina's destruction and the resulting levee failures. The juxtaposition of the rebuilding and revitalization of downtown and other tourist attractions against the backdrop of abject poverty and hopelessness among folks walking the streets and residing in neighborhoods that were destroyed by Katrina, was overwhelming.

One of the most egregious areas of discrimination against blacks in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast is employment, which was my primary purpose for going there on the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. After everything that happened a year ago, black people are taking a double-whammy; they are being overlooked and denied employment to rebuild their own city, many times in favor of folks who have never lived there and do not even live in this country.

I participated in a press conference coordinated by Choose Black America, a newly-formed organization, that dealt with the practice of contractors passing over and laying off black workers to hire, in some cases, illegal immigrants to whom they can pay a lower wage. My contention is that folks who live and used to live in the affected areas of the Gulf Coast should have the right of first refusal to the clean-up, restoration, and construction work.

The bottom-line is more important than those on the bottom. Broken casinos are more important than broken lives and shattered families, broken sidewalks in front of plush hotels are more important than the broken hearts of the disenfranchised and poverty-stricken, and it is quite obvious that although we can "lose" \$9 billion in Iraq, still unaccounted for, by the way, it is much more difficult to "find" \$9 billion dollars, much less the \$100 billion promised, to restore the lives of the people along the Gulf Coast. I know, I know, it's on the way, right?

The people in the most trouble are disproportionately black, overwhelmingly poor, and they are American citizens, yet we cannot seem to get money to them the same way we got it to Iraq, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and to the families of the 911 victims. MLK said we begin to die the day we remain silent about things that matter. If we fail to speak out on this situation and the discrimination that is now taking place, we are in sad shape.

I spoke out about it. At the news conference, I said, "I have come here to speak on behalf of the black people of New Orleans. I have come with righteous indignation at the disparity and outright corruption that continues to plague our people, even in light of one of the most tragic events in the history of this country. One year ago, and even now, black people are treated as if we do just don't count."

Despite the number of laborers needed to revive this city, the opportunity for black people to work on rebuilding their own neighborhoods is being stymied by greedy and corrupt politicians, corporate execs, and contractors.

What happened in this city one year ago - after the storm - was reprehensible. It was and is the antithesis of all things moral, all things decent, and all things right. Now, today, we face the same immorality, the same greed, and the same lack of concern and "compassion" for people who have been through and survived hell on earth. Yes, we should be ashamed, but we should also be so disturbed that we act, collectively, to right the wrongs that have grown out of this tragedy.

Again, black people are sent to the end of the line or passed over altogether for work that should be theirs by priority. There is no excuse for denying those who live in New Orleans the first right of refusal for any work that must be done to rebuild their city. And, they should be paid a living wage for their labor.

I call on the authorities to stop this illegal, immoral, unfair, and unconscionable treatment of black people in New Orleans. After being corralled like cattle, hunted down like wild animals, abandoned in what would be a stinking, watery grave, turned back at gunpoint by their neighbors across the bridge while trying to get away from the flood, relegated to yet another Diaspora, this time in the U.S., separated from their children and loved ones and unaware of their whereabouts, used as political fodder, and now being thrown on the trash heap of discriminatory unemployment, don't you think they deserve our best?

And if what is happening to them now is our best, then someone has to explain why the "least of these brethren" are being treated in such a manner?

We must reverse this latest injustice against black people once and for all, and we have the opportunity to do so in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast. We can rebuild the cities and the lives of those who were so adversely impacted by Katrina simply by doing the right thing for the right reason. Speak up, speak out, and let's not allow this injustice to continue.

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JAMES CLINGMAN

Realistic health care for black Americans

By Harry C. Alford

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

During a visit by a delegation of the Congressional Black Caucus, Cuba President Fidel Castro offered free healthcare assistance to residents in the Mississippi Delta and free medical school education to American students who promised to work in underserved American communities.

It seemed insulting or sarcastic but he was sincere and the need is real. Here we are the richest nation on earth and we suffer from healthcare issues and cannot deliver an adequate system to our own populace. There is a big concern by U.S. businesses about a viable workforce that is healthy and educated. It is becoming a scourge and is going to doom our competitiveness if we don't address it immediately.

A Cuban of African descent has a lifespan that is seven years longer than his American counterpart. Sickle Cell Anemia barely exists in Cuba and is totally under control. HIV/AIDS is not a major issue, even though sex flows in Cuba as well as any other place in the world. All Cubans get two physical examinations per year. All healthcare is free and totally accessible. Consequently, Cubans have a very healthy population that is also at least 92 percent literate. This is the envy of American business.

Unless we get a handle on our situation, the United States' position of greatness is doomed. Of course, the African-American segment of this country will be the first to hit "bottom" and will experience the lowest rung of each demographic. The hurricanes last year made the Gulf Coast situation even worse. New Orleans is operating with only two decent hospitals. Too many of us die too soon and suffer too much needlessly. The dire situation of healthcare in black communities has been ignored for too long. We cannot incubate our own businesses if we cannot have a workforce that is healthy and physically dependable. This is our challenge.

Necessity is the breeder of invention and some entrepreneurs have begun to address this void. One such innovator is Intrepid Holdings Inc. This Houston-based firm is traded over the counter on the NASDAQ exchange as IIPD. There are fewer than two dozen Black-owned firms that are publicly traded and Intrepid Holdings Inc. is one of them. The Healthcare Group division of this company is starting to put health clinics into urban neighborhoods that will provide affordable 24-hour service to the public. Instead of going to an emergency room at the local hospital and waiting hours upon hours, one can walk into a clinic at the time they desire and get timely service.

Wondering about your blood pressure, diabetes, asthma, etc.? Just pay \$25-\$40 for the service. Get your prescription needs fulfilled at an adjoining 24-hour pharmacy. Return as many times as you like and know that your healthcare needs have an alternative to the expensive, hard-to-access regimen that all Americans, especially the needy, have had to endure.

These new "Healthy Access" clinics will start opening throughout the nation during the fall. The first clinics will open in some Wal-Mart stores in Texas, the Washington, D.C.-area, Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia. They are expected to grow at the rate of two stores per week within the Wal-Mart system. Houston will also allow Healthy Access clinics within its borders in the near future. All cities can contact Intrepid Holdings and inquire about the possibility of clinics being established in their needy areas. City administrators and healthcare executives can simply go to www.intrepidholdings.com for contact information.

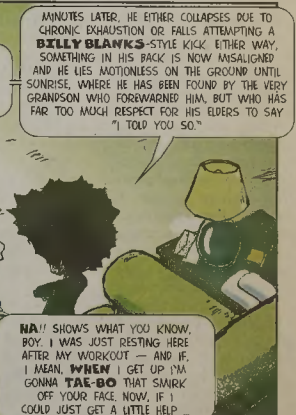
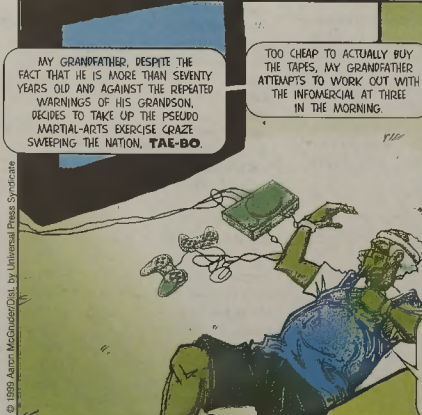
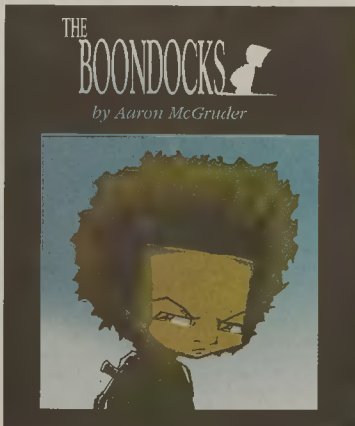
This is just one good example of the opportunities that exist in addressing our healthcare crisis. There are a few other companies attempting to do what Healthy Access is doing but they are not minority owned and, perhaps, don't directly relate to what the trials in healthcare exactly are for those of us in urban areas or blighted rural communities.

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(SIGH) LET'S SEE IF I CAN GUESS WHAT HAPPENED HERE

MY GRANDFATHER, DESPITE THE FACT THAT HE IS MORE THAN SEVENTY YEARS OLD AND AGAINST THE REPEATED WARNINGS OF HIS GRANDSON, DECIDES TO TAKE UP THE PSEUDO MARTIAL-ARTS EXERCISE CRAZE SWEEPING THE NATION, TAE-BO.

TOO CHEAP TO ACTUALLY BUY THE TAPES, MY GRANDFATHER ATTEMPTS TO WORK OUT WITH THE INFOMERCIAN AT THREE IN THE MORNING.

ANNOTS LATER, HE EITHER COLLAPSES DUE TO CHRONIC EXHAUSTION OR FALLS ATTEMPTING A BILLY BLANKS-STYLE KICK. EITHER WAY, SOMETHING IN HIS BACK IS NOW UNSAUNGED AND HE LIES MOTIONLESS ON THE GROUND UNTIL SONRISE, WHERE HE HAS BEEN FOUND BY THE VERY GRANDSON WHO FOREWARNED HIM, BUT WHO HAS FAR TOO MUCH RESPECT FOR HIS ELDERS TO SAY "I TOLD YOU SO."

NA!! SHOWS WHAT YOU KNOW, BOY. I WAS JUST RESTING HERE AFTER MY WORKOUT - AND IF I HEAR WHEN I GET UP IN THE MORNING, I'LL GO ONNA TAE-BO THAT SHIRK OFF YOUR FACE NOW, IF I COULD JUST GET A LITTLE HELP.