

OPINION/LETTERS

Winston-Salem Chronicle

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Strength in Voting

The Rev. Jesse Jackson is still able to mobilize the masses. He still realizes the power of the ballot, too.

Jackson, twice a Democratic candidate for president, hammered home the power-of-the-ballot message twice in two days over the weekend at the 18th annual N.C. Black Leadership Caucus. Saturday night, as the keynote speaker at the caucus banquet, Jackson said that there were 500,000 unregistered voters in North Carolina.

He also told those in attendance that they should not let their churches off the hook and should suggest that their ministers hold voter registration drives during Sunday worship services.

The next day, Jackson put his money where his mouth is — he did just that. Before he preached at Phillips Chapel Baptist Church near the Kimberley Park community, the charismatic Jackson had 27 people — young and old — to march down the church aisles and register to vote.

Those 27 votes could spell the difference in some elections come November.

Youths Score Big

Not only was it good to see scores of African-American youths take leadership roles in the state Black Leadership Caucus, it was also necessary.

We are at the onset of the 21st century, and lest the sun set both literally and figuratively on the American century, this nation will need our young people — and those who share the concerns of our youth — at the forefront as we continue to struggle against mediocrity, social blindness, ignorance and plain old-fashioned bigotry and racism.

If we are to rise as a people, our African-American youths must play an integral part in the direction of the total African-American community.

While we are preparing our youths for the 21st century, we must show them the importance of learning compassion and excellence, fairness and no less inclusiveness, and the freedom to speak and the disposition to listen.

We must also help them to understand the importance of subduing their physical passion until they are mature enough to accept the responsibility of creating a child.

These are complex times in which we live and for the African-American community to prosper, we must ensure that our youths are equipped with the necessary tools to galvanize the community — economically and politically.

And both are equally important.

What good is it to be able to sit down at the lunch counter if you haven't two bits to order a malt shake.

Open Government

When the General Assembly took a step recently to ensure a more open government in North Carolina, it was a positive step for the public.

These changes agreed to by the state House and Senate will give newspapers better tools to fulfill the role as watchdogs of the government. The changes also make it more difficult for public bodies, such as county commissioners, city councils, school boards and any others to conduct the public's business behind closed doors.

In Forsyth County, as we're sure in other municipalities across the state, local boards and commissions have been known to skirt the law and deny the public the right to know by carelessly and easily going into "executive session" without legitimate reason.

Their rationale, most argue, is that a candidate for a post will be less inclined to apply if his name gets out. Or that industry won't locate here if word gets out of their interest. There is little evidence that that is the case.

Most public officials just feel more comfortable discussing a matter out of earshot of the public.

Democracy, however, is not designed for the comfort of public officials, but to keep government honest by keeping it non-secretive. All that really should matter most is whether the public is comfortable.

Did You Know ...

That 29 percent of all women killed in 1992 were slain by their husbands or boyfriends, while only 4 percent of men killed were slain by their wife or girlfriend. Overall, 42 percent of all homicide victims in 1992 were killed by someone they knew.

We Need to Put Prayer Back into Our Schools

To the Editor:

I grew up in Winston-Salem. Though I have been away throughout my adult life, I do keep up with the activities in and about town. I am very concerned for my home community. There are some things we must correct if we are to save our children. We can turn things around if we put prayer back in public schools. When we took prayer out of the schools, we suffered as individual communities and subsequently as a nation.

I wish that we would give prayer another chance. I invite my family, friends and loved ones there in North Carolina to join our campaign to put prayer back in the nation's public schools.

I must salute Family Services Inc. of Winston-Salem for showing the way. I attended the grand opening of the new Sarah Austin Headstart Center, formerly Skyland School. During the ceremony, a board member prayed a dedicatory prayer which caused me a stir, for I recalled immediately that the U.S. Supreme Court had outlawed prayer in public schools.

While reading a back issue of my *Chronicle*, I noticed that the dynamic and courageous leadership of Family Service Inc. is alive and well. The *Chronicle's* article stated that one reason given for the school being out of compliance was that one of the teachers had been caught by federal investigators reading the Bible during the children's nap time. Right on Brothers and Sisters. Keep up the good work.

Wilma Martin

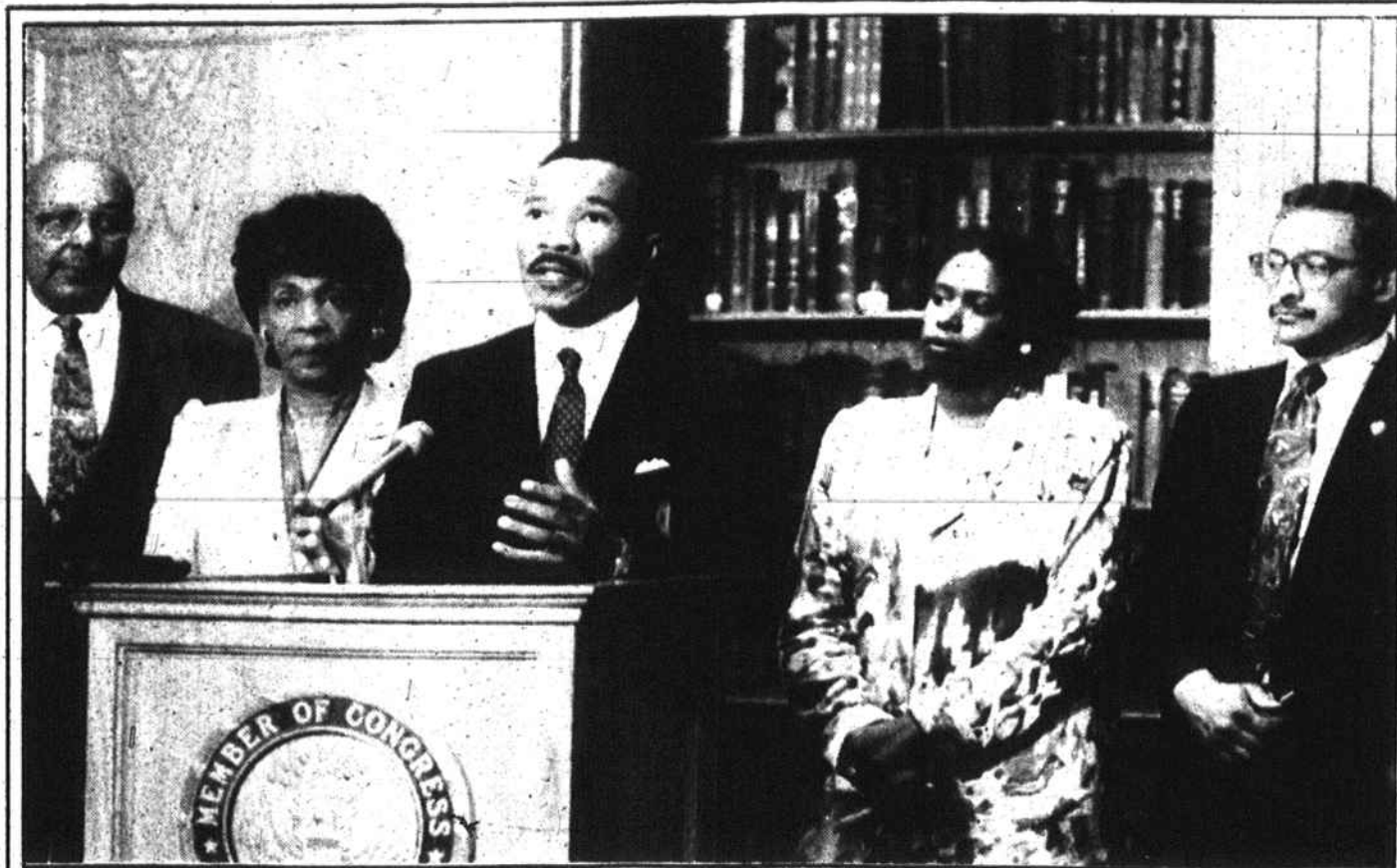
Board of Education
 Ithaca (N.Y.) City School District

Who's in Control

To the Editor:

As I write this letter, I think of my reasons and my motives. Just like most people I can respond to something that I've experienced recently. In the local school system, I have three years experience in the field of substitute teaching. From first-hand knowledge, I know that there is a very excellent, high quality level of education that is offered in the Winston-Salem Forsyth County school system.

There are some dedicated teachers and administrators, but not enough in decision-making posi-



Rep. Kweisi Mfume, D-Md., chairman of the Congressional Black caucus, center, accompanied by other members of the caucus, meets reporters on Capitol Hill Thursday, to discuss the Racial Justice Act which is part of President Clinton's crime bill package. From (l to r) Rep. Louis Stokes, D-Ohio; Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif.; Mfume; Rep. Cynthia McKinney, D-Ga.; and Rep. Robert Scott, D-Va.

CHRONICLE MAILBAG Our Readers Speak Out

tions. Because of this situation, you have a few parents that are in control of the teacher's classroom. Students know this and attempt to do as they please.

When I was personally involved in a classroom takeover, I found out how the system works. There was never a meeting between the principal, assistant principals, parent, student, other students and the secured teacher. I later found out, after my court date that Mr. Weldon Idol, who is in charge of the substitute teachers list, had called other schools to inquire of my work record and informed these schools not to give me any more assignments until this matter was cleared up. I feel that the principal of the school and Mr. Idol could have talked with me. This matter has not been mentioned in the media until now. But until now, I had to deal with lost days of work, rumored to have been fired, and accused of assaulting a student. He had to pronounce me not guilty

before I could once again feel needed and blessed to be an educator. How nice would it have been if the school and Mr. Idol to have informed me with a call of confidence and state, "We reviewed your work track record and reviewed this students' behavior track record and we stand behind you 100%. Mr. Jones, and this would be a good opportunity for us to focus in on classroom behavior and we won't tolerate teachers being abused." This problem is not going to go away until the school board and others on down to the classroom teacher stand up and let parents and students know who runs the school.

Recently, the N.C. Attorney General spoke about the need to change juvenile laws.

Not only is this necessary, but it needs to be done now. A youth that is 14 years old in 1994 is well beyond that same age of when the original juvenile laws were written. I found out the hard way about trying to file a charge against a juve-

nile. The clerk's office sent me to the juvenile division. The juvenile division sent me to the Sheriff's office. The Sheriff's office informed me that I would have to get the assigned officer to do the necessary paperwork. This officer never contacted me. I'm very thankful for the outcome of my situation. I hope that there will be some career educators and administrators that can look and learn from how they do things also.

To this day, right continues to be right and wrong is wrong. When children are wrong we have a responsibility to correct them and discipline them.

Today's child is no more or any more valuable than children born yesterday. Let's get back to the day when any adult could correct undesirable behavior in children.

You didn't have to be a relative, only that your lessons were pure.

Ricky A. Jones

NAACP is Alive And Well Under Ben Chavis

Although I am a life member of the NAACP and gained my initial introduction to the civil rights movement as a youngster in the NAACP, I had never attended a national convention of the Association. Because of the constant barrage of media attacks on the Rev. Benjamin F. Chavis and the apparent controversy about his leadership, I made a special effort to attend the 85th annual convention of the NAACP. I wanted to get a first hand feel for the dynamic of the association, an up-close assessment of the rank and file sentiments about the leadership of Dr. Chavis and the new course he is boldly charting for the NAACP.

What I discovered is an NAACP vastly different from what has been portrayed in the white media over the last year. Judging from the stream of negative media stories the NAACP was in disarray with widespread disaffection with the leadership of Chavis and William Gibson, chairman of the board. Indeed, according to the media analyst and pundits, a major challenge to Chavis and Gibson would be mounted at the convention and their ouster was imminent. Nothing could have been further from the truth. As I moved among the delegates I found great enthusiasm for the new direction being blazed by Chavis and an overwhelming almost unanimous support for his leadership. The mood was optimistic, vibrant and almost celebrative in terms of peoples' perceptions of the future of the Association.

Nothing captured the mood and sentiment of the delegates more than the opening mass meeting of the convention. As Gibson introduced Chavis to deliver his address to the delegates and the nation, the convention erupted with a thunderous and sustained standing ovation. Hundreds of delegates left their seats and raced to the front of the auditorium with banners and signs proclaiming their support for Chavis in a massive demonstration. At the very center of this impressive demonstration were scores of young people, the future of the NAACP and the Black Nation.

When Chavis mounted the podium, he did not disappoint. Citing a 14 percent increase in

corporate contributions over 1993 and a dramatic growth in the NAACP membership from 480,000 to 690,000, Chavis declared that the NAACP is alive and well under his leadership. Acknowledging that the Association has a debt of nearly \$3 million, Chavis reminded the delegates that throughout its history the NAACP has always been in debt. He challenged the black community and its allies to provide the necessary financial resources to enable the Association to engage the battle for civil rights/human rights unencumbered by worries about money. Nothing he said, however, would halt the historic march of the NAACP towards freedom and justice for African Americans and the oppressed into the 21st century.

Solidly reaffirming the new direction which he has charted along with board chairman William Gibson, Chavis outlined several major priorities for the Association over the next few years: continuing the process of creating unity in the national African American community through the Leadership Summit; the initiation of a youth entrepreneurial training program; a campaign to save historically black colleges and universities; challenging institutional racism in public school systems; continued efforts to combat violence, drugs and substance abuse in the black community, and the development of a national constituency for Africans in the U.S. As he outlined these priorities the delegates roared their approval. Clearly sensing the overwhelming support of the delegates, Chavis challenged his detractors to get on board the "freedom train" or get out the way.

At the second mass meeting Gibson spoke to the delegates and the community. When he finished his address there was absolutely no question where he stood in term of his support for Chavis and the new direction of the NAACP. He suggested that the critical crises we face as

Africans in America demands a new direction and bold uncompromising leadership to move black America into the 21st century. It was clear that Chavis and Gibson comprise a dynamic partnership and leadership team determined to reassert the relevance of the oldest and largest civil rights organization in black America.

When the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson was invited to the podium for remarks, he rose to the occasion by emphatically embracing the leadership of the NAACP and passionately defending the



VANTAGE POINT

By RON DANIELS

Leadership Summit process. No one, he said, had the right to tell black leaders and organizations who to meet with within the framework of a democratic process. Jackson lambasted the media for constantly focusing on diversions while dismissing the critical crisis in the black community and refusing to provide significant coverage of black-led initiatives to resolve the crisis. Jackson's eloquent defense of and embrace of Gibson and Chavis was a signal to friend and foe alike that a new era of operational unity is dawning in black America.

By the time the 85th annual NAACP convention had concluded it was clear that Chavis has not only withstood the furious assault of the media and the naysayers, the delegates had jubilantly proclaimed that this leadership was just what the doctor ordered to sustain the health and well being of the Association. The NAACP is alive and well under Benjamin F. Chavis and black people by the thousands are getting on board a new Freedom Train destined to carry black America into the 21st century.

(Ron Daniels is a national syndicated columnist.)