

OPINION

Florida is fired up!

THE CHRONICLE

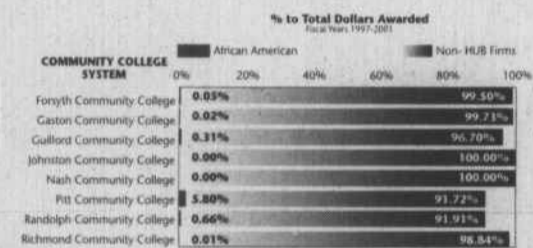
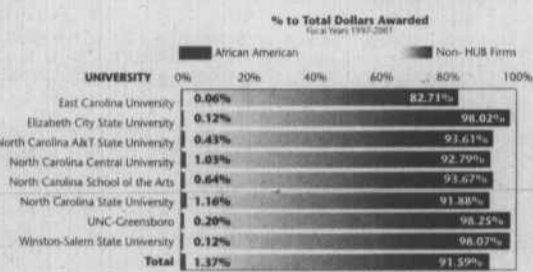
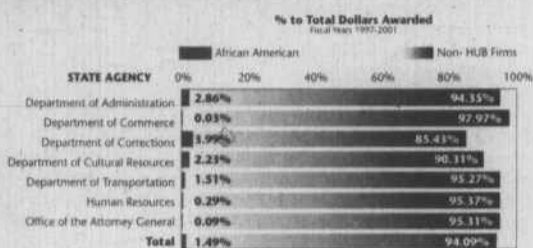
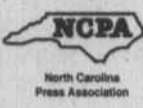
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Disparities persist



Ernie Pitt
This & That

The N.C. Department of Administration has received a final report from MGT of America on the disparity that exists between Historically Underutilized Businesses (HUBs) and non-HUBs. The disparity study lists all minorities. However, for my purposes I have pulled out only the African-American portion and a sampling from three different industries: universities, community colleges and government agencies.

Needless to say, the report reveals an appalling utilization of minorities on government construction projects. Even the agency that is supposed to be promoting utilization of minority-owned businesses has a poor record. The study covers a five-year period between 1997 and 2001. If anything has changed since 2001, I would be surprised.

Remarkably, I don't think the study has been publicly announced nor have I heard anyone other than Rep. Earline Parnon expressing any concerns about the results. Gwen Swinson, who is the secretary of the Department of Administration and who oversaw part of an \$83 million construction budget, utilized less than 3 percent minority-owned businesses. By the way, she is African-American.

It makes me wonder if all of the marching and boycotting and getting arrested and hosed and half eaten alive by German shepherd dogs and praying and sacrificing and doing without and getting beat over the head, means anything to African-Americans once they individually have overcome. What about the rest of us? And what about the shoulders

upon whom they stand? Did Mrs. Parks go through all of her trials and tribulations for nothing? Did she and Dr. King go through all of that so that one person could simply...get a job? Come on, y'all. We can do better than that.

Now, I could be wrong; however, I am not aware of any group that is currently advocating greater use of minority-owned businesses. One might say, "Well, that's their problem," and you might be right. However, I do believe that some of those persons who are in positions of authority who happen to be a minority ought to do some advocating too. I would venture to say that that is a part of their job. Otherwise, there is no difference in them or anyone else. If they are not going to try to make a difference for us, then why are they there? To kick our behinds like the rest of them?

I do realize and understand how institutionalized racism works. When the institution is racist, in order for those who work within the institution to blend in, they have to assume the values of the institution. They start doing what everyone else does, including kicking minorities in the behind. In this case not advocating the use of minority-owned businesses and even recommending that the institution NOT use them. Thinking that because the institution is racist, if they are racist then they are sure to prosper within the institution. The sad thing about this phenomenon is that those who are engaging in this activity are not really aware of what they're doing. Additionally, a lot of them are treated like ol' mules. When an ol' mule ceases to be of value to the owner, he just takes that ol' mule out back, shoots it and gets another one.

Lord forgive me. Amen!

Ernie Pitt is the publisher of *The Chronicle* and the chairman of the Housing Authority of Winston-Salem Board of Commissioners. E-mail him at erpitt@wschronicle.com.



Ron Walters
Guest Columnist

Being in Florida and talking to people for several days recently, it was clear to me that black folks, white folks, Haitian folks and others are still apprehensive about how or whether their vote-will count in Florida in November.

The recent primary election in Florida was won handily by John Kerry and George Bush on the Democratic and Republican sides respectively. But more than 50 percent of Democratic voters told the exit pollsters that Kerry should pick John Edward as his running mate over Florida favorite son, Sen. Bob Graham, who polled just 20 percent as the prospective vice presidential pick.

Edwards picked up 10 percent of the vote, even though he has stopped his campaign. And despite the fact that the voting seemed to go well, there is still some anxiety over the new process. Because of what had happened in the 2000 election, Gov. Jeb Bush made the first proposals to his Legislature to begin to reform the electoral system of any state.

Legislation was quickly formulated, with the input of the Florida Black Legislative Caucus, passed and signed into law by the governor. The only question then was whether Jeb Bush would provide the money for the new machines. The initial money from the state was important because the federal law that was subsequently passed (Help America Vote Act) provided money to states on a dollar-for-dollar matching basis. In short, the money came, the machines were purchased, but there were still problems.

In Broward County, for example, in the 2002 off-year elections, there were still big problems with missing or moved polling places, machines that did not work right, long lines and the like. In the most



recent primaries on March 9, however, voters used the new touch-screen voting machines in several places and the process seemingly went off without much of a problem.

Now the biggest problem observed by most reform advocates is that the machines don't give you a receipt to show that you voted. So, you could vote, but your vote still not be counted because of an error or purposeful change of the result. This is possible because the code that programs the machine is known only to the election officials and the district supervisors.

Ironically, electronic voting could make it much easier to steal an election than with paper ballots. Broward County Mayor Ilene Lieberman said that she wanted a receipt for voting for, "the same reason I don't put cash in the ATM without asking for a receipt."

However, the new Jeb Bush appointee, Florida Secretary of State Glenda Hood, was defensive about the criticism, saying that paper receipts are unnecessary because the machines can print out an audit at the end of election day. And she says that

you can't trust receipts because whatever mistake you put in is what you get back. Well, that's the point. If there is a mistake, there is a record of it. In fact, U.S. Rep. Robert Wexler has sued state election officials alleging that the machines lack the ability to provide a paper trail that is needed for a recount.

Furthermore, the Florida machines are programmed to allow voters to use either English or Spanish, but they are not programmed to allow voters to use Creole, the language commonly spoken by Haitian immigrants.

There are many recent immigrants from Haiti whose command of English is not very good. But the use of Creole would capture most of that population, since they are bilingual. Empowering the Haitian community to vote accurately will be important because many in that community, a taxicab driver said, are angry with the Bush administration for sitting on their hands and letting Aristide be driven from power. So, they are eager to have the opportunity to drive Bush from power with the ballot!

Getting all of this right is

important because there were signs that Kerry is preparing to engage Bush in a big way over Florida's electoral votes. Florida now has two more votes than it had in 2000, now 27, which makes it an even bigger prize.

Florida is winnable because that increase in electoral votes reflects an increase in population and while not many more Cubans have come in, immigrants from other Latin American countries, less conservative than Cubans, have entered since the 2000 election. In 1992, Clinton pulled his troops out of Florida and lost it, but in 1996 he won it. The fact that Gore probably won the popular vote in Florida as he did in the rest of the country should give Kerry confidence that Florida is winnable.

Ron Walters is the Distinguished Leadership Scholar, director of the African American Leadership Institute, in the Academy of Leadership and professor of government and politics at the University of Maryland-College Park. His latest book is "White Nationalism, Black Interests" (Wayne State University Press).

The 'Big Lie' about Kerry's record



George E. Curry
Guest Columnist

With public opinion polls showing that if the presidential election were held today, Sen. John Kerry would defeat President George Bush, Republicans have launched a Big Lie campaign to distort the presumptive Democratic nominee's record on military spending. Obviously, they believe that if you tell the same lie over and over, people will eventually believe it.

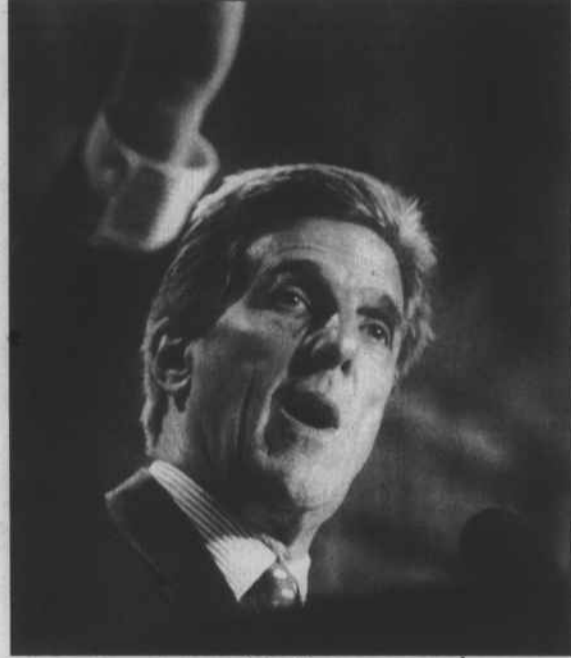
That would be bad enough. But to make matters worse, some of the country's best journalists are allowing these lies to go unchallenged.

Research by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), a New York-based media monitoring organization, reports that Kerry is being depicted as one who is repeatedly voting against military funding when that's not the case.

For example, the report notes that Ralph Reed, the former head of the Christian Coalition and now a Bush-Cheney campaign strategist, appeared on CNN (Feb. 3) and described Kerry's record in the Senate as "voting to dismantle 27 weapons systems, including the MX missile, the Pershing missile, the B-1, the B-2 stealth bomber, the F-16 fighter jet, cutting another 18 programs, slashing intelligence spending by \$2.5 billion, and voting to freeze defense spending for seven years."

Blitzer reacted by turning to Ann Lewis of the Democratic National Committee and saying, "I think it's fair to say, Ann, that there's been some opposition research done."

NBC anchor Tom Brokaw swallowed the line when he said on MSNBC (March 2), "...The vice president just today was talk-



John Kerry

ing about (Kerry's) votes against the CIA budget, for example, intelligence budgets and also weapons systems. Isn't he going to be very vulnerable come the fall when national security is such a big issue in this country?"

The usually reliable Judy Woodruff was transformed into a parrot in an interview with Rep. Norm Dicks of Washington (Feb. 25). She said, "The Republicans list something like 13 different weapon systems that they say the record shows Senator Kerry voting against. The Patriot missile, the B-1 bomber, the Trident missile and on and on and on."

In his response, Dicks did what Woodruff, Brokaw and Blitzer had failed to do: He admitted that Kerry was being attacked for a single vote on the Pentagon's 1991 appropriations bill. No member of the media trio pointed out that 16 senators voted against that bill, including five Republicans, or that 10 of the 13 purport-

ed votes against military spending were part of the 1991 defense appropriations bill.

Woodruff was so caught off guard by Dicks' response that she said, "Are you saying that all these weapon systems were part of one defense appropriations bill in 1991?"

That's exactly what he was saying.

Vice President Cheney told Fox News' Brit Hume: "What we're concerned about, what I am concerned about, is (Kerry's) record in the United States Senate, where he clearly has over the years adopted a series of positions that indicated a desire to cut the defense budget, to cut the intelligence budget, to eliminate many major weapons programs."

Hume failed to note that Cheney was criticizing Kerry for a position he had taken around that same period.

In fact, Fred Kaplan of Slate, the online site, noted that Cheney

served as the elder George Bush's secretary of defense. He quotes Cheney as telling Congress during that period: "You've squabbled and sometimes bickered and horse-traded and ended up forcing me to spend money on weapons that don't fill a vital need in these times of tight budgets and new requirements."

He was particularly critical of members of Congress who engage in pork barrel politics by pressuring the Defense Department to move forward on the development of the M-1 tank and the F-14 and F-16 fighters and other weapons that "we have enough of."

Although military spending represents only 20 percent of the federal budget, it eats up approximately half of all federal discretionary spending.

With so much being spent on the military, growing federal deficits fueled by tax cuts that primarily benefit the wealthy, Bush is particularly vulnerable on domestic issues. A recent USA Today/CNN poll shows Kerry leading Bush 52 percent to 44 percent, largely because the public believes Kerry will do a better job of handling such issues as the economy, health care, education and Social Security. Bush's overall rating in the USA Today poll was 49 percent, matching his lowest rating in late January.

Republicans plan to spend \$133 million over the next few months to "redefine" Kerry. If this is typical of the way they plan to do that, they are not trying to "redefine" Kerry, they are trying to mis-define him.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com. His most recent book is "The Best of Emerge Magazine," an anthology published by Ballantine Books. Curry's weekly radio commentary is syndicated by Capitol Radio News Service (301/588-1993) and is carried on more than 300 stations. He can be reached through his Web site, georgecurry.com.

CORRECTION



The wrong last name was used for Ed Sheridan, sanitation supervisor with the city of Winston-Salem, in the story about bulky item pickup in the March 11 issue of *The Chronicle*.