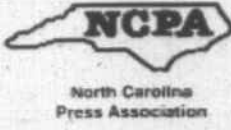


OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

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A Haitian man searches for food. MCT Photo

Help Haiti!



Kendrick Meek
 Guest Columnist

In light of the recent worldwide food price increases, Haiti is facing an acute economic crisis. Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere and is just 700 miles off the coast of my home state of Florida. As Americans, and especially as African-Americans, we must come to the aid of the Haitian people.

In Haiti, where the typical Haitian makes \$2 a day, the increase in food prices is unsustainable for the typical Haitian. In addition to the food price crisis, Haiti suffers from a high percentage of joblessness, which results in persistent poverty. During my 11 trips to Haiti since my election to Congress in 2002, I have observed firsthand the obstacles Haiti must overcome to revitalize their economy. For me, and my South Florida constituents, this is an issue which concerns us deeply.

During my most recent trip to Haiti on April 20 and 21, I met with Haitian President René Préval, U.S. Ambassador to Haiti Janet Sanderson and representatives from the international community. President Préval and I discussed ways to provide humanitarian assistance to the Haitian people. The President has determined that over the next six months, Haiti requires: 30,000 metric tons of rice (4 percent broken quality) per month; 15,000 metric tons of wheat per month; and 7,000 tons of cooking oil per month.

Upon my return from Haiti on April 22, 2008 I wrote a letter to U.S. President George W. Bush urging him to allocate to Haiti at least \$15 million in direct monetary assistance from the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust, which helps nations facing surging food prices. In addition, letters were written to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and U.S. Agency for International Development Director Henrietta H. Fore explaining the importance of the U.S. involvement in providing humanitarian support for the country.

Haiti has many strong supporters in the U.S. Congress, especially within the Congressional Black Caucus

(CBC). Members of the CBC traveled to Haiti in mid-May on a fact finding mission and have returned with an increased sense of commitment to assist Haiti. Already we as a Caucus are taking the lead in urging the international community to provide immediate debt relief to the Haitian government. This year, Haiti will send \$48.7 million in debt payments to multilateral financial institutions. That money can be better spent to assist the Haitian people.

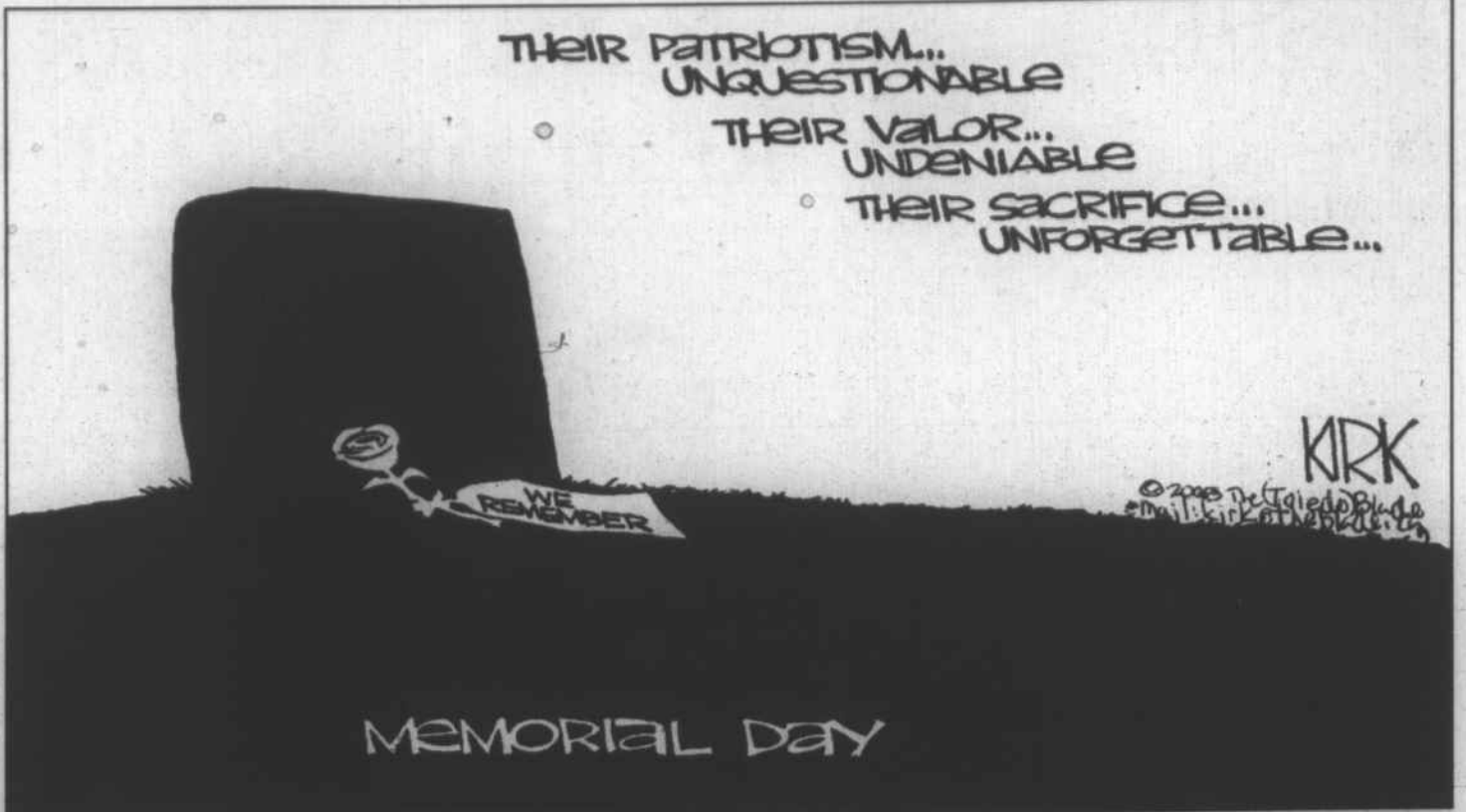
And, the CBC has also renewed its support for granting Haitians residing in the United States Temporary Protected Status (TPS), a temporary immigration status. TPS may be granted when any of the following conditions are met: there is ongoing armed conflict posing a serious threat to personal safety; it is requested by a foreign state that temporarily cannot handle the return of nationals due to environmental disaster; or when extraordinary and temporary conditions in a foreign state exist which prevent aliens from returning.

On May 15, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encourage Act of 2008 (HOPE II). HOPE II is vital legislation which expands trade preferences to Haiti. Humanitarian assistance for Haiti in the short run is critical, but creating jobs by revitalizing the Haitian economy in the long run is essential.

The international community is playing a vital role in stabilizing Haiti, but ultimately it is Haitians who need to rebuild their economy by developing homegrown industries, and HOPE II gives Haitians that opportunity.

The Congressional Black Caucus is actively working and advocating on behalf of Haiti in the U.S. Congress. We have remained engaged on this subject long before the current situation in Haiti began garnering worldwide attention, and we will remain engaged for the indefinite future.

U.S. Rep. Kendrick B. Meek represents the 17th Congressional District of Florida which includes parts of Miami-Dade and Broward Counties. He serves on the House Committee on Armed Services and is the lone Floridian sitting on the House Committee on Ways and Means.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Great Coverage

To the Editor:

Please accept my sincere thanks for covering our story at Mineral Springs Middle School ("A Cut Above," March 29). The Chronicle exemplifies community mindedness and I look forward to reading it each week!

The article, "Africa on the Back of my Head" is one of many that tell of good things happening in our schools.

Surpassing my \$100 challenge, our students and faculty raised \$1,000.36 for the Samaritan Ministries and Sudan. Plus we delivered 172 cans of food to Crisis Control. This is an amazing end to the story written by Layla Farmer!

Mineral Springs is a very special place and I thank you for recognizing us and so many!

Sincerely,

Janie B. Livengood,
 7th Grade Social Studies Teacher



Teacher Janie Livengood with one of her seventh-graders. File Photo

A more perfect union



Phill Wilson
 Guest Columnist

By striking down California's law that limited marriage to opposite sex couples, the California Supreme Court took a major step toward the formation of that "more perfect Union" that our forefathers dreamt about.

The ruling is a blow against marginalization, and stigmatization, therefore, a blow against HIV/AIDS. Black America should applaud the Court's decision.

It is by now clear that shame and stigma surrounding sexuality—whether gay, straight or bisexual—is deadly. When our public policies reinforce a social order in which some relationships are valued more than others, we push people to the margins.

When we refuse to affirm open, healthy relationships, we encourage hidden, self-damaging ones. And that's something Black America cannot afford. Many of our leaders are calling on a mass Black Mobilization to end the AIDS epidemic in our communities.

Central to that effort is a frontal assault on pervasive and a corrosive blame and shame paradigm that undermines AIDS education, prevention and treatment efforts.

As a community, we can no longer accept the plague ravaging members of our families. Study after study has shown HIV infection rates among Black gay and bisexual men to exceed those in



The late Coretta Scott King was a well known proponent of equal rights for homosexuals. KRT Photo

some of the hardest hit corners of the globe. A seven-city U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study found 46 percent of Black gay and bi-men to already be HIV positive. And the toll is particularly high among young men: A New York City health department study last fall

found that a stunning nine out of 10 HIV infections among gay and bisexual men under age 20 were among Blacks and Latinos—most of whom don't know they are infected.

Many different factors come together to drive these trends, ranging from the social to the biological. And

far too many questions remain unanswered. One villain, however, is clear: Sexual shame and fear. And public policies that devalue loving, supportive relationships help spread these emotional vectors of disease.

Moreover, our nation's sexual caste system is not only unhealthy, it's immoral.

"Homophobia is as morally wrong and as unacceptable as racism," the late Coretta Scott King reminded us. "We ought to extend to gay and lesbian people the same respect and dignity we claim for ourselves. Every person is a child of God, and every human being is entitled to full human rights."

From child custody to health benefits, our government denies those rights daily through intrusions into the family decisions of same-gender couples. They are denied access to more than 1,000 legal rights and responsibilities that marriage brings. It's an injustice carried out against a broad swath of society. The 2000 Census found same-sex households in 99.3 percent of U.S. counties. And not just white people: 10.5 percent of those households were Black and 11.9 percent were Latino. And not just the couples themselves: 34 percent of the female couples and 22 percent of the male couples were raising at least one child in their home.

I welcome the day when every state follows the lead of California in working towards true equality for all of our families.

Phill Wilson is a longtime AIDS activist and the founder and Executive Director of the Black AIDS Institute.