

OPINION/ FORUM

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Education: Still a Civil Rights Issue



Gwen Moore
 Guest Columnist

(NNPA) — My favorite president had always been Lyndon Baines Johnson, champion of the Great Society, until Barack Obama was elected.

President Johnson was on the frontlines in our battle for civil rights. And he understood — before so many others did — that education is a civil rights issue. He made elementary and secondary education the cornerstone of the War on Poverty. He understood that our entire society benefits when every child has a chance to succeed.

The call to continue this work is as strong today as ever because a child's zip code still determines the quality of education he or she will get. This isn't equal opportunity, and we can do better.

In Milwaukee, Black children have some of the worst reading outcomes in the entire country. We must do better.

Wisconsin, like most states, has been facing budget problems. And our kids have paid the price — losing art, gym, computers and libraries. And now 700 teachers in Milwaukee have been given pink slips, resulting in bigger class sizes that inevitably deny our kids a better education. They need every qualified teacher we have.

We can do better. We must do better.

I am a strong supporter of emergency funding that will go directly to our schools to prevent teachers nationwide from losing their jobs — \$23 billion would keep 300,000 teachers in classrooms across the country.

It would stop class sizes from exploding to as many as 50 kids. And in many cases, it would stop from making a bad situation even worse. It would keep support staff, librarians, gym teachers and art teachers enriching our kids' lives — including 700 in my Congressional District.

My colleague and fellow Wisconsin Congressman Dave Obey, who is working on this emergency legislation has said, "the economy may recover, but the kids

won't."

Beyond this emergency in front of us, we need to ensure that all of our children, no matter their zip code, can receive a quality education. We need to target funding to our kids who need it most.

Our most troubled schools need the most help, and policy should recognize this. You can count on the Congressional Black Caucus to always fight efforts that would take away funding from these schools for experiments. Any system that creates winners and losers out of our children flies in the face of equal opportunity. A child in Milwaukee shouldn't have to compete against a child in Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit or anywhere else.

We need to expand support services and increase community and parental involvement. We know that what happens to our kids outside of the classroom has just as profound an impact on their success as what happens in the classroom.

It's why Head Start and Gear Up are so important. It's why Historically Black Colleges and Universities and TRIO and Upward Bound are so important. These all help make sure that kids have the help they need to be successful.

President Obama challenged us with an ambitious goal that the U.S. graduate more students from college than any other country. He realizes that — like many of us — in order for America to be competitive in the 21st Century global economy, we have to invest in our children.

There is no way we will meet this goal if we leave any of our children behind. We need to close the achievement gap. We need to keep kids in school to boost high school graduation rates. We need qualified teachers in classrooms.

This will help us ensure true equal opportunity for our children. This will move us closer to realizing President Obama's goal. And this will help us create the next generation of leaders. President Johnson was fighting this fight 50 years ago, and we must continue it today. We cannot give up. We cannot give in. Our children are counting on us.

U. S. Rep. Gwen Moore, a Democrat, represents Wisconsin's 4th District.



Justice Deferred, Justice Denied



Darrell DeBrew
 Guest Columnist

There's something more shocking to the conscience than the incarceration of an innocent man. That something is thousands of men and women — mostly African-American — waiting for immediate release from the courts after a change in the law. That law is the Crack Law.

Three African-American males, Christopher Richardson; Gregory Logan, and Malcolm Powell are in suspense because the federal court in North Carolina's Middle District won't release them.

After 20 years, in 2007, Congress allowed a minor change in the Crack Law, though the racist effect was apparent for over a decade. Young African-Americans have been receiving a mandatory minimum of 10 years for having just a relatively small amount of the cocaine-based drug, while a kingpin caught with four and a half kilograms of cocaine powder receives five years. It takes 5,000 grams of cocaine powder to



Logan



Powell



Richardson

trigger the same 10-year mandatory minimum.

But even after this wrong has supposedly been made right, African-Americans victimized by this law are still behind bars because of the federal courts. The proper reduction in sentence would give Richardson, Logan and Powell immediate release because of good behavior and time already served. A one-page order and a phone call would set each man free. In less than a minute, someone can call a clerk and order them to process the one page order.

No hearings, lengthy arguments, voluminous paper work or complex decisions would have to be involved.

Ten decisions can be made a day, just as more complex decisions are made quickly and in great volume each day. Instead, the Middle District of North Carolina has a system based on release date. That system doesn't consider where a sentence will end up, thus causing defendants to serve more time than necessary.

Each unnecessary day Richardson, Logan and Powell have to serve is justice deferred and justice

denied. Each has served over 10 years and would have been home more than five years ago if sentenced for powder cocaine. If any of them serves the rest of his sentence without a decision, it would be a travesty of justice.

Darrell James "Da'Rel-Da'Rel" DeBrew (www.myspace.com/officialydebrew) is the author of several novels. The Rocky Mount native is currently serving time in a North Carolina-based federal prison.

An All White Senate?



Julianne Malveaux
 Guest Columnist

(NNPA) — There have only been six African-Americans in the United States Senate in history, and two — Hiram Revels and Blanche Bruce — served Mississippi during Reconstruction as appointed Senators.

In modern times, four African-Americans have served, and each has been the lone African-American Senator serving. Edward Brooke (1967-1979) of Massachusetts, Carol Mosley Braun of Illinois (1993-1999), Barack Obama (2005-2008) of Illinois, and Roland Burris (2009-2010) of Illinois. Braun, Obama and Burris all held the same seat, with Braun winning it during the "Year of the Woman" in 1992, Obama winning it in 2004 before winning the Presidency in 2008, and Roland Burris currently holding it as an appointed Senator who will not run for re-election.

Though former Urban League executive Cheryl Jackson valiantly attempted to succeed Burris, and garnered 21 percent of the vote, there is no African American in the final running for the Illinois Senate seat.

Will the Senate return to

its usual lily-white state (it has been segregated longer than it has had an African American presence) after the 2010 election? That depends on whether Congressman Kendrick Meek (D-Fla.) is able to prevail in his Florida primary on August 24. While former President Bill Clinton and Vice President Joe Biden have held fundraisers for Meek, Meek is not the frontrunner in his primary. Indeed, some say that Meek has garnered insufficient Democratic support and that at the rate the race is going, the state that President Obama won in 2008 may be the site of a Republican victory this year.

Florida Governor Charlie Crist withdrew from the Republican primary to run as an independent when polls said that former Florida House Speaker Marco Rubio, supposedly a darling of the Tea Party crowd, would whip him in the polls. So Crist started drifting slightly to the left of his formerly solid Republican positions. In drifting left, he has attracted some of the Democratic money that might otherwise have gone to Kendrick Meek. Meanwhile on the Democrat side, billionaire Democrat Jeff Green has decided to challenge Meek for the Democratic nomination. With deep pockets, Green can challenge Meek, but he is unlikely to beat either Governor Crist or Speaker Rubio. If Meek



U.S. Rep. Meek

can't pull this one off, the United States Senate will become, again, a segregated body. So much for post-racial America.

Why aren't more Democrats embracing the Meek race? Money runs with money, and many in the Democratic monied crowd do business with Jeff Green and will support him. How to explain Governor Crist's inroad into coffers that might have been considered Democratic? Somebody had better ask the Democrats about that. Crist's victory in Florida could be a precursor to election results in 2012.

Is it important that an African-American serve in the United States Senate? One might argue that a good senator is a good senator and that you don't have to be African-American to support important causes like health care, full employment, education, and other progressive

issues (the late Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), along with Al Franken (D-Minn.), Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), Bernard Sanders (D-Vt.) among others).

At the same time, it is bone-chilling that we still have the possibility of segregated legislative bodies in the so-called post racial 21st Century. Let's not forget that the United States Senate just voted down an unemployment insurance extension, leaving nearly two million Americans without financial support in the midst of this unemployment crisis.

Who will better understand the plight of the unemployed, Kendrick Meek, Jeff Green, Charlie Crist or Marco Rubio? A review of their records suggests that Meek will bring a passion to serve the underserved to the rather patrician and otherwise all-white Senate.

If the Democratic Party does not fully embrace the candidacy of Kendrick Meek, they may choose to lose Florida in the 2012 Presidential election. With just six weeks away until the August 24 primary, the Dems can't afford inaction or inertia. A decision made three weeks from now may be too little, too late. Are we about to experience a blast from the past, an again all-white United States Senate?

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