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Why Perry should be Labor boss

By Sylvia Perry
SPECIAL TO THE POST

A few years ago, I co-taught the Capstone Seminar for 22 second-year graduate students at the University of Pennsylvania's prestigious Fels Center of Government. Earning master's degrees in various aspects of government and public affairs at the end of that semester were 14 Phi Beta Kappa's, several former Rhodes Scholars, a passel of honors bachelors degree holders and a majority who had rich backgrounds as legislative aides to congresspersons or assistants to various mayors and governors.

During the final class meetings, we polled each student about his or her career plans after graduation. With the exception of one, all of these stimulating and bright young people excitedly reported their success in finding coveted positions with private corporations and industries, not with governmental agencies or public organizations. Why? Because they feared the effects of press intrusion and unwarranted notoriety on their children and families, and felt that, given the conservatively capped government salaries and other restricted public employment amenities, the gains from public service simply were not worth the pain.

The years which I describe were 1986 through 1989. I wonder if these students feel vindicated today when they look at the cannibalizing of public servants which soaks the front pages of national newspapers? I wonder if they did not possess some superior intuition or power of prognostication which warned them to steer clear of the governmental fast track which far too frequently penalizes rather than awards excellence? It appears to me these days that prominence in public service eventually leads to having every minor personal flaw magnified and having the well intentioned and completely appropriate fulfillment of legitimate duties of public position distorted into devious schemes of personal or political aggrandizement.

There are numerous recent cases of character assassination and reputation assault which would discourage any sane person from voluntarily accepting high government appointment. Often, the entire family is vilified and tarnished by broad brush allegations of "appearance of impropriety" which, once described, become incorporated by reference into the persona of the public figure, and whether or not proven to be true, remain indelibly inscribed in the media's memory, to be automatically retrieved as copy for any future publicity. "Once accused of..." "Thought to have been involved in..." "Allegedly associated with so-and-so (who was once accused of...)" and so on, haunt public figures even through their obituaries into their graves.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that of the many who are called to offer service in a national public administration, few choose to be chosen. And of those who do choose, many (especially women and minorities) come to wish that they had not. The current contretemps over the alleged/implied/assumed/speculated upon role of Alexis Herman in the Democratic National Committee's (DNC) fund raising investigation is a graphic and dramatic case in point.

Herman's primary responsibility in the White House for the last four years has been to reach out to constituents, especially traditionally excluded or under-represented classes, to make sure that they felt embraced. Since these groups included clergy, small business owners, labor groups, minorities and women who often also feel that their contributions do not count, Herman's office was responsible for correcting that impression and improving the reality. Where excluded groups often are not asked to help make a difference in decisions affecting all Americans, Herman's office existed in order to facilitate their making a difference by the inclusion of their opinions, encouraging their influence and recognizing their civic and entrepreneurial power.

Alexis Herman did her job well. This fact has been under-reported and underestimated. Unfortunately, the decision to leak un-annotated records of the many perfectly legitimate meetings which she arranged for diverse groups of Americans added to the problem and was unhelpful at best, cynical at least.

There is no doubt among women and minorities that minority women have a harder time than anyone in gaining public acceptance in positions of authority, and in overcoming ingrained stereotypes and prejudices about race and gender. Sniping and sabotage, motivated by these biases alone, have torpedoed many women's and minorities' career advances. Harvard-trained lawyer Lani Guinier, denied the chance of becoming Deputy Attorney General for Civil Rights, and Dr. Henry Foster, unsuccessfully advanced for the position of Surgeon General, immediately come to mind.

But this reality is further complicated by the growing occupational hazards of high-level governmental service and compounded by ambiguous ideas of loyalty and the deadly "friendly fire" of political expediency from within the administration's own ranks. The press then enters upon a feeding frenzy, resulting last week in prominently placed photos of Herman in the daily press and weekly news reports, the substance of which had very little to do with her, and virtually nothing which accurately, fairly or fully explained her legitimate responsibilities in the White House public liaison job which she held.

It should be anticipated by everyone, therefore, that eventually the best qualified and experienced public service professionals will opt for some other line of work. Americans will then well deserve the resultant gang of dispirited, uninspired and mediocre bureaucratic drones, who will probably provoke little scandal, because they probably will do very little that makes much difference. They will be just the opposite of Labor Secretary-designate Alexis Herman, with her positive administrative and executive profile.

SYLVIA PERRY is a syndicated columnist.

Pre-school no bargain for at-risk

By Kevin Campbell
SPECIAL TO THE POST

The proposed pre-school program being considered by Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in and of itself will do more harm than good, especially to the black communities and the taxpayers.

The proposal started during CMS Supt. Eric Smith's first months on the job. Over 7,000 children under age five were identified as living in poverty and two-thirds receive no preschool experience. The plan being sold to the public is to discontinue most of the Title I programs and divert the funds to at-risk 4-year-olds. The programs to be cut are reading programs, reduced class sizes, literacy teachers that work with the disadvantaged children and other programs designed to help

at-risk children catch-up with their more fortunate classmates

The Title I programs provide services to about 8,200 children of which a very large percentage are African American.

The school system will not be the only institution effected. The N.C. Division of Child Development already provides child care funding for low income families in the form of a voucher. The vouchers may be used to purchase child care from a licensed child care center. If the preschool program moves forward, the child care centers which serve the general public will be weakened and children of all ages will receive lower quality care.

Lower quality will follow because one of the key factors of quality is that a center be operating at or near capacity.

This point was recently supported by a four state study in which The Frank Porter Graham Center at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill participated.

One of the major problems in Mecklenburg County is an already low enrollment level of children in child care centers. In other words, child care quality is harmed because there are too many centers on a countywide basis. The CMS pre-school will not compete with and not complement the current delivery system of child care. So, if the pre-school is established, the enrollment problem worsens.

Thousands of children will be left behind, the infants to three year olds and the non-CMS preschoolers, all will receive even lower quality care because resources will be drained. The centers that lose the most chil-

dren and resources will be the ones serving the African American neighborhoods.

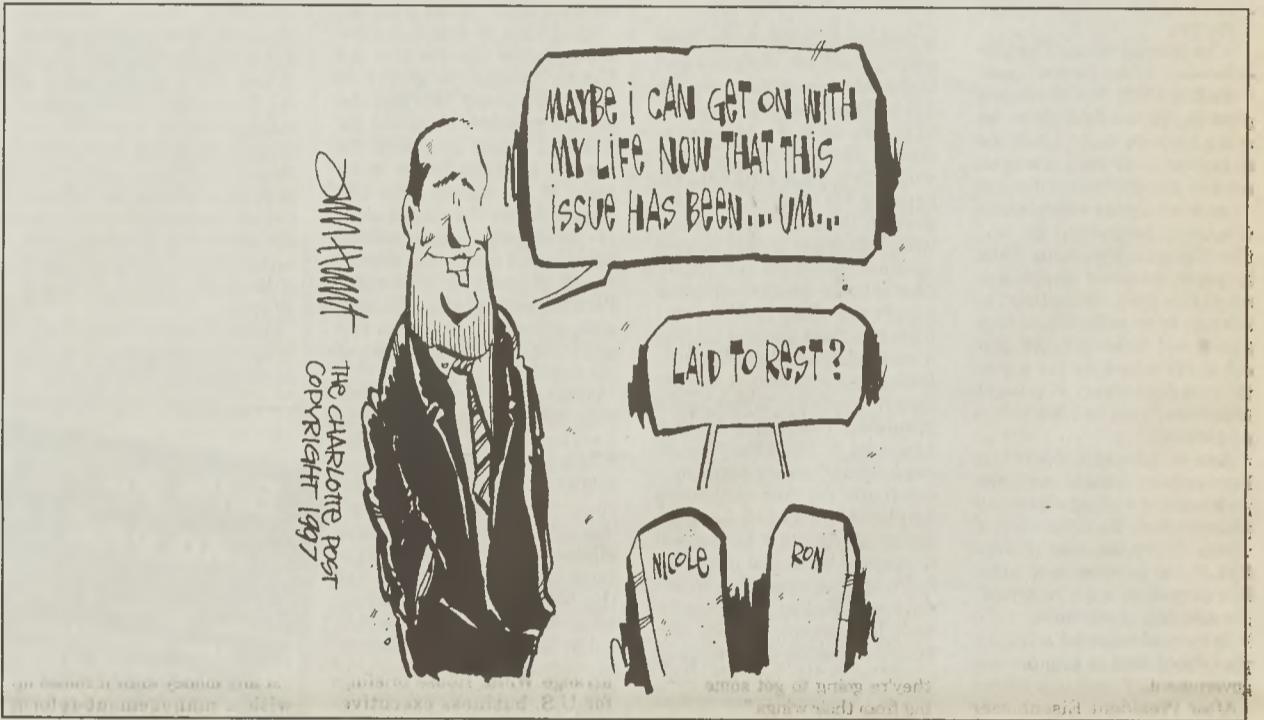
The benefits do not outweigh the costs. To serve 2,000 at risk children, 8,200 others will lose service, a net loss of 6,200, of which a very high percentage will be African American. To establish a pre-school for 2000 children, many times that stand to have reduced child care quality. To provide classrooms, the bond issue will be larger, but child care spaces are unfilled countywide.

Let's go back to the drawing board and design a complementary system utilizing CMS, the Division of Child Development, Smart Start and the private sector. The end result would be more children receiving quality care.

KEVIN CAMPBELL is a day-care operator in Charlotte.



Herman



Reflections on the Henrietta Marie exhibit

By Wendy Mills
SPECIAL TO THE POST

The best part about the Henrietta Marie exhibit was working with Dawn Womack, vice president of arts and education at Spirit Square. I haven't met a dynamo like Ms. Womack since I left New York and worked with a mutual friend of ours, who is now the assistant to the New York City school systems' chancellor, Barbara Byrd Bennet.

Every day, there was a call from the ancestors, an ancient presence was with Dawn and me from the beginning of this exhibition. Ms. Womack's energy seemed to exude and never before have I given so much of myself for a single purpose since my first years teaching in New York.

Even before the first article about the Henrietta Marie

appeared in 1995, there was this absolute feeling that the ship was coming to Charlotte. Since I was already familiar with the exhibit from being a member of the National Association of Black SCUBA Divers, I wanted the exhibit to come to Charlotte with more than just the historical slave issue. I wanted to bring black inventors with the exhibit.

After the article about the exhibit coming to Discovery Place, others about the rejection of "A Slave Ship Speaks: The Wreck of the Henrietta Marie," started appearing. So I began informing Dawn about the exhibit and put her into contact with Dr. Jose Jones, NABS president, and the Mel Fisher Maritime Museum.

As soon as Dawn received all the necessary information she made a commitment to bring the exhibit to Spirit Square. She

alone raised the entire funding for the pro-grams that she initiated "From Enslavement to Empowerment," with little help. My husband, Fred, and I accompanied her to a couple of churches in February 1996 helping to raise the consciousness of the people and money for the programs. Dawn was out every night speaking to clubs, churches and local individuals and during the day meeting with bank presidents, bank officers and men like Hugh McColl, laying out her plan and getting them to commit.

The careful planning by Dawn Womack for her lecture series was demonstrated when the very first guest speakers on opening night of the exhibit were Dr. Jose Jones, President of the National Association of Black SCUBA Divers and Marine Biologist, and Dr. David Moore, the marine archeologist

commissioned by Mel Fisher to excavate the wreck. It was such an appropriate opening with these two men telling the story of how the wreck was found, excavated and scientifically studied to put together the only exhibit of a slave ship in history. The audience was further informed about the history and struggles of Black SCUBA divers and NABS by Dr. Jones.

This has been one of the most rewarding and empowering experiences of my life and hope the people of Charlotte know what a blessing it is to have Dawn Womack, a woman of vision and action, in our presence.

Donna Devereux and her staff in the Spirit Square Visual Arts Department should be applauded for the exhibit and the complementary art exhibit.

WENDY MILLS lives in Charlotte.

Lots of promises, no budget action

By Walter R. Mears
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

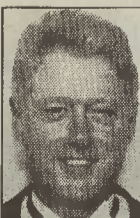
WASHINGTON - It is a balancing act tried and toppled before, but President Clinton makes it sound easy - Congress votes for a deficit-free budget, he signs, and the deal is done.

The deal, but not the deed. That will be five uncertain years away even after Clinton and the Republicans come to terms on a 2002 balanced budget plan, as they almost surely will. After all, it was a GOP goal first, embraced by the Democratic president in transit to the political center. Now he champions the goal with the zeal of the converted; he said shortly after his re-election that a balanced budget should be easily achievable. Three decades of unmet pledges and projections say otherwise. This may well be different; there is a

shared commitment in a divided government to get the budget balanced. Still, the administration and congressional budget architects will have to bargain out the details. There are marked differences on spending priorities, how much and how to cut taxes, and on the economic projections that underlie any long-term budget.

Administration assumptions on economic growth are more optimistic than those on which GOP budget outlooks are based, easing the path to the \$17 billion surplus Clinton projects in 2002. Still, it is all on paper, a promise to be delivered after Clinton has left office. It is all subject to the course of the economy, and subject also to political decisions that will be shaped by two congressional and one presidential election before the due date. "Let this Congress be the Congress that finally balances

the budget," the president said to State of the Union cheers last Tuesday. But what this Congress does won't be final. It



Clinton

can enact a plan for 2002 balance. But it will be up to the next Congress, and the one after that, to make sure that it finally happens for the first time in nearly 30 years. Clinton's new budget includes a system meant to assure that the budget is balanced in 2002 even if economic projections are off and there is a gap that the next president and Congress can't settle. It involves automatic steps to increase tax revenues and limit spending. That harks to a system of auto-

matic cuts set up in 1985 to force a course to balanced budgets, unsuccessfully because Congress moved the targets and spent the money anyhow. While Clinton made deficit reduction a first priority of his presidency, his commitment to balanced budgets came later, only after the Republicans captured Congress. Even then, he began two years ago with a budget that projected continuing deficits, amending it later to aim at balance in 10 years, then in 7, now in 5. Presidents since Richard M. Nixon have been promising to control deficits. And two, Democrat Jimmy Carter and Republican Ronald Reagan, came to office after promising to balance the budget within a term. Neither came close, and deficits soared during the Reagan years.

WALTER R. MEARS is an Associated Press vice president.