

# Charlotte misplaces priorities threaten us



DON REID

Since the early 1990s, Charlotte has experienced unprecedented economic prosperity, while during the same period the politicians, bureaucrats and some of the media have done a masterful job of covering up our three biggest problems.

Two of the three problems, a dysfunctional educational system and high taxes, are slowly but surely being exposed. For example, we now know that only 11 percent to 15 percent of fourth- and eighth-grade blacks, and 49 percent to 55 percent of white fourth- and eighth-graders passed the national NAEP tests on math and reading.

Thanks to the John Locke

Foundation, we know that Charlotte has, by far, the highest per capita tax of all the cities in North Carolina and that the per capita tax has increased over 40 percent since Mayor McCrory first became mayor.

But what about the third major problem — high crime? Despite the hype that crime is decreasing, despite the statistics and denial, most of us know that crime is a major problem in our town. Sure, there are areas of our city with low crime, but in these areas you will find gated communities, a high concentration of burglar alarm systems and in many of these communities the residents are also protected by their own private security patrols. But what about other areas?

Here's an example: In one area off Eastway Drive, over the period Jan. 1, 1999-Oct. 31, 2003, less than three

years, Pierson Drive had 80 crime incident reports, Woodland Ave. 86 crime incidents, Norland Road 106 incidents and believe it or not, Eastway Drive had 5798 crime incidents!!

A friend, a well know political figure, who lives in the area, reported to me that recently, at 11:30 p.m., he observed a car with its lights out, parked in front of his house. The car, by flashing its lights, was signaling another car parked down the street in front of a house occupied by an 80-year-old lady. My friend followed the two cars as they left the area, at the same time calling 911 reporting the suspicious nature of the incident and that one car had no license plate.

The police refused to respond, suggesting that they be called if the cars return to the neighborhood! The result: the 80 year old

lady's car was stolen and we apparently don't have the desire or resources to prevent it. With this kind of crime problem along Eastway Drive, can you imagine what it's like in some of our inner-city neighborhoods.

The fact is our mayor and city council have not made crime prevention a high priority. The negative economic impact of crime would dwarf any positive impact of a new arena or convention center, not to mention relieving the tremendous stress that crime brings to our citizens. The \$50 million per year from the transit tax, would put 1000 police officers on our streets and in our communities preventing crime....the number one responsibility of government, at any level.

And let's talk about equity. When the mayor's car and the mayor pro-tem's cars

were stolen, there was an immediate response with several police cars and even the police helicopter. If like Eastway Drive, there were 5798 crime incidents on say, Carmel Road, the police chief and city manager would be fired!

Yes there is a conflict of interest when the mayor accepts free plane trips to playoff games from CPI Security Systems — by not placing crime prevention at the top of his priority list, the mayor is indirectly building the business of CPI!!

We've said all along that the only way to slow out of control spending by CATS on this light rail idiocy was to hope they run out of money. By cutting the funding for Charlotte's system, the Federal Transit Administration may have come to the rescue of Charlotte's over taxed citizens.

The FTA says it cannot comply with our request for federal funds because our CATS planning has not progressed far enough. But bureaucrats like our CATS head Ron Tober are never deterred by little things like too little money. Tober wants to go full steam ahead and hope the money from FTA come through later.

"If they(the council) are nervous about buying trains until we have a done(financial) deal, we'll have a delay" says Tober, and then goes on to say that each month's delay will cost the city \$1 million. This is nothing but a ploy to scare the council to buy trains before the money is available. It sure would be interesting to know how Tober came up with the million bucks a month!

DON REID is a former member of Charlotte City Council and a founding member of Citizens For Effective Government.

## Exercising black political clout

By Ron Walters

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

The results of the South Carolina primary were instructive in many ways but they primarily showed that black voters are all over the map, splitting their vote almost equally between Democratic presidential candidates John Edwards and John Kerry at 37 percent and 34 percent, respectively, with Rev. Al Sharpton getting 17 percent, which was less than half of what Edwards received.

This says at least two things. First, it says that if the black vote has lost its unity, then it has lost its significance in the 2004 election. What does it mean for black politics if the top candidates — Kerry, Edwards, and, to a lesser extend, Clark — to have the black vote split among them? It means that a split in a minority vote will hardly be recognized by any of them. On the other hand, more unified black vote could not be ignored by any of them.

Furthermore, this means that if this pattern of a split black vote in national elections continues, while we all may be having fun asserting our "individuality," what we really will be asserting is political impotence.

Judging by the numbers, what black voters seem to be saying is that we are just like every body else; we are going to hang free, let the chips fall where they may and vote for whomever is the best-looking, best-sounding and has the best chance of getting elected in November.

The truth is that we cannot vote just like everybody else. The decision by many Blacks to join the bandwagon of "electability" means that we have lost our clear vision of how to use power to impact on the election system. Blacks were 47 percent of the primary voters in South Carolina and it would have been far better for them to have voted 100 percent for one candidate rather than split the black vote.

The media has been always drawn to the dramatic feats of Black politics — asking why are blacks behaving differently than anyone else. This kind of action is the stuff that draws attention to the agenda of Black voters. If the black vote were used to make or break one of the leading candidates, then they would be beholden to that Black vote and their issues. Given that the white vote was distributed among the five candidates, the black vote could have determined the winner. But that didn't happen.

Black voters, "just like everybody else," seems to be shifting from their early allegiance from Howard Dean to Kerry. Dean received only 4 percent of the black vote in South Carolina.

Right now, the media seems to be telling black voters what to do and shaping the race according to its own balance sheet. I don't support Howard Dean, but the media seems to have ejected him like a foreign substance from the body politic just because of the so-called "I Have a Scream" speech following his loss in Iowa. Sure, Dean looked un-presidential, but I still don't think we get it. The media wants the classic fight: a well-known senator from inside the Washington power circle pitted against George Bush, the incumbent president. It doesn't want a firebrand governor who will flame out before they have had a chance to sell many newspaper ads or TV commercials.

The plain fact is that blacks need a strategy and we need leaders to devise it, lest we expend their precious energy in this election season all for nothing.

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## All Americans have a dream: Equal access to homeownership

By Franklin D. Raines

SPECIAL TO THE POST

In 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., said, "...[H]alf of all Negroes live in substandard housing. And Negroes have half the income of whites. ... [W]e are likely to find that the problems of housing, education, instead of preceding the elimination of poverty, will themselves be affected if poverty is first abolished. The poor, transformed into purchasers, will do a great deal on their own to alter housing decay. Negroes, who have a double disability, will have a greater effect on discrimination when they have the additional weapon of cash to use in their struggle."

Today — as we approach the 50th anniversary of the Brown v. Board of Education decision that marked the beginning of the end of racial apartheid in America — minority Americans still have not achieved parity in housing or wealth. Dr. King was arguing that poverty had to be abolished first before there could be parity in housing. And of course, to a great extent he is correct — families need a decent income and some money in the bank to get a mortgage.

But we at Fannie Mae, the nation's largest source of home mortgage funds, also stand for the converse proposition: If we can bend the housing finance system to transform the poor into home purchasers, if we can help underserved families apply the income and savings they do have, then we can get more minority families into homes — and they can start to build equity wealth.

Today, while the U.S. homeownership rate has reached an all-time high of 68 percent, and 75 percent for white Americans, only 49 percent of minorities own their homes. If there were racial parity in homeownership, we calculate that three million more African American families would own their homes — and would have \$760 billion more in home equity wealth. For example, a \$100,000

home purchased in 1990 that appreciated the national average of 4-5 percent per year would now be worth \$172,000 — yielding a \$72,000 gain in equity wealth, tax free.

To do our part to close the racial gaps in homeownership and wealth, Fannie Mae has just expanded our American Dream Commitment plan. Under this plan, launched in 2000, we pledged to provide \$2 trillion in housing capital for 18 million minority and underserved families by the end of the decade. Since then, following three extraordinary years for the housing industry, we have already hit the \$2 trillion mark. This is on top of the \$1 trillion we provided to 10 million underserved families from 1994 to 2000.

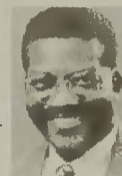
Now Fannie Mae is renewing and deepening our American Dream Commitment plan, starting with an emphasis on first-time homebuyers. Fannie Mae will create 6 million first-time homeowners — including 1.8 million minority homeowners — over the next 10 years, and help boost the minority homeownership rate to 55 percent. We are not satisfied with 55 percent; ultimately our goal is to erase the racial gap in homeownership.

The Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies has projected that it would take until the year 2020 for the minority homeownership rate to reach 54.4 percent. We are going take it farther six years earlier.

Over the past 10 years, the \$3 trillion in commitments Fannie Mae has made and met have transformed us into a company where underserved families are the core of our business and our future. Now that we have the capital, the tools and a wide range of committed housing partners, Fannie Mae is pushing to do more with bold ideas and big plans to really move the minority homeownership rate.

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VAL ATKINSON



## Judicial campaign reform

The N.C. Judicial Campaign Reform Act that passed the N.C. House on September 26, 2002 allows for public funding of races for the N.C. Supreme Court and the N.C. Court of Appeals.

There are tons of conditions and provisions surrounding this reform, but what's important to the average North Carolinian is the \$3.00 check off on your State tax return. Checking this block will not increase your taxes, it's merely a confirmation that you agree with the Judicial Campaign Reform Act and are willing to have public funds support statewide candidates running for the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals.

Candidates agreeing to participate in this program will be limited in the amount of funds they can raise; and they must raise a minimum amount as well. Candidates running for Court of Appeals seats must raise a minimum of \$33,000 and cannot raise over \$66,000. Supreme Court candidates must raise \$34,500 and cannot raise over \$69,000. If the candidates meet these requirements they become eligible for a \$137,500 distribution for Court of Appeals candidates and \$201,300 for Supreme Court candidates. Rescue funds will also be available for candidates whose opponents are not plan participants and exceed the fund raising and/or spending limits set by the plan.

Having said all that, the bottom line is that African American judicial candidates like Court of Appeals Judges Wanda Bryant and Loretta Biggs and Supreme Court Associate Justice G.K. Butterfield would have all been elected had we had a Judicial Campaign Reform Act in place, operational and functional before the general election of 2002 when all three of the aforementioned judges and associate justices were defeated by white candidates.

These public funds will not impact your return or the taxes you owe. This is something we all can do and it's absolutely painless.

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