

# The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community  
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## OPINION

# Who'll be accountable for what happens to community?

## Looking out for ourselves requires African Americans to hold elected officials responsible to demands

When it comes to our communities, why is it that we continue to allow corporate and public entities to choose our leadership? I recently commented to an elected official, "We need to have 'real' black people on these committees and task forces." She questioned, "What does that mean... 'real' black people?" It means that we need real black people who know, understand, and actively demonstrate concern about making a difference in our communities. The others are only interested in what goes in their paychecks or comes from under the table monies.

Although there are some strong advocates who fight to try to make a difference for our causes, their fight would not be nearly as hard if our elected officials, those whom we voted into offices, did their job?

An example of this poor leadership was the recent situation with House Bill 1827, HB 1827 would allow General Contractors hired by the N.C. Department of Transportation to waive the requirement of MWBE and DBE inclusion. This bill, if passed would start a snowball effect and eventually allow every state and local department to exclude and disregard the needs of minority, small, disadvantaged businesses.

The state legislature stated last week that they were just waiting on the Black Political Caucus to vote "No" on this issue. Our one advocate in Raleigh requested a no vote, but NOT ONE of our elected officials voted no on this issue.

I was told that we need more lobbyists in Raleigh walking the floors and advocating for our issues and concerns. Let me first explain that the purpose of a lobbyist is to fight and push for the causes of the people or organization that has hired them. We in the black community do not have lobbyists in our government at any level because we are not paying any lobbyists' salaries. Unfortunately, most of us are only just making it, because the folks elected do not keep our real issues as priorities.

It was said at a meeting in Charlotte, "We as citizens need to become our own lobbyist." We need to call, communicate and hold accountable the people we put in office. We vote and allow the same people to hold these offices for years and years with no expectations. Folk already think and know that we tend to be complacent. Those that we vote into office have got to think much less of us, or why would they take us for granted the way that they do.

They come to us during campaign season and ask for our vote and tell us that they will represent our needs. Or do they really tell us anything and we still just keep sending them back. One thing shows, they don't really care to truly fight for our needs. Secondly, they don't even respect us enough to come back to us or make a phone call to discuss with us any issues and concerns to obtain opinions and desires. That again is on us because we don't hold them accountable. Running up in a meeting, once a month, every now and then with a "report" does not count.

How can they represent us when they have no idea of our needs? None of them has asked anyone I know. I checked. How can they represent us when they refuse to come to us and ask our needs, wants, and opinions? None of them asked anyone I know. I checked. How can they represent us when they will not even listen and respect our advocate(s)?

They continue over and over to vote against us. They voted into office with the hope that we could win sometime(s). But we never seem to come out on top of anything. With those we have put in office that look like us, it is so apparent that our agenda is not their agenda. Was our vote no compensation enough? Is their compensation coming from other means?

Therefore, we have our jobs to do. We must really consider whom we put in office at election time. Maybe the next time we should not vote those folks back in, just because they look like us.

We must really consider elections and whom we are putting into offices, locally and on the state level. We should not send those back just because they have warmed seats years and years. We are looking for new life that would be interested in representing the needs of those who vote for them.

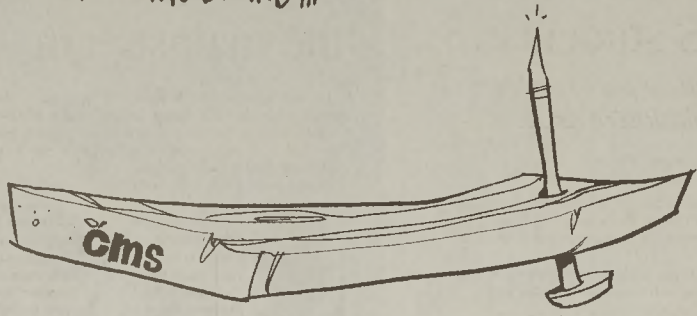
In some counties, we have two years to search for new people interested in holding those positions. During that time we all need to become lobbyists and get involved in the process. We need more grassroots folk to put on their lobbyist caps and know the real story about what is going on in these elected offices.

We need grassroots folk and organizations collaborating throughout our cities and forming collaborations throughout the state to make a difference. This is starting to happen and we are signing on to each other's issues and concerns. We are forming collaborations for elections, advocating and lobbying.

If our elected officials refuse to represent us, we should refuse to send them back to Raleigh or any of our local offices just to warm seats and take us for granted.

SYLVIA L. GRIER is first vice president of the Millions More Movement - Charlotte, Inc. and president, Carolinas Association of Black Women Entrepreneurs, Inc.

## TRENT MERCHANT GETS A SEAT ON THE BOARD...



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# Stem cell debate becomes personal

On the day I was supposed to depart for Abuja, Nigeria last month with the Leon Sullivan Foundation, my cousin Audrey Livingston died in Johnson City, Tenn.

She was 47 years old and had been living with scleroderma, a chronic connective tissue disease, for eight years. Of course, I cancelled my trip to Africa to be with my family in Tennessee.

For several years, I had watched as my cousin's extremities were removed one by one. First, a finger, then another finger, then one toe and another toe and still more fingers and still more toes. In the end, she could hardly grip a fork, but she never lost her grip on life. As much as my cousin went through, she was always cheering us up, not the other way around. I've never seen anyone go through so much without ever complaining. But that was Audrey, that was my cousin.



GEORGE E. CURRY

And she didn't let her illness prevent her from being places she felt she had to be. Over the past year alone, she and I have lost three uncles on the same side of the family. Audrey attended every funeral because, above all else, she was a person with a deep love for her family.

It took a long time for doctors to diagnose Audrey's illness as scleroderma or systemic sclerosis. It is a rare disease for which there is no cure. According to information distributed by the Scleroderma Foundation and the Mayo Clinic, it is a progressive disease that leads to the hardening and tightening of the skin and connective tissues, the fibers that provide the body's framework and support.

"In addition to thickening and hardening of your skin, scleroderma can cause your skin to lose its elasticity and become shiny as it stretches across underlying bone," the Mayo research states.

Essentially, the body's immune system turns against itself by overproducing collagen, a fibrous type of protein that makes up the body's connective tissue. Unfortunately, there is no treatment to stop the overproduction of collagen.

But if a cure is to be found, it could well come from stem cell research. And that's why President Bush's decision to veto stem cell research legislation is personal with me.

After doctors in Johnson, City, Tenn. failed to accurately identify Audrey's disease, they sent her to the Duke University Medical Center in Durham, where she was finally diagnosed as having scleroderma.

Not surprisingly, Duke is now leading a national study

to test whether stem cell transplants can reconstruct defective immune systems. If successful, the study could reverse the disease rather than merely alleviating the symptoms. It is funded by a \$20 million grant from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Dr. Joseph Shanahan, a Duke University rheumatologist, told reporters that investigators wanted to determine whether the immune system can be suppressed for a year in order to take control of the disease or whether it's necessary to repopulate the immune system with purified stem cells.

As part of this fascinating study, patients are given drugs that stimulate the release of stem cells into their bloodstream. Stem cells are then extracted from the blood, processed and stored for later use. Chemotherapy and radiation are used to destroy the immune system, which is then repopulated or replaced by the patient's stored blood stems.

To be fair, President Bush does not oppose all stem research and it appears that he might not object to the research being done at Duke, the kind that would have directly benefited Audrey. However, he vetoed a bill passed by both the House and Senate — his first and only veto after more than five years in office — authorizing certain types of stem cell

research. Although the proposed legislation would have prohibited federal funding for the creation of embryos solely for research, it would have allowed research using embryos stored at federal fertility clinics and donated by couples who no longer need them.

Research posted on the site of the National Institutes of Health reflects the excitement medical experts have about this new research.

"Stem cells have the remarkable potential to develop into many different cell types in the body," basic information on the site observes. "Serving as a sort of repair system for the body, they can theoretically divide without limit to replenish other cells as long as the person or animal is still alive. When a stem cell divides, each new cell has the potential to either remain a stem cell or become another type of cell with a more specialized function, such as a muscle cell or a red blood cell, or a brain cell."

For those who claim to be pro-life, this is an opportunity to prove it. It won't bring back my cousin Audrey, but it might spare some families needless pain.

GEORGE E. CURRY is editor-in-chief of the National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service and BlackPressUSA.com.

# Helping America's uninsured children

As children get ready to head back to school, parents everywhere are checking off their lists of the things they're going to need: backpacks, notebooks, pencils. But this season, many adults are helping to cover some much bigger basics for children.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Covering Kids and Families Initiative has been sponsoring a Back to School campaign in eight cities aimed at enrolling more children in the Health Insurance Program (CHIP). The Children's Defense Fund's Texas office is one of the organizers of this campaign in Houston.

Houston's campaign includes advertisements in local media, outreach events throughout August, and a kick-off press conference and enrollment event with speakers including Grammy-winning gospel singer Yolanda Adams, all designed to let uninsured children and families know that they may be eligible for help.

CHIP and Children's Medicaid provide low-cost or free health coverage to uninsured children in working families that cannot afford private health coverage. CDF

has already developed a children's health insurance outreach and training initiative with the Houston Independent School District. The district asked about students' health insurance status as its 2005-2006 enrollment form to learn more about the need.

They discovered that 22.4 percent of students in Houston are uninsured. CDF is now working with school nurses and parent support specialists at each school to follow up with uninsured children and link them with coverage by training school staff to help parents apply for CHIP and Medicaid. Starting this month, a new partnership is going to allow CDF to expand this program to all 20 Harris County school districts, reaching more than 700,000 students.

CDF is also reaching out to find uninsured children and families in places besides schools. In August, CDF is holding its 15th city-wide outreach drive at 20 Houston supermarkets. Together, the 14 previous drives have helped over 18,000 children apply for CHIP and Medicaid. A week later CDF will hold another city-wide enrollment event at 15 McDonald's restaurants, and McDonald's will also be distributing "CHIP Trayliners" at 260 Houston-area locations this month.

Clear Channel has donated

100 billboards promoting CHIP enrollment, and the Houston Dynamo, Houston's major league soccer team, are placing CHIP announcements on their tickets and banners being displayed at their games. CDF is coordinating similar outreach activities and enrollment events in other cities and towns in Texas, and these innovative marketing methods are going to reach thousands of Texas families whose children need health insurance.

The needs in Texas provide a quick snapshot of the needs of children in the rest of the country. Texas has the highest rate of uninsured children in the nation. More than one in five of Texas's children — 1.4 million — lack coverage. Nearly 90 percent of uninsured children have at least one working parent, but health coverage is often too expensive for families to afford, averaging \$933 a month for family coverage according to the Texas Department of Insurance. But for many of these children and families, there should be an alternative: Of the 1.4 million uninsured children in Texas, more than 700,000 are eligible for, but not enrolled in, CHIP and Children's Medicaid. That's where efforts like the Back to School campaign come in.

I am so grateful for all CDF's Texas office is accomplishing. CDF-Texas's

Executive Director Barbara Best, was recently profiled as one of 15 outstanding international health care advocates, and the only American, by the World Health Organization as part of the Voices from the Frontline web series for her work in enrolling Houston children in health coverage. The Back to School Campaign is just one more step in CDF's efforts to make sure every child in Texas and America gets a Healthy Start, and a model for the kinds of successful outreach and enrollment efforts that could make a difference for uninsured children in cities and states across the country.

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN is president and founder of the Children's Defense Fund and its Action Council.

