

The Charlotte Post

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OPINIONS

Time for new direction on attacking AIDS

Rep. Nancy Pelosi, the presumed new speaker of the House, says voters sent a clear, simple message on Election Day: "It's time for a new direction." That was the Democratic leader's own message all year on the campaign stump, and it's her promise now, as her party regains control of Congress for the first time in 12 years.



PHILL WILSON

The Black AIDS Institute couldn't agree more. And we desperately hope the Democrats are serious about charting that new course, because Washington has allowed the AIDS epidemic in Black America to run amok for far too long.

Congress has failed to do the hard work of reforming the 16-year-old Ryan White CARE Act to keep up with an ever-changing epidemic. The law was due for congressional reauthorization in 2005, but the pols have yet to act on that mandate. Lawmakers—including Democrats—have been too busy bickering over how best to divide up inadequate funding among the varied cities and states to see the bigger picture: There's not enough money in the program.

Given the disproportionate impact the AIDS epidemic is having on Black America, the Congress's decision to break without reauthorizing the Ryan White Care—one of the primary resources for care and treatment of poor people living with HIV/AIDS—was a direct assault on the health and welfare of black America.

While the administration and Congress fiddled, the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) has collapsed. ADAP subsidizes lifesaving anti-HIV drugs for about 30 percent of those getting treated in the U.S. Just last week, AIDS advocates in South Carolina announced that three people have died while languishing on the state's 300-person waiting list for AIDS treatment. As of the last reporting period, there were waiting lists in six states—a number that will most certainly grow if the congress does not set a new direction in the fight against HIV/AIDS quickly.

Funding for the Ryan White CARE Act has remained all but flat during the last three Congresses. Meanwhile, the U.S. government estimates an additional 200,000 Americans have contracted HIV since 2001. According to the Congressional Budget Office, as of January 2006 we were spending \$200 million a day on the war in Iraq. According to the coalition of local officials and advocates that has monitored the program since its inception, with the equivalent of what we spend in Iraq in one day, we could fully fund the AIDS Drug Assistance Program.

But, the AIDS Drug Assistance Program is not the only part of our national response to the domestic AIDS epidemic that is failing. Local health departments and clinics around the country, particularly in the South, report having to cut or limit services they offer in order to meet growing demands with limited resources. Addition treatment, support groups, transportation assistance—all have had to fall by the wayside in some places. The Centers for Disease Control's prevention efforts are being starved by lack of resources. Who suffers? African-Americans represent nearly 50 percent of the estimated 1.2 million Americans living with AIDS today and 54 percent of the new cases in our country. When care and treatment services are cut, black people don't have access to treatment. When HIV prevention efforts are undermined, black people get infected with HIV.

If Rep. Pelosi is true to her word, she'll indeed steer a dramatically new direction on AIDS. She can start by demanding that the House pass a budget that adequately funds comprehensive prevention efforts, and puts enough funding into the CARE Act to keep Americans living with HIV/AIDS alive no matter what state they live in.

PHILL WILSON is CEO and founder of the Black AIDS Institute in Los Angeles. He has participated in numerous international conferences on AIDS and was selected by the Ford Foundation in 2001 as one of "Twenty Leaders for a Changing World." Wilson has been living with HIV for more than 25 years and with AIDS for 15 years. He can be reached at Phillw@BlackAIDS.org.

FROM THE IN BOX

Charlotte Catholic response to pregame bigotry too timid

As parents of an African American son at Charlotte Catholic, we are deeply saddened by a recent incident that occurred at a Forestview High School soccer game against Charlotte Catholic, Saturday, November 4.

Forestview's soccer team played an excerpt of Adolf Hitler lieutenant Joseph Goebbels' speech prior to the official start of the soccer game. Equally offensive were the racial epithets directed at the players and our son being called a "nigger." However, we are even more disappointed with the tepid position of Charlotte Catholic High School and the MACS administration. They have not publicly addressed the insults directed to our players. We feel a strong message needs to be conveyed that any kind of intolerance is unacceptable.

There is a Code of Ethics administered by the North Carolina High School Athletic Association that does not tolerate or condone inappropriate behaviors. Additionally, Charlotte has an increasingly diverse student population. Therefore, it is imperative that our leadership provides guidance and holds accountable any infringement of these policies.

We hope this incident will serve as a learning experience to everyone. I would encourage individuals who are in a position to effect change and make a difference, act accordingly.

Lance and Hope Drummond
Charlotte



Is affirmative action on the way out?

The disappointing passage of Proposal 2 in Michigan, after similar Right-wing successes with Prop 209 in California and Initiative 200 in Washington state, coupled with other attacks, means that pro-affirmative action forces need to become more aggressive in defending and explaining affirmative action. A failure to do either will spell



GEORGE E. CURRY

the end of affirmative action as we know it. The irony of the misnamed Michigan Civil Rights Initiative passing in Michigan is that it was the suit against the University of Michigan Law School that paved the way for the United States Supreme Court upholding the concept of affirmative action. The court, rejecting a more numbers-oriented affirmative action program that the University of Michigan used at the undergraduate level, approved the more holistic approach used by the law school.

Writing for the 5-4 majority, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor stated, "The Law School's narrowly tailored use of race in admissions decisions to further a compelling interest in obtaining the educational benefits that flow from a diverse student body is not prohibited by the Equal Protection Clause."

What the law likes to refer to as a "reasonable person"

would have concluded that the issue was clearly settled. Far from it. Instead, Ward Connerly, the conservative Black California businessman who once benefited from a state set-aside program, decided to take his anti-affirmative action crusade on the road. After winning in Michigan, he may be heading to your state. Connerly is part of a well-funded national campaign to win with confusing ballot initiatives what conservatives clearly lost in pleadings before a Supreme Court dominated by conservatives.

While Connerly leads the attack on one flank, an even more successful assault is being carried out by the Center for Individual Rights, a conservative think tank opposed to affirmative action. By simply threatening to file suit against universities, the institutions usually buckle rather than litigate. Dozens of universities have scrapped race- or gender-sensitive programs rather than fight back.

Sadly, even the Justice Department came down on the side of CIR and pressured Southern Illinois University to terminate three fellowship programs whose recipients were mainly underrepresented women or people of color. But the Center for Individual Rights didn't stop there. It is now suing the Virginia Commonwealth University and the Dow Jones Newspaper Fund for operating a two-week high school journalism program designed

to encourage African-Americans to go into journalism, a field in which they are underrepresented.

CIR and other conservative groups are basically using the "equal protection clause" of the 14th Amendment, which was passed to end discrimination against African-Americans, to attack programs aimed at helping Blacks. It has shamelessly turned the 14th Amendment on its head. And, as I've said countless times, there is no infrastructure on the Left to counter the energy and mischief of the Far Right.

They've been so successful that the news media has adopted the language of the Far Right. Conservatives have been successful in getting not only the news media to adopt their misleading language, but even our own leaders have fallen into that trap. I saw a syndicated column this week by a national civil rights leader that asserted that Michigan's Proposal 2 "bars use of preferences by state colleges and universities as well as government agencies." How can we get news outlets to stop equating to race- and gender-sensitive actions with "preferences," if we're using the loaded language ourselves?

As a 1995 report by the National Association of Black Journalists pointed out, "Since polls have shown that the public supports affirmative action, but opposes 'preferential treatment,' using the terms interchangeably, under

the guise of objective reporting, unfairly characterizes affirmative action."

It further explained, "Using the term 'preferences' in this context betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the reason behind affirmative action: that it is intended to counter the built-in, systematic 'preferences' for white males that still exist."

In addition to losing the language war, we are not effectively arguing our case. Admission to college has never been based strictly on test scores and grade point averages, yet the public is made to feel guilty because Jennifer Gratz, a white applicant, was not immediately accepted into the University of Michigan undergraduate school while supposedly "less qualified" African-Americans were.

In one of its briefs, the University of Michigan noted, "In 1905, when petitioner Gratz applied...more than 1,400 white and Asian-American students with higher adjusted GPAs and test scores were rejected so much for Jennifer Gratz being discriminated against."

This war on affirmative action is not over. But we shouldn't continue to show up for the battle unarmed.

GEORGE E. CURRY is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service.

Civil rights commission hits rock bottom

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights was established as part of the Civil Rights Act of 1957. It was enhanced by the Commission on Civil Rights Act of 1983.



HARRY C. ALFORD

It is to receive and analyze complaints and to provide studies and advice to the president of the United States. It cannot enforce anything but the body can advise and provide input in regards to the civil rights of American citizens.

The finest days of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights were under the management and chairmanship of Arthur A. Fletcher, who served under President George H.W. Bush. His best accomplishment was a detailed study on the implementation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 for each major federal agency.

He also did much work in assuring that the U.S. military carried on with its tradition of exemplary affirmative action. Art, the "Father of

Affirmative Action," was certainly on the case and the nation was better for it.

From there, it was "rock bottom" as the opposite side, the anti-affirmative action right-wingers decided to put on the mother of all charades. Today, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an anti-affirmative action clique with a mission to neutralize the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and destroy what it can of the Voting Rights Act. It is anti-civil rights. It seeks to hurt and provide hurdles to those trying to diversify the American economy. Let's look at their membership.

Chairman Gerald A. Reynolds comes from the Center for New Black Leadership. Don't let the name fool you. This is a White organized group of racial animus pointed against those of the traditional civil rights movement. They couldn't lead 100 Black folks to a barbeque. According to the STLtoday.com, Reynolds "doesn't just oppose affirmative action; he abhors it. Affirmative action is The Big Lie. It is, he writes, a corrupt system of preferences, set-asides and quotas...a con-

cept invented by regulators and reinvented by political interest groups seeking money and power. Furthermore, many of the problems devastating low income Black communities are the result of a spiritual decay. Reynolds would remedy that through school choice programs, faith based institutions, replacing self-defeating values with middle class values, urban economic development and opposing the use of racial preferences in education and the workplace."

Wow, what a slap in the face of Art Fletcher, MLK, Rosa Parks, Whitney Young and the entire civil rights movement. I think we are talking "nut case" here.

Along with Reynolds are three other Republican slots filled by equally venomous anti-affirmative action attitudes - total of three Negroes and one Hispanic. Go to www.usccr.gov and view their pictures. They are strange! There is another slot that is reserved for an

"Independent." However, that independent is a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, an ardent anti-affirmative

action think tank. It's rather disingenuous to think that she is actually "independent."

Two of the three allotted Democratic seats are filled by a Hispanic and a Native American. They have proven to be staunch defenders of affirmative action but by virtue of a 5-2 vote their views become muted.

Affirmative action has been the key to the black middle class of America. It has been the driver for improvement in education, job opportunity and career enhancement. Thus, it brought economic power to a group of Americans who were living 75 percent under the poverty level at the time of enactment in 1968 (Art Fletcher under the Nixon Administration). Today, 75 percent of African Americans are living a middle class lifestyle. While there is still much room for improvement we can all say that there has been much success.

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