

## Blacks feeling frustrations with the black president



**CLARENCE PAGE** says the shift Obama brought to politics gives black leaders a new patience, but on unemployment their patience might be wearing thin.

**P**OLITICS has strange consequences. Few are stranger than those of racial politics. The jobs bill pending in Congress offers an excellent example.

Imagine, for example, the Revs. Jesse Jackson or Al Sharpton during previous economic downturns. By now, a pending employment bill might well have stirred marches and demands by black leaders for special aid to communities hard-hit by the recession.

But not this time. As much as Barack Obama's presidency has stirred anger on the right, it has brought a new patience to activists on the left. Black leaders still want the nation's first black president to pay attention to black issues, but they don't want to be perceived as getting in his way.

Few outside of black-oriented media noted the three black men who trudged into the White House through blizzardlike wind and snow to meet with President Obama in mid-February. Sharpton, Marc Morial, president of the National Urban League, and Benjamin Jealous, president of the NAACP, met with Obama for an about hour to talk about black unemployment throughout the country.

"We're not looking for race-based programs," Sharpton said afterward. "But, like the president, we want to make sure that everyone is included."

That's fine with Obama, who since his early campaign days has emphasized a colorblind approach. Help everyone equitably, he has insisted, and African-Americans will be helped, too. Yet fashioning colorblind solutions to unemployment is a tough task when the problem has a distinctly color-coded composition.

For example, Team Obama breathed a guarded sigh of relief as the overall unemployment rate eased from 10 percent to 9.7 percent in January, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. But Ohio State University's Kirwan Institute, which studies the recession's impact on African-Americans, found that black unemployment actually had gone up three-tenths of a percent, to 16.5 percent.

The 43 members of the Congressional Black Caucus briefly withheld their votes from a financial services bill in December to express their frustration at the lack of attention to joblessness, mortgage foreclosures and other ills in their hardest-hit communities. But when the House passed its \$154 billion jobs bill in December, they left out the caucus' request to direct 10 percent of the funding to low-income communities. John Powell, Kir-

wan Institute's executive director, expressed hopes this measure and others targeted to the neediest communities would be restored to the final bill, despite pushback by those who say they want a more "universal" approach. "We should have universal goals," he argued, "but targeted strategies."

Yet among black America's prominent public intellectuals, only Georgetown's Michael Eric Dyson has had the audacity to declare, "Obama runs from race like a black man runs from a cop." If anything, Obama runs from race like a black politician looking to avoid a potential white conservative backlash.

Another consequence of Washington's changed racial landscape is a higher profile and new level of accountability for black organizations like the Congressional Black Caucus. An embarrassing follow-the-money New York Times investigation of its finances raises questions about how well the caucus and its charities are serving their constituents. Yet caucus leaders have been less forthcoming than a Tiger Woods news conference.

Taking advantage of political finance laws that its members helped write, the CBC's network of nonprofit groups and charities has become a fundraising powerhouse. Yet the Times found it spends more of that cash on lavish galas, golf outings and conventions than it spends on scholarships and other badly needed public services.

Worse, a huge share of its donations comes from companies that produce the sort of products that the lawmakers write laws to regulate, including tobacco, liquor, "early paycheck" loans, "rent-to-own" furniture stores and other products that have a controversial impact on poor black neighborhoods.

In a statement, Rep. Barbara Lee, a California Democrat who chairs the caucus, called the Times story unfair but did not ask for a correction. More than a week after the Valentine's Day report, attempts by journalists to get further answers have not been successful.

If anything, the caucus and its foundation have been exposed for engaging in ethical conflicts, real or apparent, that no one seemed to care about in the years when black congressmen and the occasional black senator were the only visible black power in town. Times have changed. With a black president in the White House, the caucus gains real clout. When questions are raised about its ethics and priorities, it needs to give some real answers.

Page's e-mail address is [cpage@tribune.com](mailto:cpage@tribune.com).



PEDRO MOLINA

## Stimulus funds creating jobs for Houston scientists

■ And city's share shows research standing in U.S.

By **JESSE M. FLYNN** and **KIRSTIN R.W. MATTHEWS**

**A**PPROXIMATELY 1,300 jobs have been saved or created for scientists in the Houston area, thanks to National Institutes of Health stimulus funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act signed into law last year by President Barack Obama. Houston-area researchers have been awarded 311 grants totaling \$121 million from NIH stimulus funds this fiscal year alone. From this data, we estimate Houston received approximately 2.5 percent of the \$4.73 billion appropriated for grants and contracts in fiscal year 2009, which created or saved an estimated total of 50,000 jobs in the U.S. (as stated by the NIH report "Preliminary NIH ARRA FY2009 Funding").

In Houston, the institutions receiving the most were Baylor College of Medicine, the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center and the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston; they received \$40 million, \$33 million and \$27 million each, respectively. The ARRA money will go toward creating and saving jobs in Houston as well as funding critical biomedical research. Funded projects in Houston include efforts to develop bone replacement techniques, innovative new therapies for the treatment of blood hypertension, novel narcotic-dependence treatments, drug therapies for Parkinson's disease and the use of nanotechnology to create improved MRI contrast agents.

The results of this novel funding endeavor provide a unique snapshot in time and enable us to make national comparisons that are difficult to generate otherwise. How does Houston match up to other metropolitan areas around the state and the country at large? The state of Texas received \$214 million ARRA grant dollars from the NIH. The Greater Houston area, including Galveston, alone received more than 56 percent of the funds awarded in Texas. The next closest metropolitan area in the state was the Dallas/Fort Worth area with just 19 percent. However, Houston was awarded considerably less than other nation-

ally known urban research areas: the Boston metropolitan area, North Carolina's Raleigh/Durham/Chapel Hill Research Triangle and the San Francisco Bay Area. This leads us to conclude that while Houston is performing well in comparison to other cities in Texas, there is still a great deal of room for improvement in regard to attracting and retaining top researchers capable of leading cutting-edge projects and infusing Houston's economy with additional grant dollars.

We believe the recent funding of novel and innovative projects through the Recovery and Reinvestment Act will translate into increased visibility for the city, aiding in recruiting first-class scientists, and strengthen Houston's position as a leader in biomedical research.

The appropriation of stimulus dollars for research has received considerable criticism from opponents, because many people have difficulty understanding how giving money to scientists will quickly and efficiently stimulate the economy. We believe the data quantitatively illustrate that these funds are having a positive and meaningful impact on the creation and retention of highly desirable jobs in Houston. Furthermore, the positions saved or created by these funds are jobs that often address the most pressing medical issues facing the nation. Maintaining the health of the people in a society is critical to maintaining its economy.

Consistent advancement in biomedical research is essential for maintaining the well-being of Houstonians and the economic stability of Houston. ARRA funds from the NIH have contributed greatly to furthering this cause.

However, in order to prevent a research-specific work-force fallout when a portion of these grants expires two years from now (traditional NIH grants are for five years), federal and state support must be increased to maintain these valuable projects. Supporting these endeavors would aid in establishing Texas as a world leader in biomedical research and Houston as a premier city for scientists conducting this work.

Flynn is a graduate research assistant at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center; Matthews is the Fellow in Science and Technology Policy at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy.



## Government isn't broken; it's working just fine



**GEORGE F. WILL** says this loose talk of a malfunctioning government structure seems to come up only when liberals aren't getting everything they want.

**W**ASHINGTON — Today's health "summit" comes at a moment when, as happens with metronomic regularity, Washington is reverberating with lamentations about government being "broken." Such talk occurs only when the left's agenda is stalled. Do you remember mournful editorials and somber seminars about "dysfunctional" government when liberals defeated George W. Bush's Social Security reforms?

The summit's predictable failure will be a pretext for trying to ram health legislation through the Senate by misusing "reconciliation," which prevents filibusters. If the Senate parliamentary rules, as he should, that most of the legislation is ineligible for enactment under reconciliation, the vice president, as Senate president, can overrule the parliamentarian. This has not happened since 1975, but liberals say desperate times require desperate measures.

Today's desperation? Democracy's majoritarian ethic is, liberals say, being violated by the filibuster that prevents their enacting

health legislation opposed by a majority.

Some liberals argue that the Constitution is unconstitutional, for two reasons, the first of which is a non sequitur: The Constitution empowers each chamber to "determine the rules of its proceedings." It requires five supermajorities (for ratifying treaties, endorsing constitutional amendments, overriding vetoes, expelling members and impeachment convictions). Therefore it does not permit requiring a sixth, to end filibusters.

The second reason filibusters are supposedly unconstitutional is that they exacerbate the Senate's flaw as "inherently unrepresentative." That is, the Founders — who liberals evidently believe were dolts or knaves — designed it to represent states rather than, as the House does, population.

Liberals fret: 41 senators from the 21 smallest states, with barely 10 percent of the population, could block a bill. But Matthew Frank of Radford University counters that if cloture were blocked by 41 senators from the 21 largest states, the 41 would represent 77.4 percent of the nation's population. Anyway, senators

are never so tidily sorted, so consider today's health impasse: The 59 Democratic senators come from 36 states containing 74.9 percent of the population, while the 41 Republicans come from 27 states — a majority — containing 48.7 percent. (Thirteen states have senators from each party.)

Since there have been 50 states, Republicans have never had 60 senators. There were 60 or more Democratic senators after seven elections — 1960 (64), 1962 (66), 1964 (68), 1966 (64), 1974 (61), 1976 (62) and 2008 (60), following Arlen Specter's discovery that he is a Democrat, and the protracted Minnesota recount). But both parties have been situational ethicists regarding filibusters.

In 2005, many Republicans, frustrated by Democrats blocking confirmation votes, wanted to ban filibusters of judicial nominees. They said such filibusters unconstitutionally prevent the president from doing his constitutional duty of staffing the judiciary. But this is not just the president's duty; the Senate has the role of consenting — or not.

"Great innovations," said Jefferson, "should not be forced on slender majorities." Hence Barack Obama recently embraced a supermajority mechanism: The 18-member commission he created to recommend measures to reduce the deficit requires that any recommendation be endorsed by 14 members.

Filibusters are devices for registering intensity rather than mere numbers — government by added machine. Besides, has a filibuster ever prevented eventual enactment

of anything significant that an American majority has desired, strongly and protractedly?

Liberals say filibusters confuse and frustrate the public. The public does indeed mistakenly believe government is designed to act quickly in compliance with presidential wishes. But most ideas incubated in the political cauldron of grasping factions are deplorable. Therefore, serving the public mostly involves saying "No." The Bill of Rights, like traditional conservatism, effectively pronounces the lovely word "no" regarding many possible government undertakings — establishment of religion, unreasonable search and seizure, etc.

The fiction that government is "paralyzed" by partisanship is regularly refuted. Presidents Reagan, Clinton and Bush reached across party lines in 1986, 1996 and 2001 to pass tax reform, welfare reform and No Child Left Behind, respectively. The \$700 billion TARP legislation and the \$862 billion stimulus were enacted with injudicious speed.

Liberals are disappointed with the public, which fails to fathom the excellence of their agenda. But their real complaint is with government structure. And with the nature of the politics this structure presupposes in a nation way of government and replete with rival factions. Liberals have met their enemy, and he is the diminutive "father of the Constitution," of whom it was said that never had there been such a high ratio of mind to mass: James Madison.

Will's e-mail address is [georgewill@washpost.com](mailto:georgewill@washpost.com).