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Trendletter

Political Trendletter: Congressional Report Card—First Session of the 105th Congress

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Think Twice Before Amending the Constitution

Many Americans may not know that more than 100 bills and resolutions have been introduced during this session of Congress to amend the U.S. Constitution. That's extraordinary given that the Constitution has only been amended 26 times in 210 years and then only to address issues of paramount concern after careful consideration.

Our national charter was first modified in 1791 with the ratification of the Bill of Rights, perhaps the foremost set of human rights statutes in the world. The post-Civil War amendments—the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth—freed the slaves, made them citizens, and granted them the right to vote. Other amendments authorized the federal income tax, permitted the direct election of senators, enfranchised women and 18-year-olds, granted residents of the District of Columbia the right to vote in presidential elections, and codified the process of presidential succession.

Whether any of the current proposals to amend the Constitution should stand on a par with the First Amendment or granting women the right to vote is highly questionable. The proposed constitutional amendments in Congress today bear little comparison to those already ratified. They are shortsighted and, if enacted, may not survive the tests of time or changing circumstances.

Two measures that are coursing their way through the legislative process, one banning flag burning and the other permitting prayer in public schools, would limit liberties guaranteed by the First Amendment. Our democratic system will easily endure a few flag burnings, reprehensible though they may be. What would be less easily endured is tampering with the right of free expression. Similarly, HJ Res 78, a resolution to "Restore Religious Freedom," would cross the line that separates church and state. The measure would have the effect of permitting the imposition of state- or community-sanctioned prayers by a religious majority on a captive audience of public school students, including those who do not share the beliefs of the majority.

HJ Res 2 is a measure that would impose on all representatives and senators a 12-year lifetime limit of their term of service in Congress. Such an amendment is unnecessary. Article I, Sections 2 and 3 of the Constitution have already established term limits that voters can invoke if they so choose: two years for members of the House and six for Senators. Besides, the average tenure of members of Congress is now fewer than 11 years. Ironically, many of the congressional proponents of "term limits" have already served more than 12 years. Is this a cry for help? "Stop me before I run again!" It is worth noting, too, that if enacted, the law would sweep out of office some of the most experienced legislators, including blacks, who played by the old rules whereby members gained influence through seniority.

The so-called Balanced Budget measure is another proposed constitutional amendment of dubious value. A balanced budget amendment may compel Congress to make drastic and inequitable cuts in health care, education, and other social programs that low-income Americans rely upon. Furthermore, nothing in the legislative process impedes Congress from passing a balanced budget. As we have seen in the recent GOP-Clinton administration compromise on balancing the budget by 2002, all that is needed is common sense and the will to compromise.

The original framers of the Constitution were far from perfect or all-wise. And the Constitution is certainly not a perfect document. But these attempts to push a bunch of poorly considered Constitutional amendments through Congress are shortsighted and unwise. ■



PRESIDENT

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An Advocate's Struggle

A Fighter to Secure Political Rights for African Americans, Frank Parker Died in July—But His Legacy Continues

by Marc DeFrancis and Mary K. Garber

In 1966, just one year after President Lyndon Johnson signed the momentous Voting Rights Act, a talented, red-headed young white man graduated from Harvard Law School and made the unusual decision to enter the field of civil rights law. His name was Frank Parker, and his career as a leading litigator in the cause of voting rights would help shape the political and social history of Mississippi and, indeed, the nation. Given Parker's untimely death in July at age 57 and the generous scholarly contributions he made at the Joint Center over the years, it is fitting to acknowledge the legacy of a man whose legal work set a standard for the cause of voting rights.

Immediately on passing the bar, Parker was hired as a staff attorney with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, where he was assigned to survey barriers to black voting in the South. He quickly discovered that, as he later put it, "states covered by the Voting Rights Act [of 1965] were not about to roll over and play dead," but rather armed themselves with new forms of state-sponsored discriminatory electoral procedures to render black votes meaningless. Chief among these was vote dilution, and chief among the offending states was Mississippi.

Within a year of the Voting Rights Act's passage, Mississippi's all-white state legislature had gerrymandered congressional district lines to eliminate the majority-black Delta district, dividing it up among three predominantly white districts. The legislators also instituted new multimember districts, and authorized a switch to at-large election systems throughout the state. Their effort worked. Although blacks made up 40 percent of the state's population at the time, and although black voter registration had ballooned from 6.7 percent to 59.9 percent in the two short years since 1965, the legislature's vote-diluting techniques rendered black candidates virtually unelectable. As late as 1975, only one of the state's 174 legislators was black.

Entering the Battlefield

In 1968, Parker left Washington to engage the forces of white supremacy face to face, joining the Jackson, Mississippi, branch of the recently formed Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. At a time when there were only a handful of registered black attorneys in the state, and virtually no native civil rights lawyers of any color, the need for out-of-staters willing to defend black plaintiffs' civil rights was great. Along with groups such as the National Lawyers Guild and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the Lawyers' Committee took on the job of challenging these new forms of "massive resistance" to equal rights.

Parker served the Lawyers' Committee first as staff attorney, then assistant chief counsel, and then, beginning in 1976, as chief counsel. His efforts as a litigator brought important successes in several areas, including employment discrimination, racism in school curricula, and freedom to protest. But the court victories that may have had the most far-reaching consequences stemmed from Parker's decade of lawsuits against the state and local governments in Mississippi to bring minority vote dilution to an end.

The legal environment in which Parker had to work, especially in the late 1960s, was far more hostile than one might imagine from the perspective of today's "New South." Very few Southern lawyers were willing to defend black plaintiffs in civil rights cases, and many federal judges were entrenched believers in the old system of white supremacy. Parker had to argue before U.S. Appellate Judge Harold Cox, an unreconstructed segregationist who had referred to blacks from the bench as "chimpanzees." Cox did not bother to hide his dislike for Parker. Bill Minor, a political columnist for the Jackson Clarion Ledger, relates a story about the two men's showdown over a mural in Cox's courtroom. A faithful representation of the state's society at the time, the Depression-era painting showed blacks picking cotton and doing menial jobs and whites as the lawmakers and overseers.

"Standing up before Cox in the courtroom one day in 1971, Parker objected to the mural as creating an atmosphere that compromised justice for his clients. 'It will remain in this court whether you like it or not,' Cox acidly replied. Parker pursued it to the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. Suffice it to say, the mural was soon covered by a curtain and remains so today."

Bill Minor has described Parker as "a one-man legal army, standing off the 30 or more lawyers on the staff of the State Attorney General's office and winning with almost clockwork regularity." In 1971, Parker and his Lawyers' Committee associates began arguing a challenge to the state legislature's entire system of multimember and at-large districts, whose majority-white electorates guaranteed that no black candidate faced a fair prospect of being elected. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and affiliated activists served as plaintiffs. Parker often had to argue the cases in a U.S. District Court whose judicial panel included not only Harold Cox but J.P. Coleman, the former Mississippi governor and an avowed segregationist.

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Mr. DeFrancis is senior editor at the Joint Center and Ms. Garber is a contributing editor to *FOCUS*.

Frank Parker

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With these three judges playing the role of a renegade court, the state legislature repeatedly refused to redraw the districts as required by higher court decisions. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall later described the cases as having "a procedural history that can charitably be described as bizarre." Parker and his associates spent the next 14 years pursuing the goal of instituting equitable district elections, a task that required nine trips to the U.S. Supreme Court. The final decisions, including *Connor* v. *Finch* in 1979, *Connor* v. *Coleman* in 1979, and *Elam* v. *Dalton* in 1981, succeeded in bringing Mississippi's systematic vote dilution to an end.

In 1979, the Connor decisions directly led to the election of 17 black state representatives from newly drawn single-member districts, increasing black membership in the state's legislative chambers fourfold. Ever since, the state has had to draw single-member districts with equal voting populations.

Equally important for the state's progress in political equality was the *Brooks* v. *Winter* case, which Parker took on to challenge the state's racial gerrymandering of congressional districts. The Lawyers' Committee again succeeded, after two trips to the U.S. Supreme Court, so that by 1984 Mississippi was ordered to reconstruct the Delta district along its original black-majority lines. In the 1986 elections, black Delta voters elected Mike Espy to the U.S. House of Representatives, the state's first African American representative in Congress since Reconstruction. (After his appointment as Secretary of Agriculture in 1993, Espy was succeeded by black civil rights activist Bennie Thompson.)

Today there are nearly 800 black elected officials in Mississippi including 10 state senators and 35 state representatives. In June, when Harvey Johnson was elected mayor of Jackson, he became the first African American to hold that post. Johnson is one of Mississippi's 38 black mayors. Few of those politicians would have careers in public office had it not been for the work of Frank Parker and the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights.

Parker also litigated 30 cases of vote dilution through gerrymandering and at-large elections at the county and municipal levels, again resulting in the discontinuation of those practices. In 1980, he won a suit requiring that Mississippi make available to ninth grade students a new textbook that honestly dealt with the state's racial history, and in 1976 he won a five-year battle ending the State Highway Patrol's all-white hiring policy and mandating a court-ordered affirmative action hiring program.

Strengthening the Voting Rights Act

With these major victories behind him, Parker moved to Washington, D.C., in 1981 to head up the Lawyers' Committee's national Voting Rights Project. A new emergency had arisen the year before when the U.S. Supreme Court, in *City of Mobile* v. *Bolden*, reversed its earlier ruling (*White* v. *Regester*, 1993) and required proof of discriminatory intent in order to invalidate election districts and procedures. The Lawyers' Committee, joining hands with numerous other national organizations, lobbied Congress to amend the extended Voting Rights Act so that proof of discriminatory results would again become sufficient to declare procedures invalid.

Congress passed the measure by an overwhelming majority, influenced in part by Mississippi's 14-year history of discrimination through court rulings and legislative countermeasures, about which Parker testified at length. As Parker later wrote, "The legal standard first developed in the litigation struggles of black Mississippi voters and candidates… ultimately was adopted as a nationwide statutory prohibition against vote-dilution mechanisms." As of 1987, the Justice Department estimated that the law had already caused more than 1,300 jurisdictions across the country to revise their election procedures.

Parker's unmatched expertise in voting rights law was sought over the years by numerous organizations and scholars, and he wrote many law review articles and contributed chapters to books on the subject. But before 1985, he was first and foremost an activist rather than a scholar. In that year, he came to the Joint Center as a MacArthur Fellow and began work on what would be his only full-length book, *Black Votes Count: Political Empowerment in Mississippi After 1965*. Published in 1990, the book won considerable praise and half a dozen prestigious awards from legal, scholarly, and civil rights organizations including the American Bar Association, the American Political Science Association, the Southern Political Science Association, the Mississippi Historical Society, and the Gustavus Myers Center for the Study of Human Rights in the United States. Like so much of Frank Parker's work, *Black Votes Count* gives no credit to and makes little mention of Parker's personal role in the many court battles and historic decisions discussed. In fact, the book tells the story of a very large part of Parker's life's work, dedicated to changing the systems that operate to keep people from exercising their equal rights as free citizens.

In 1993, Parker left the Voting Rights Project to begin a period of teaching, first at the University of the District of Columbia Law School and later at American University and Washington and Lee law schools. This later career was cut off just as it was getting started with Parker's death last July.

Two years ago, while engaged in his teaching, Parker returned to the Joint Center to conduct research on affirmative action. During this time, he was a frequent contributor to *FOCUS*. By then, his red beard had run to gray, and without the likes of Harold Cox to face off against, his style was more sedate. The young interns at the Joint Center would not have guessed that the warm, witty, cigar-smoking gentleman in the white panama hat and rumpled seersucker suit was a veteran civil rights firebrand. But while his appearance changed, his mission did not. As Brenda Wright, the current director of the Voting Rights Project for the Lawyers' Committee, recently commented, "Frank Parker's passion for justice, his indomitable spirit, his tenacity and sheer stubbornness in pursuing justice made him irreplaceable and unforgettable." ■

From Accountant to Teacher in Harlem

Teaching in One of New York's Poorest Neighborhoods Means Dealing With Jammed Classrooms and Violence, But Hope Is Present Too

By Kevin Williams

In 1993, Kevin Williams, a recent graduate of Howard University, left his position as an accountant at the Joint Center and took a job as a science teacher in a junior high school in central Harlem. He knew it would be a challenge, but he never anticipated how much of a challenge. After four years in the classroom, Williams takes stock of the contributions he has made and assesses some of the personal costs.

When I left the Joint Center, I looked forward to teaching, but I was not naive about the pressures placed on public school teachers, especially in poor urban communities. I quickly learned that the difficulties I would face would be far more serious than I had anticipated. I found that I would have to attempt to teach students who lack even basic skills, be a surrogate parent to children raised in brutal environments, navigate a path through physical danger, and work without enough supplies or equipment. Dysfunctional families, classroom violence, including assaults on teachers, and amorous advances by students are common. In addition to teaching about molecules, cloud formations, and invertebrates, I help students deal with the violent deaths of their classmates and family members and with sexual and physical abuse, often by people close to them. While this is one of the toughest jobs in the nation, I return to it every school year because the need is so great and I have made a difference in the lives of some of my students.

My first assignment as a teacher was to a homeroom class with the school's lowest academic performance and the highest rate of behavior problems. It was a 7th grade class of 32 students. A few had already been in and out of the criminal justice system; most of them had failed a grade once; half had failed twice. I was their fourth teacher that year. This sort of baptism of fire is how new teachers receive their initial training. Those who can't handle it are soon weeded out.

Never Be Alone With a Student

New teachers have to learn how to evade a variety of professional perils. One of my early lessons was from an older teacher who told me never to be in the room alone with a female student. One day when class ended, Lisa, a 15-year-old student who was already a mother, walked up to me and slipped a note into my pocket. I told her, "Unless it's homework I don't want it," and handed it back. Not to be discouraged, she had her friend give me the love letter. This was an eighth-grade student who should have been worrying about what high school she would like to attend. I immediately reported the situation to my principal, who had the guidance counselor inform Lisa that a note expressing her feelings toward a teacher was inappropriate. Lisa came right back to my class at the end of that day to try to talk. I grabbed another student on his way home, told him I needed to talk to him, and kept him in the room until Lisa left. Then I reported that incident as well. This wasn't the only time a student related romantic feelings toward me.

Some students, especially some of the older boys, pose a physical danger to other students and teachers. My first year, a student physically attacked a French teacher. The student was transferred to another school, but other students continued to threaten the same teacher for the rest of the school year. One of the boys in my class told this teacher to "Shut up, before you get decked again."

Gratuitous violence by students against their peers is a constant problem. During a science test I was giving, Matt, one of the older boys and a bully, pulled out a cigarette lighter and attempted to light a girl's hair on fire. Luckily, only the ends of her hair were burned. Matt's excuse for his actions was, "I was just playing." This was the same student that threatened to beat up another student, Tony, who was only 13 and small for his age, if he did not give Matt 70 dollars. Tony didn't have 70 dollars, so he stole it from his mother. For each of these incidents of terror, Matt was suspended for five days and then allowed to return.

Hope and Heartache

There are also students for whom you have some hope. One of these was Charlene. She wasn't the best behaved child, but she had a special way about her. One day, as a writing assignment, the class was asked to finish the statement, "I was proud of myself when I… ." Charlene did not do the assignment. When I asked her why, she told me she had nothing to be proud of. I tried to encourage her and give her reasons to be proud, but she would not respond. That same day, after school, another student across the hall stabbed her in the back with a knife, narrowly missing her spinal cord. (The boy who stabbed her, Joe, is now in prison for a murder.) Things went further downhill from that point. She became pregnant, had a miscarriage, and was charged with attempted murder for a shooting. She worked her way back into school, only to fight her way out again. She was expelled. Unfortunately, neither I nor her family know where she is today. She went from being my source of hope to my biggest heartache.

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Harlem

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During a one-week period last year, I attended a funeral for one of my students, learned of the death of a former student, found out that a stray bullet had hit another student's younger sister, and heard that a student's uncle was killed by a person who went on a shooting rampage.

Last year drug dealers executed a student and his family because the student's brother had stolen drug money. Even though his two older brothers were in and out of trouble, he wasn't. Yet he was the one to die. Although he wasn't in my class, the tragedy of this boy's murder hung over the students in my homeroom like a cloud. For these children, the event triggered memories. They began to cry over the many incidents of violence that had taken the lives of their family and friends. Many had lost fathers, mothers, brothers, or other family members to violence. These students have to deal with so much that I can understand why school is such a low priority in their lives.

The main problem with these young people is not in their schools, but in their families and communities. How can a teacher be expected to cope with such pervasive problems? What do you say to the student whose parents died of AIDS? What do you say to the child who witnessed the murder of his mother by his father? How do you deal with the student who disliked his mother so much that he stabbed her once and told you and her that he wished she were dead. (She survived; he did not. A month later, he was shot and killed.) How do you deal with a student who reports sexual abuse by her father, a preacher in a local church? She was hesitant to make the allegation public because she doesn't want to upset the church congregation.

Teaching is an emotionally stressful and all-consuming profession. In addition to teaching all day, at night we must prepare lesson plans, class assignments, quizzes, and tests, and grade homework and past assignments. If a teacher were to grade homework and class assignments for every schoolday period, he would have more than 300 sheets to grade from a single day's work.

Along with teaching English, math, history, and science, we have the additional job of teaching our children coping skills to help them through daily adversity. However, we are handicapped when it comes to delivering on our primary task when there are few books, where an average of 42 children crowd into a classroom, where there are not enough seats or equipment to go around. Until our schools can be an oasis from the troubles students face at home and in their neighborhoods and offer them the opportunity to find positive things in life, our challenges as educators will remain.

A Job I Would Choose Again

After this dreary account of how physically and emotionally draining my job is, some may wonder why I continue to teach. To me, teaching is one of the most important jobs in the country. And not all of my students are without hope. My greatest reward is in seeing the look of satisfaction on the face of the student who completes a challenging task. I have seen some of my former students succeed in high school by using the tools I helped them acquire. I've helped turn the lives of some students around as they have matured into young adults. These young people shouldn't be abandoned.

The rewards do not happen every day, and they are separated by intervals of heartbreak. But helping students overcome their problems gives me a great sense of accomplishment. I indicated that teaching has caused me to face many situations I never dreamed I would face four years ago. In spite of that, if I had the choice of doing it all over again, I would still choose teaching, because I do not know of any other job that offers the same rewards and satisfaction. ■



DISCUSSION AND BOOK SIGNING:
Louis Martin and the rise of black political power

JOIN AUTHOR ALEX POINSETT AND HISTORIAN DAVID GARROW FOR AN EXAMINATION OF THE CAREER OF LOUIS E. MARTIN, CIVIL RIGHTS SPOKESMAN, LABOR ADVOCATE, JOURNALIST, AND ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE KENNEDY, JOHNSON, AND CARTER WHITE HOUSES.

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Survey Confirms Racism Is Still a Problem

The 1997 Joint Center National Opinion Poll Surveys Views on Crime, Drugs, Education, and the Role of Government in Addressing Problems

by David C. Ruffin

A national survey conducted by the Joint Center determined that the majority of Americans believe that discrimination remains a serious national problem and that race relations are not getting any better.

The survey, carried out in early April, registered the opinions of 1,700 Americans over age 18. Half the respondents were African Americans and the other half were selected from the general population. Designed by Joint Center senior research associate David Bositis, the survey also registered public opinion on national concerns such as balancing the budget, the role of the government, and welfare reform.

Discrimination Is Still a Concern

There is a broad consensus that discrimination is still a serious problem and race relations are not improving. Both blacks (93%) and the general population (77%) overwhelmingly agree that racial discrimination is "still very common today."Twenty-two percent of the general population believes that racial discrimination is not very common.

The poll shows considerable pessimism about progress in race relations. Both groups show widespread concern about the state of race relations in the nation as a whole—87 percent of blacks and 80 percent of the general population feel that race relations in the country are poor or only fair. Roughly similar proportions of blacks (56%) and the general population (45%) also feel that "the situation of black people in this country" is about the same today as it was five years ago. Among the general population, 41 percent feels that the situation has actually improved, but only half that fraction of blacks feels this way.

Views on racial issues seem to show more agreement when the questions are most general. The closer the questions come to people's everyday experience, however, the greater the divergences of opinion. This is true of perceptions about racism in one's own community as well as the prevalence of police harassment. Among the general population, 57 percent feel that race relations in their "own community" are either excellent or good, while only 39 percent of blacks feel this way about their neighborhoods. The statement that police are "much more likely to harass and discriminate against blacks than whites" is agreed with by 82 percent of blacks but only 57 percent of the general population. The general population is also three times as likely as blacks (34% vs. 11%) to disagree with the statement about police harassment completely.

Clinton Is Up, Congress Is Down

The proportion of people of both races who describe themselves as "Independents" is relatively high: 36 percent of the general population and 24 percent of blacks. However, the Democratic Party continues to be the party for most blacks (68%), compared to only 33 percent of the general population. Only 5 percent of blacks consider themselves Republicans.

Blacks are more apt than the general population to give President Clinton high marks for the job he is doing, but both groups agree closely in giving Congress a very low rating. Clinton garnered excellent or good ratings from 60 percent of blacks and 42 percent of the general population. By contrast, only 22 percent of blacks and 17 percent of the general population gave similar ratings to Congress.

Crime and Drugs Are Consensus Issues

For both blacks and the general population, crime, drugs, and education are ranked among the top five "most important problems facing the country." For both groups, crime is the chief concern and drugs rank third. For blacks, jobs and unemployment are the second most important issue, while racism and education rank fourth and fifth. For the general population, education is second, while taxes and welfare rank fourth and fifth, respectively.

The survey poses a relatively detailed question about preferences for balancing the federal budget. Most of those surveyed prefer sin taxes to cutting funding for healthcare programs. Respondents were asked to consider a number of options for helping to balance the budget and to check those that they would recommend. Black and general population responses are nearly identical (within 5 percentage points) on a number of proposals, including raising taxes on liquor and cigarettes (favored by 65% vs. 66%), on gasoline (19% vs. 21%), and reducing the growth in cost of Medicare (26% vs. 28%) and Medicaid (22% vs. 27%).

Blacks are somewhat more likely than others to recommend cutting defense spending (42% vs. 34%) and somewhat less likely to favor cutting spending on welfare (43% vs. 56%). Very few respondents of either group favor cutting spending on education (4% vs. 8%).

Split on the Role of Government

The expectation that the government should play a greater role in improving people's lives is very much higher among African Americans than among the rest of the nation's citizens. Asked whether they felt that "govern-

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Mr. Ruffin is the editor of *FOCUS*.

Survey

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ment is trying to do too many things that should be left to individuals and businesses," or whether government "should do more to solve our country's problems," the two groups responded in vastly different ways. Among blacks, two-thirds (67%) feel government should "do more," and just 28 percent feel that it is trying to do too much. Among the general population, the perception is the reverse: close to two-thirds (61%) feel that government is trying to do too much, and one-third (33%) feel that it should do more.

These differences are borne out by additional responses to related questions on the role of government. Blacks (45%) are almost twice as likely as the general population (26%) to feel that the main responsibility for helping "the poor and unemployed" should rest with the federal government. Conversely, nearly two-thirds (64%) of the general population would place that responsibility on state or local governments, compared with 48 percent of black respondents. A similar divergence appears in regard to health coverage for children. Asked whether the government should provide health insurance for all uninsured children, 84 percent of blacks and 63 percent of the general population agree.

Opinions on financing higher education reflect a similar pattern. Blacks (57%) again are far more likely than the general population (40%) to feel that the federal government should bear the main responsibility in making money available for higher education. Interestingly, very few people from either group think the government (at all levels) is spending too much money on education, and a majority from both groups believe it is spending too little (79% of blacks and 62% of the general population).

Consensus on Welfare Reform

Attitudes toward welfare reform and its most desirable goals show little divergence between the races. When offered a list of six goals of reform and asked to choose one or two as most important, the same two goals top the list: helping people get back into the workforce (cited by 57 percent of blacks and 48 percent of the general population) and strengthening families (35% of blacks, 40% of the general population). The two goals at the bottom of both groups' lists were eliminating welfare fraud and cutting taxes.

Asked to identify which of the items in a list they considered to be "big problems" with the welfare system, blacks and others cited the same two problems the most often: the encouragement given to poor unwed women to have babies and fraud and abuse by recipients. Differences appeared in other assessments, however. Blacks were much more likely than the general population to consider "big problems" to be the inadequacy of benefit levels to support families (67% blacks vs. 40% general population); the failure to give poor people job skills and training (72% vs. 50%); and the disrespectful treatment of poor people (66% vs. 40%).

While there is broad consensus between African Americans and the general population on many national concerns—race, crime, education—there are differences in views on how to address some of these issues. The majority (67%) of all blacks believe that the federal government should play a more active role in addressing social and economic problems. Less than a third (28%) of the general population agrees. ■

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TRENDLETTER

POLITICAL REPORT

Congressional Report Card—First Session of the 105th Congress

by David C. Ruffin and Christopher Geier

With the Democratic gains in the November 1996 elections, the GOP was cut to an eleven vote majority in the U.S. House of Representatives in the 105th Congress. This slim majority and the internal power struggle within Republican House leadership ranks had the effect of curtailing GOP activism as compared with the 104th Congress.

Nevertheless, Republican legislators continued to assault programs and protections that low-income and working Americans rely upon. For example, the House passed measures that would permit companies to provide comp time for overtime work instead of money. This may dramatically reduce wages of many employees. One bill would require single parents with young children in public housing projects to perform community service. Other legislation would allow 13-year-olds to be tried as adults.

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The roll call votes in the following Congressional Report Card focus on 10 different issues, including criminal justice, workers' rights, vocational education, nutrition, and term limits. Each of the 102 U.S. representatives in the report card is from a congressional district with a black constituency of 15 percent or more.

There was generally a clear divide between Republicans and Democrats on most issues. However, several southern Democrats broke party ranks to join Republicans in voting against measures that would preserve the social safety net.

Votes in the Report Card

1. CBC Budget

The federal budget proposed by the Congressional Black Caucus would balance the budget by the year 2002 by making more than $475 billion in cuts in military spending and corporate welfare as well as cuts of $50 billion in Medicare savings. The measure would not include a tax cut but would add back about $130 billion to funds for welfare programs, Medicaid, food stamps and social programs. Roll Call vote No. 143, on May 21, 1997, was rejected 72-358. A vote **for** was consistent with action taken by the majority of the CBC.

2. Prosecution of 13-Year-Olds

An amendment to the Juvenile Crime Control Act of 1997 (HR 3), introduced by Rep. John Conyers (D–Mich.), would exclude the provision in the act that allows 13-year-olds to be tried as adults. Roll call vote No. 113, on May 8, 1997, was rejected 129-288. A vote **for** was consistent with action taken by the majority of the CBC.

3. Nutrition for Women, Infants, and Children

An amendment to the Agriculture appropriations bill by Rep. David Obey (D–Wisc.) would increase funding for the Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC) by $23.7 million. WIC is a supplemental nutrition program for pregnant mothers, infants, and young children. Roll call vote No. 308, July 24, 1997, was rejected 195-230. A vote **for** was consistent with action taken by the majority of the CBC.

4. Forced Community Service

An amendment by Jesse Jackson, Jr. (D–Ill.) to HR2, a bill to overhaul the public housing system, would exempt residents of public housing who are single parents of young children or primary caregivers of the elderly or disabled from the requirement of performing eight hours of community service a month. Opponents of the requirement charged that it discriminates against the poor by forcing them to work without pay. Roll call vote No. 102, May 1, 1997, was rejected 181-216. A vote **for** was consistent with action taken by the majority of the CBC.

5. Overtime Pay

Passage of the Working Families Flexibility Act of 1997 (HR 1), a bill that would amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 that established the 40-hour work week. HR 1 would permit businesses to offer either money or time off for working overtime. Labor advocates feared the measure would significantly reduce workers' wages in many sectors of the economy. Roll call vote No. 59, March 19, 1997, passed 222-210. A vote **against** was consistent with action taken by the majority of the CBC.

6. Summer Youth Jobs

An amendment by CBC Rep. Major Owens (D–N.Y.) to separate the summer youth employment program from the Job Training Program Consolidation Act's block grant so that the youth program would continue to receive a separate appropriation. The amendment would deny states the discretion to eliminate summer youth jobs under the act's block grant. Roll call vote No. 137, May 16, 1997, was rejected 168-238. A vote **for** was consistent with action taken by the majority of the CBC.

7. Gender Equity in Vocational Training

An amendment to the Carl D. Perkins Vocational-Technical Education Act Amendments of 1997 (HR 1853) by Rep. Patsy Mink (D–Hawaii) would require state and local governments to spend at least 10.5 percent of federal vocational education funds (the current funding level) on programs for displaced homemakers, single parents, and pregnant women. Roll call vote No. 286, July 22, 1997, was rejected 207-214. A vote **for** was consistent with action taken by the majority of the CBC.

8. NEH Funding Cuts

An amendment to Interior Department appropriations would eliminate $110 million for the National Endowment for the Humanities, thus defunding the agency. Among its many programs, the endowment strengthens the teaching of the humanities at historically black colleges and universities by providing grants to instructors at those institutions to enable them to complete doctoral degrees. Roll call vote No. 270, July 15, 1997, was rejected 96-328. A vote **against** was consistent with action taken by the majority of the CBC.

9. Funding Cuts for B-2 Bombers

An amendment by Rep. David Obey (D–Wisc.) would cut $331 million from the defense appropriations bill that would go toward building more B-2 stealth bombers than the 21 previously authorized. Critics of the bomber charge that it is an expensive Cold War weapon with limited value in a post–Cold War world. They also assert that the money used to build B-2s would be better spent on other defense priorities. Roll call vote No. 336, July 29, 1997, rejected 200-222. A vote **for** was consistent with action taken by the majority of the CBC.

10. Congressional Term Limits

A proposed constitutional amendment to impose a lifetime limit of 12 years on the term of service for all members of each chamber of Congress. The Constitution sets term limits of two years for members of the House and six for Senators. The average tenure of members of Congress is now fewer than 11 years. Such a measure would remove from office the nation's most senior and experienced legislators. Roll call vote No. 21, February 12, 1997, was rejected 217-211. A vote **against** was consistent with action taken by the majority of the CBC. (A constitutional amendment must pass each House of Congress by a two-thirds majority.)

How to Read This Report Card

The chart below indicates how members of the House with black constituencies of at least 15 percent voted on the 10 roll call votes described above. The votes occurred between February 12 and July 29, 1997. A plus sign (+) indicates a vote consistent with the position taken by the majority of the Congressional Black Caucus; a minus sign (-) indicates the reverse; and a question mark (?) indicates that the legislator did not vote.

African American representatives are in boldface type. Black GOP representative **J.C. WATTS**, whose Oklahoma district is just 5 percent black, does not appear in the chart. House rules have barred **ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON**, the Democratic delegate to Congress from the District of Columbia, and **DONNA CHRISTIAN-GREEN**, the Independent delegate from the Virgin Islands, from voting on the floor of the House.

How They Voted—First Session of the 105th Congress

State	District	Repre-sentative	Party	Black population	House Votes (see descriptions, above)									
					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Alabama	1	Callahan	(R)	26	-	-	-	?	-	-	-	+	-	-
	2	Everett	(R)	21	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-
	3	Riley	(R)	24	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	?	-
	5	Cramer	(D)	15	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	-
	7	**Hilliard**	(D)	64	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Arkansas	1	Berry	(D)	15	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
	2	Snyder	(D)	15	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	4	Dickey	(R)	24	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+
California	7	Miller	(D)	15	+	+	+	+	+	?	+	+	+	+
	9	**Dellums**	(D)	29	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	32	**Dixon**	(D)	40	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
	35	**Waters**	(D)	44	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
	37	**Millender**	(D)	34	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
Delaware	At-large	Castle	(R)	15	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	-
Florida	2	Boyd	(D)	21	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+
	3	**Brown**	(D)	51	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	?	-	+
	11	Davis	(D)	15	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	17	**Meek**	(D)	54	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
	23	**Hastings**	(D)	46	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
Georgia	1	Kingston	(R)	28	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-
	2	**Bishop**	(D)	35	?	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
	3	M. Collins	(R)	23	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	4	**McKinney**	(D)	33	+	?	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	5	**Lewis**	(D)	57	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	8	Chambliss	(R)	28	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	10	Norwood	(R)	34	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Illinois	1	**Rush**	(D)	68	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	2	**Jackson**	(D)	66	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	7	**Davis**	(D)	60	+	+	+	?	+	+	+	+	+	+
	12	Costello	(D)	15	-	?	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Indiana	1	Visclosky	(D)	19	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
	10	**Carson**	(D)	27	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	?
Kentucky	3	Northup	(R)	16	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+
Louisiana	2	Jefferson	(D)	56	?	+	-	+	+	?	+	+	-	+
	3	Tauzin	(R)	20	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-
	4	McCrery	(R)	63	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-
	5	Cooksey	(R)	20	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-
	7	John	(D)	18	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-
Maryland	3	Cardin	(D)	16	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	4	**Wynn**	(D)	56	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	5	Hoyer	(D)	18	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	+
	7	**Cummings**	(D)	68	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	?	+
Massachusetts	8	Kennedy	(D)	20	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Michigan	9	Kildee	(D)	16	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	14	**Conyers**	(D)	65	?	+	+	+	+	+	+	?	+	+
	15	**Kilpatrick**	(D)	68	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Mississippi	1	Wicker	(R)	20	-	-	-	-	-	?	-	+	-	+
	2	**Thompson**	(D)	58	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	-	+

How They Voted—First Session of the 105th Congress

State	District	Representative	Party	Black population	House Votes (see descriptions, above)									
					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Mississippi	3	Pickering	(R)	28	-	?	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+
	4	Parker	(R)	37	-	-	-	?	-	-	-	+	-	+
	5	Taylor	(D)	18	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
Missouri	1	**Clay**	(D)	48	+	?	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	?
	5	McCarthy	(D)	21	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
New Jersey	1	Andrews	(D)	15	-	-	+	?	+	?	+	+	+	+
	10	**Payne**	(D)	57	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
New York	4	McCarthy	(D)	15	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	6	**Flake**	(D)	55	+	+	+	+	+	?	+	+	+	+
	10	**Towns**	(D)	59	+	+	+	+	+	?	+	+	+	+
	11	**Owens**	(D)	72	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	15	**Rangel**	(D)	47	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	16	Serrano	(D)	42	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	17	Engel	(D)	40	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	30	Quinn	(R)	15	-	-	+	+	+	?	-	+	+	-
North Carolina	1	**Clayton**	(D)	53	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	2	Etheridge	(D)	20	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
	3	Jones	(R)	20	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	4	Price	(D)	19	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	7	McIntyre	(D)	17	-	-	-	+	-	+	?	+	-	-
	8	Hefner	(D)	21	-	?	+	+	+	?	+	+	-	+
	12	**Watt**	(D)	53	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Ohio	1	Chabot	(R)	27	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	-
	3	Hall	(D)	16	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	11	**Stokes**	(D)	55	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	12	Kasich	(R)	21	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-
Pennsylvania	1	Foglietta	(D)	50	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	?	+
	2	**Fattah** (D)		58	+	+	+	+	+	?	+	+	+	
	14	Coyne	(D)	16	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
South Carolina	1	Sanford	(R)	18	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-
	2	Spence	(R)	23	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-
	3	Graham	(R)	19	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	4	Inglis	(R)	18	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	5	Spratt	(D)	28	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	6	**Clyburn**	(D)	58	+	+	-	?	+	+	+	+	-	+
Tennessee	5	Clement	(D)	21	-	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+
	8	Tanner	(D)	17	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+
	9	**Ford**	(D)	54	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Texas	1	Sandlin	(D)	16	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
	2	Turner	(D)	15	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	-
	5	Sessions	(R)	15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	9	Lampson	(D)	20	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	11	Edwards	(D)	15	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	18	**Jackson Lee**	(D)	44	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
	24	Frost	(D)	19	-	-	-	+	+	+	?	+	-	+
	25	Bentsen	(D)	21	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
	29	Green	(D)	15	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
	30	**Johnson**	(D)	42	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
Virginia	1	Bateman	(R)	17	-	-	-	?	-	-	-	+	-	+
	2	Pickett	(D)	16	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+
	3	**Scott**	(D)	61	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	4	Sisisky	(D)	31	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	+	+
	5	Goode	(D)	23	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-
Wisconsin	5	Barrett	(D)	29	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+