

APA Campaigning

Is it time for an APA Black President?

Our country and the world recently celebrated the election of the United States first Black President. It truly exemplifies the hopes and promise of the United States of America. The rise of President Obama is a story that could only happen in America. As we look at this trailblazing and unprecedented story, it makes me reflect and take a close look at the American Psychiatric Association.

Many members of the APA are fully aware that there has never been a president of the APA who is of African descent. To some it would seem truly odd on how in the 21st century this has never occurred. In 1969, spurred by the civil rights movement and the assignment of many African American leaders including Martin Luther King, Jr., Chester Pierce and many others formed the Black Psychiatrists of America to address the issue of the lack of concern by the APA in not addressing the needs of African American patients and professionals. These actions opened the door for discussions on the lack of representation in diversity, governance of the APA, research, educational concerns and culture.

This movement by a few African American psychiatrists resulted in many changes within the APA. The forward progress resulted in the creation of the Committee of Black Psychiatrists and the subsequent committees for diversity. This movement caused the APA to have to consider inclusion of or the fear of splintering the organization due to members not having representation and not meeting the needs of the varied American population.

Hence, there were multiple gains in persons achieving positions within the APA. These gains have continued even to this day. Even with all these gains, there has never been an African-American president of the APA. Some would ask why. You have to look at what it takes for a person to become president of an organization. This requires dedication to the field, knowledge of the organization, popularity among voting members and effective campaigning to mention a few.

In the book "Black Psychiatrists and American Psychiatry" by Dr. Jean Spurlock discusses how in the 1976 election that Dr. Mildred Mitchell-Bateman, a Black female psychiatrist was unable to win the position of President-elect of the APA. She poses the question "were members not ready for a black woman, or any woman or any black person, in the top post." It is true that elections are lost and won upon votes. It is possible that the person elected that year was better qualified, more popular or even simply the best candidate for the position. At the same time you have to also understand that African-Americans have been a part of the APA for many years. Despite our allegiance, paying dues, serving on committees and even assignments in high positions, the APA has never elected a president of African descent. At an APA Assembly, Dr. George Mallory raised an issue. Some of us may know it as the "Mallory Principle" in which he states that through the efforts of African American psychiatrists the APA has become more diverse. African Americans were the first to mention equality for all psychiatrists and bring attention to the needs of diverse patient groups. We demanded the APA be inclusive so that it could serve its true mission for the needs of all mental health patients and providers. It seems as if this has been helpful in many aspects. This is easily seen in the diversity of the APA since the civil rights movement, but he further mentioned that despite the progress of other groups, African Americans

seem to be passed up when it comes to leadership in the office of APA president. These issues were raised over 40 years ago and there still has not been a APA president of African origin. Some would say none have been qualified. It would be difficult to review the curriculum vitas of Chester Pierce, Alfred Cannon and numerous others and say there have not been qualified candidates. Others would say there has not been an African American candidate who has been popular enough. I would question if there were members of the APA more popular than Jean Spurlock or Alvin Poussaint. I mentioned but a few names of exceptional and overly-qualified candidates who never served as president of the APA.

That brings me to my next point. This year we have an excellent candidate who is running for president of the APA. Her name is Donna Norris. Dr. Norris has been active in the APA for over 35 years. She has served as APA Secretary-Treasurer, Area I trustee, Speaker of the Assembly and Recorder. She has served in over 30 components of the APA. I highly support and recommend that you vote for her to be president-elect of the APA. She is African-American, but this is not the only or most compelling reason that she should be elected. American psychiatry is going through dynamic changes at this time. Health care reform, pharmaceutical relationships, and increasing diversity are just a few. At this time there is not a better candidate in American psychiatry to lead our organization. No one is more qualified, more knowledgeable or has shown their dedication to the APA more than Dr. Norris. This is a nation that says that hard work, diligence and knowledge are the keys to success. There is no one who I personally feel is more knowledgeable or more dedicated to the creed and mission of the APA. Her familiarity and insight are without compare. Years of preparation have gone into her candidacy for the position of President-elect.

I encourage everyone to go to www.psych.org and vote for Donna Norris for the position of APA President-elect. Voting started on December 22, 2009. I ask this, not because Dr. Norris is African-American, but because I feel she is the most qualified candidate who would best lead our organization. She needs my vote...your vote...our vote as members of the APA. I ask that you do not let this historic and important moment pass you by without being a part of history. **Make a difference-- vote your heart, vote for history, vote for our future, vote for the best candidate, and vote for Dr. Donna Norris to be the next President-elect of the American Psychiatric Association.**

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Black Psychiatrists of America, Inc

National President