

# STATE OF THE COUNTRY

*To Bishop Adam Jefferson Richardson, the presiding prelate of the Second Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, to Connie Speights Richardson, our beloved Episcopal Supervisor, Host Presiding Elder William A. Dyson Sr. and Associate Presiding Elder Chester Morris, to all the clergy and laypersons assembled, your Committee on the State of the Country presents the following report:*

## NATURE, SCOPE AND TASK

Nearly one and one half years into President Obama's historically unprecedented administration the gathering storm of political opposition has unleashed anti-democratic impulses that have threatened to deadlock the work of Congress, to impede presidential initiative, to disrupt civic discourse and to quicken unreflective fear and fury among portions of the electorate as unknowing as it is certain of the liberties guaranteed by American citizenship. These miscues notwithstanding, our committee reports in a cursory fashion on recent developments in education, military service, international relations, banking reforms, immigration reform and finally health care legislation.

To be sure, the challenges that beset the nation in the present moment are too numerous to recount in the scope of this report but we are convinced that the braided nature of so many of them require that we draw attention to the peculiar manner of their interrelatedness. Why are so many jealously hoarding the stockpile of weapons that they insist the second amendment grants them as an *a priori* right while so many more cannot afford the homes they own, let alone a gun with which to protect them? Why have others obstructed passage of health care legislation by insisting upon death panels while so many more of our fellow citizens go without the health care that would insure a longer and healthier quality of life? Why are the jobless, the luckless and the

homeless left to wonder that they can expect to be even poorer tomorrow while wealthy Wall Street bankers can bet on exotic financial ventures with our money and become even wealthier either in loss or gain? How has reasoned debate been dismissed while its caricature thrives as demagoguery, cant and fallacy? Your State of the Country Committee has but scant answers to all these questions but we are confident nonetheless that the democratic urges of the American people will prevail and redound to the collective good of all.

## PROCESS AND DATA GATHERING

We have consulted the major media sources in the gathering of data but the astonishing degree to which all manner of information is available requires we search with circumspective care. Newspapers, sensitive to the concerns of their advertisers, may not always be as free as we might hope in their determination to lay bare the roots of financial malfeasance, the deeply confounding basis for political corruption. Radio and television sustain daily volleys of political punditry that do more to obfuscate issues than they do to illumine them. As a consequence, news has become just another form of entertainment that bemuses our angels and incites our demons. Universal access to these most popular forms of reporting has had the most curious effect of upending the original intent of securing an informed and educated citizenry; the more we hear the less we understand. What we have instead is a benighted, and unthinking polity in search of truth but satisfied with, lie, distortion and defamation. An even greater threat to rational discourse seems to have evolved without radio, television or newspapers. The internet has made it possible for every person to be his or her own publisher and, thus, any tomfoolery can appear as informed consent and dissent in the ever expanding blogosphere.

Responsible observations cannot be made in the absence of responsible research devoted to the nuanced measures that so often clothe the truth. For this reason we have relied less upon polling data than we have upon critical reviews and painstaking analyses. Our findings to follow are the sum of our gathering from journals, university and government studies and the sweet intuition that follows the labor of thinking over matters of far reaching significance. In the end, what we may discover in the dark closet of the nation's forebodings is that race continues to foster mistrust and outward displays of unwholesome aggression. We may be required to recite yet once more what we must do to uproot the ugly legacy of racist thinking from the common ground of our democracy.

## FINDINGS

I. First, let us state straight away how encouraging it is to note the example before us of the Urban Prep Academy charter school in Chicago.<sup>1</sup> In spite of the overwhelming odds of reversing the 40% graduation rate of black males in the Chicago public schools this academy managed to place every one of its graduating seniors (107 African American males) in an accredited four-year college. When public education continues to falter, alternatives, which formerly we condemned, like charter schools, appear ever more sensible as one remedy. This is but one story of the abounding many that demonstrate that all is not lost in our hope to educate the next generation for a rapidly changing world.

II. "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" has been a policy that underscores the nature of selective service without regard to talent, or capacity. Its use now appears in jeopardy as the nation continues to wage war on different fronts in a highly conflicted area of the world. Even the retired

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.urbanprep.org](http://www.urbanprep.org)

General, who first suggested it as a viable course for the military, has recently had a change of mind and heart. Colin Powell agrees with most active military leaders that the policy does more to harm the Armed Services than to promote its goals and objectives. Moreover, it is morally repugnant to cast stones at those who have risked their very lives to defend the nation and to cast those stones for reasons not germane to the prosecution of their duty to do so.

III. We are heartened to note the significant transformation underway in world opinion concerning the role of American leadership. To no small degree, the adult and intelligent strategies Obama has adopted in his relations to other world leaders and the countries they represent merit acknowledgement and commendation. The recent accord signed by President Obama and President Medvedev to decrease the stockpile of nuclear armaments in both nations signals a most welcome change of tone in American and Russian relations. To be sure, the more recent summit of 47 world leaders convened by our President to devise measures for effectively disposing of nuclear materials and waste augurs a safer and more secure world for all.

IV. Financial and banking reforms loom, however, and the current reluctance of Republicans to join Democrats to regulate the largest banks in the world threatens to extend the supremacy of corporate interests over national interests despite the fact that public welfare has undergone serious dislocations in the aftermath of the financial meltdown caused by irresponsible financial schemes birthed in corporate offices along Wall Street. The recent Supreme Court decision that the Constitution of the United States permits these same corporations to influence elections through unfettered financial support of candidates of whom they approve is a tragic mistake.

V. No less tragic is the new law just passed in Arizona intended to curtail the influx of

illegal aliens into Arizona along its southern border. The outcry has been vociferous against the new law, which harbors racial profiling at its core. It is essential that undocumented residents be treated justly and that they abide by laws that govern us all but the harassment and humiliation of Latina American citizens, which will be unavoidable under this law, is too costly a price to pay.

VI. Finally, the year long battle to pass health care reform has produced a bill well short of what many had hoped could be achieved but certainly more than its opponents would have allowed. Universal health care for all of our people is closer than it once was but that it was so heavily opposed raises serious concerns about the health insurance industry and its aim to pad profit at the expense of those it claims to serve. The Republican resolve to disagree at every turn raises the spectre of race because the measures finally adopted in the bill were in many instances Republican. The political strategy to “just say no” under girded Republican dreams that health care reform would become Obama’s “Waterloo.” Many of us have long ago reached the conclusion that the aversion Republicans have for Obama and the aversion for him they have stoked in the “Tea Partiers” is nurtured by racial animus enflamed by the spectacle of a man who has the temerity to be both black and President of the United States at the same time.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Our committee would propose the following goals for our nation’s people of faith.

1. The renewal of our commitment to secure the young against the vagaries of an uncertain future by equipping them with the learning that arms them against surprise and vicissitude

2. The support of troops upon departure and return because they are our first line of defense against terror and violent attack from abroad, but above all because they are our brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers
3. The promotion of international good will, especially among the least of these who have been the victims of earthquake, famine and genocide (Haiti, Niger, Rwanda)
4. The demand of our legislators to create binding laws to regulate greed, avarice and corporate overreach in the affairs of the nation
5. To abet a more congenial and hospitable space of safety for the stranger that is within our gates
6. The vocal and visible demonstration of our support for health care reform as the image of Christ's resolve to heal the sick and to enable the disabled

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Our committee recommends the church speak clearly and unequivocally to the burning issues of the day; by fostering a sense of urgency over the care and education of our children so that it would be meaningful to say that none will be left behind; by sensitively engaging our people over the unsettling cultural questions raised by the nature of human sexuality, but not just in the Armed Forces but in our families and in the church itself where “don’t ask, don’t tell” still abides; by promoting international exchanges of the kind that mitigate tension and engender concord and peace; by developing economic initiatives and strategies that are in keeping with our mission but that reduce the influence of faceless corporations over our people’s resources; by protesting the injustice of laws that foster discrimination and pit our neighbors against their own government; and by participating in health insurance exchanges that secure affordable insurance for more of

our people while urging our elected officials to perfect the promising start already made in health care reform.

The God we serve requires we use our hands to serve his people, our hearts to kindle the fire for justice and our minds to discern the difference between truth and lies, good and evil, and the beautiful and the vulgar. Your Committee on the State of the Country has cited some of the trials of the past year and we have marked them as but minor against the will of God whose law is unamended, whose love is unabated, and whose glory is unsearchable. If the justice we seek in our nation is the justice God requires of us in his sovereignty above every nation then it would be true what King did say more than fifty years ago; “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.”<sup>2</sup>

Respectfully submitted by the members of the Committee on the State of the Country to the One Hundred Forty-fourth Session of the Virginia Annual Conference in the year of our Lord, 2010.

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#### D E L E G A T E S

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<sup>2</sup> Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Speech delivered at the end of the march from Selma to Montgomery on the steps of the Alabama state capitol building, March 25, 1965.