



**CAMPAIGNING WITH DR. MCKENNA:
FORGING A FUTURE FOR OUR CHILDREN**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

Part I. Certainly, we realize it is a first step in a longer and larger struggle, but the election results last week for LAUSD District 1 in which Dr. George McKenna, the community's choice, won the first round, was a victory on various levels and for several real and righteous reasons. It was first of all a victory for our children who deserve the best representative and advocate possible always, but especially in these critical and challenging times. It was also a victory and promising step forward for the community as a whole in its long and difficult journey and struggle for quality education and for the excellence in representation and advocacy, equity in resources, excellence in teaching, cultural respect and grounding, and self-conscious community engagement which such a responsive and responsible education requires.

And it was likewise a victory for the assertive practice of self-determination of the people, impressive and instructive evidence of their will and capacity to hold at bay and defeat "big money" which is constantly praised and paraded in street conversations and corporate quarters as the mother and mid-wife of all political victories. Linked also to the victory of community self-determination over big money imposition is its parallel triumph over political anointments from "on high", backroom and boardroom business as usual, and the companion assumption that this means "it's a done deal".

And so, there is in the community a rightful sense of celebration, but also a sober realization that the struggle continues and there is much work and strategic reflection still to be done. As we move forward, it is important, however, to reflect back and to

ask ourselves what led to this victory, what number of interrelated and interlocking factors formed the foundation on which this victory was conceived and carried to conclusion. As always, we must begin with praise of the people, who cast aside conventional wisdom and worshipful conversation about the invincibility of big money; entrenched politicians with a long laundry list of called-in endorsements for past and promised funding and favors; and an already in-place campaign structure ready to hit the road at the drop of a hat or handkerchief.

This was for the community a signature moment for struggle and they rightly saw this election as critical to forging a good future for our children, and thus the need for not bowing down to big money (\$450,000); not accepting candidates anointed and assigned to run regardless of qualifications or input from the people; and not allowing the personal interests of politicians to be camouflaged and pursued as the real interests of the people without rejection and resistance. And so the people stood up, put the interests of our children and community first and said "yes" to quality education and rightful representation and "no" to personal projects and customary practices negative to the interests of the children and our larger community.

The second decisive factor in the victory was the people's candidate, Dr. George McKenna, himself. By all assessments, his credentials are impeccable. No one, not even his opponents, deny that his qualifications are superior in education, administration and experience. He brings also a long history as an activist educator, deeply rooted and actively involved in the institutional and organizational networks and initiatives of the community. And thus, he brought and brings

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high name recognition and respect, with the additional claim of being the star-subject of a major movie in which he was portrayed by Denzel Washington and which is deserved testimony to his achievements in and for the community.

Thirdly, key to the process and practice of victory in this campaign was/is Team McKenna, the core group of campaign staff, an intergenerational group of men and women who put the campaign together at almost a moment's notice and took it to victory across the first finish line. It was clearly an awesome challenge, for they had to face and then put behind them normal and initial apprehensions and reservations that come with beginning a campaign with little or almost no money, no structure, no headquarters, no standing volunteers; needing to build from the ground and grass root level; attempting this in an age of "me" rather than "us"; and needing to have started yesterday or last year, if they had known it would come to this.

It was an unlikely, unanticipated and unplanned group, but when they were given this invitation of history they accepted it with the dedication, discipline, determination, and skill it required. Moreover, they reached out to the community and the community responded with a rich diversity of persons, peoples and organizations who came forth: those with invaluable political wisdom and experience and networks of resources; those with vital technological ex-

pertise; and the indispensable volunteers who did the day-to-day work of phone banks, mailers, precinct walking, holding forums, and conducting an endless number of informal conversations on the good and promise of all this.

The idea with Dr. McKenna as the people's choice for this community campaign for the LAUSD District 1 open seat had originated in discussions held in the Black Community, Clergy and Labor Alliance (BCCLA) and grew out of conversations around BCCLA's Community Covenant on Politics. BCCLA had discussed initiating a new relationship between the community and political candidates and office holders, one based on a covenant of mutual respect, mutual benefit, accountability and cooperation for common good.

We had thus, created a Black Community Covenant and agenda for which we asked endorsement in order to receive our support. We had held interviews during the mayoral race with candidates Eric Garcetti, Wendy Gruel and others who endorsed the Covenant. The McKenna Campaign is a continuation of this initiative and fits seamlessly within the arc and agenda of the new covenant politics we deem vital to the community's advance forward. And thus, Dr. McKenna's support was diverse and wide ranging, reflecting the community's deep desire for a new politics and its active commitment to engage in the necessary practices to produce it.

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