

Community organizers deserve praise, not Palin's insults

By Federal D. Glover
East County Times

Article Launched: 09/17/2008 05:40:42 PM PDT
DURING THE Republican National Convention, Vice Presidential nominee Sarah Palin took her opportunity in the national spotlight to belittle community organizers in an attempt to hit at the Democratic Presidential nominee Barack Obama. As a former community organizer myself in the now-defunct Neighborhood Youth Corps, I took personal offense at her snide attempt to disparage a noble occupation by employing the same sarcastic technique that transformed the words "liberal" and "San Francisco" into negative pejoratives.

I think back when I was in the youth corps trying to get young people involved in beautifying their parks and neighborhoods. Now, as a county supervisor, I think of all the community organizers I work with who volunteer long hours, weekends and nights to provide services to our community. They most often work in cramped offices and are always scrambling for funding for their underappreciated work. Many of the nonprofit agencies are recipients of grants from the Keller Canyon Landfill Mitigation Fund, which I administer.

For the most part, community organizers work to get government to cut through the red tape to respond to an issue or a cry for help. They make the guardians of the status quo uncomfortable because, by necessity, they are agitators and work to shake things up, to wake up a slow-moving government agency, to pressure an unresponsive bureaucrat or

to raise the conscience of an unaware community.

Among the "community organizers" who were able to institute societal change are Martin Luther King, Susan B. Anthony, Cesar Chavez and Mohandas Gandhi.

Unlike our elected leaders, community organizers don't have the authority to order or mandate changes in our society. Most of the time, all they have is the power given to them by the people they seek to serve.

In East County, we are fortunate to have a bevy of community organizers among us doing the work that makes life a little bit easier for those who are having difficulties, whether they are emotional, physical or drug-related. They work in the areas of health, domestic violence, family counseling or tutoring kids.

They help youngsters dealing with an unexpected pregnancy (hey, as the GOP pundits say, "Life happens."). They also counsel families going through economic hardships, heal emotional wounds, coach kids in a variety of sports, organize events to help stop the spread of AIDS and HIV, provide afterschool classes and activities for kids without adult supervision, involve youngsters in dance or cheerleading programs, teach job skills to the underskilled, scrounge for donations so they can bring hot meals and provide company to the elderly, become role models for young people, bring health care to underserved communities, advise homeowners facing foreclosure, find jobs for the unemployed and counsel kids to stay out of gangs.

Some of them work for nonprofit community-based organizations and others work for the County providing social and health services. However, many are volunteers from the ranks of ordinary citizens.

Advertisement

ContraCostaTimes
.com

(800) 598-4637

Subscribe today!
www.contracostatimes.com/subscriberservices



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

ContraCostaTimes.com

The list goes on because the need is great in parts of East County.

Many clergy when they urge their flocks to work on social justice projects can fall under the community organizer umbrella.

Obama, who worked through the faith community, sought jobs and counseling for those workers who lost their livelihood when the steel plant closed down in Chicago's Southside or found housing for their families. Similarly, the community organizers from the Contra Costa Interfaith Services Community (CCISCO) work with local congregations to find jobs, decent working conditions and affordable housing for their clients.

Community organizers live and work among us, and rather than hurl insults (in the guise of clever rhetoric) at people who are trying to make life a little bit easier for so many people, we should be thankful for their presence and the unheralded work they do. Instead of spitting in their faces, we should honor them. Without their help, life would be much more difficult for many of our neighbors trying to survive in this stalled economy on the bridge to nowhere.

Glover is the County Supervisor for District 5.
Reach him at dist5@bos.cccounty.us.

Advertisement

ContraCostaTimes (800) 598-4637
 .com

Subscribe today!
www.contracostatimes.com/subscriberservices



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics