

opinions

column LEFT

MLK and the Cerritos Triple Flip

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On November 22, the Cerritos City Council made one of those decisions whose details will be quickly forgotten, but its results will be remembered for years to come. The controversial decision was to not bring the city of Cerritos in line with the federal, state, county and many other city governments and honor the Martin Luther King holiday.

Although no councilmember repeated the infamous phrase of former Alabama Governor George Wallace, "Segregation today, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever," the message that the Council collectively made can be perceived as the same. On January 17, 2005, most governmental entities across the country will honor Martin Luther King's birthday. Cerritos will be the exception, not the rule. Under this condition, by remaining open on the MLK holiday, the city of Cerritos will be sending the message of a holdout segregationist city.

This is certainly not the message that the Council intended to convey, nor does it fit the racially diverse demographics of the city.

Technically, the Council's reason for not honoring the MLK holiday involves the number of annual holidays city employees receive, as negotiated with the union. The contract between the city and

the employees' union, which cannot be altered until the summer of 2006 unless both sides mutually agree, states that employees are entitled to 12 holidays per year. Nine of those holidays are fixed, and the remaining three are "floating holidays," whereby each employee can celebrate their "floating holiday" whenever they wish (with a supervisor's approval). In essence, the floating holidays are nothing more than restricted vacation days. Whereas regular vacation days can be carried over from year to year, a floating holiday is a "use it or lose it day" that must be used within the year.

The City Council felt that 12 holidays per year is already high (second highest in the county), so rather than add a 13th holiday, they asked the union to agree to exchange one of the floating holidays into a fixed MLK holiday. To no one's surprise, the union rejected this offer to unilaterally give up flexibility in their holidays just to help the city save face.

We, therefore, need some creative idea to help the city of Cerritos get out of this logjam. Call it the "Cerritos Triple Flip":

- (a) trade one floating holiday to an MLK holiday;
- (b) convert one floating holiday into a vacation day;
- (c) retain one floating holiday.

With this plan, the city gets to save face, and the union maintains flexibility. The flexibility lost by converting one floating holiday to a fixed holiday on the third Monday in January is offset by flexibility gained in having a vacation day that can be accumulated year to year.

Let's all hope and pray that the city and the union will either accept this plan, or some other compromise plan, in order to avoid the wrong message that the city of Cerritos is currently sending out.

Text of Article

MLK and the Cerritos Triple Flip
Alon Barlevy, PhD.
Vice President, Hubert Humphrey Democratic Club

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