



UNITED STATES
COMMISSION ON
CIVIL RIGHTS

1121 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20425

July 18, 1991

The Honorable George H. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As members of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, we have a profound sense of concern over signs of growing racial division in the Nation. As a result, we urge that you act decisively prior to the 1992 Federal, State and local elections to prevent the use of irresponsible campaign tactics that only serve to divide the nation along racial lines.

Signs of racial tension in our schools, in the streets, and on the job appear to be increasing. Everyday, we are confronted with examples of hate crimes and racial incidents. A major goal of the Nation must be to alleviate this tension. With candidacies for the Presidency already being discussed, we must recognize how significant the election process is in the citizen's perception of government. A campaign can set the tone for race relations for years. The irresponsible tactics of a few cannot be permitted to divide the Nation. The use of inflammatory racial rhetoric in political campaigns will only fan the flames of racial division and distrust, exacerbating social problems and making governance more difficult at all levels.

Fortunately for all Americans, most political candidates refuse to permit race baiting and similar tactics to penetrate their campaign's discourse. The Commission believes that most candidates will show similar resolve in 1992. But the specter of divisive racial tactics and the resultant alienation requires that we, as public officials, actively endeavor to prevent such tactics from entering the 1992 campaigns.

With the strong moral authority of your offices, your repudiation of such tactics by any candidate or campaign committee will be a major step in responsibly dealing with this problem. While the Commission acts as a conscience of the government on civil rights, the success of any effort to sensitize both candidates and citizens on the perils of injecting racial tactics into a campaign will be largely due to the strong moral suasion that you bring to bear.

Because of the problem's severity, we urge you to convene a summit conference, comprised of major public officials from Federal, State and local government, the media, and private citizens, to address

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this issue and to prepare guidelines for proper conduct. Since the summit must be understood as a nonpartisan effort, we believe that an open and strong coalition is essential for establishing a positive agenda.

The primary purpose of the summit should be to forcefully establish, in the eyes of both candidates and the public, that the injection of racial animosity into a campaign should not, and will not, be tolerated. The summit can serve as a focal point in publicizing the inappropriateness of racial politics. The summit could also serve as a valuable instrument for discussing practical problems of what constitutes an inappropriate use of race.

At a minimum, the Commission believes that the following principles should be adopted:

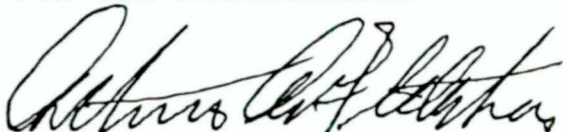
1. A candidate should make every effort to avoid even the appearance of the use of racial tactics in the campaign. As we have learned, even the appearance of a problem can result in the loss of faith in government. Candidates, even unsuccessful ones, can establish a perception of the integrity of government. As a result, each candidate must scrutinize his or her actions and the actions of staff to ensure that those actions cannot be perceived as having the effect of injecting racial bigotry into a campaign.

2. A candidate should advise his or her staff that they will be held personally accountable for any attempt to use race-baiting as a tactic.

In summary, this Commission believes that positive, nonpartisan action on the part of this Nation's political leadership is necessary to establish a standard of campaign conduct that is free of divisive racial stereotypes; a standard that consciously avoids even unintentional linkages of social problems with a particular racial or ethnic group if such linkage would be unfair or misleading, or inflammatory; a standard, in sum, that is worthy of a richly multicultural, multiracial society such as ours, whose very diversity should enhance its strength. And we ask you to take the initiative toward this end by convening the summit meeting to clearly define and espouse that standard.

Respectfully yours,

FOR THE COMMISSIONERS



ARTHUR A. FLETCHER
Chairman