



# THE PLAIN DEALER

## The search for a replacement for Rep. Stephanie Tubbs Jones: The screening committee tried to prevent division

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**Louis Stokes**

The untimely demise of our beloved Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs Jones was a devastating blow to the 11th Congressional District. It all happened so fast.

Complicating matters was the election for the two-year term: Tubbs Jones' name had to be replaced. The choice of this person is made by the Cuyahoga County Democratic Party Executive Committee.

The other election will be a primary election Oct. 14. This election is for the unexpired term, which will amount to about two months in office. But this election is extremely important: If the same person is elected to the two-year term and the unexpired term, they will go into office with two months seniority over all other incoming freshmen and will have priority over them in committee selection.

Seeing the need to inform, educate and unify a community that's still grieving, Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson and I decided to convene a candidate screening committee to interview candidates for the two-year term and to recommend to the executive committee the candidate that the screening committee felt best represented the interests of our congressional district. It was their right to accept or reject our recommendation. This committee was a cross section of our district, and it was diverse.

Why did Mayor Jackson and I act as co-conveners? Because neither of us has any agenda other than good governance. We recognized that our district faced a crisis and needed direction. We were joined by Arnold Pinkney, another leader of good reputation. We came together because the 11th Congressional District is not an ordinary one. It is steeped in history. For the past 40 years, this district has been represented by only two persons: Tubbs Jones and myself.

There is precedent for a screening committee to vet candidates for this office in our district. I went before such a committee. So did Tubbs Jones.

We had hoped that The Plain Dealer would respect that our community was still in mourning and needed to avoid confusion and division. We were seeking unification and consensus. Instead the newspaper created controversy where there was none.

The screening committee was a private group, not subject to Sunshine Laws, and was not required to be open to the public. Prior to our meeting, I gave Plain Dealer reporter Joe Guillen copies of letters containing the date, time and place of the screenings. The accusation of a secret meeting is completely false.

The Plain Dealer's editorial reference to these outstanding people as being a so-called screening committee was unwarranted. Accusing them of being in on a fix was not only untrue but also disrespectful. The committee interviewed eight candidates from 6 p.m. to midnight and voted near 1 a.m. Neither Mayor Jackson nor I ever asked any person to vote for any specific candidate.

The Plain Dealer had no facts upon which to impugn our characters.

Regina Brett wrote a column without understanding the political situation. She wrote: "Someone needs to finish out the last months of Tubbs Jones' current term. Since nothing will happen during that time, it doesn't much matter who fills that seat, so I'm not going to address that now."

Can you imagine that? Our district has just lost 10 years seniority, and she doesn't realize that the person winning the two-year term must also win the unexpired term to gain seniority over the other incoming members. This is of the highest importance to a district that now has no seniority.

The selection process is over. Our committee recommended Mayor Marcia Fudge to replace Tubbs Jones'

name on the ballot. The same recommendation was made by the Democratic ward leaders and the Black Elected Democrats of Cleveland, Ohio.

Additionally, the executive committee of the Democratic Party has selected her. We have unified our community.

It is sad that The Plain Dealer chose to attack the leadership that Mayor Jackson and I provided. The paper missed a great opportunity to be a part of the healing process.

Stokes, who retired in 1998, represented the 11th Congressional District for 30 years. Currently he is senior counsel with Squire, Sanders and Dempsey L.L.P. and a member of the faculty of the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, Case Western Reserve University.

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