

Senator GRASSLEY. Do any of you have any questions or doubts in your mind about Clarence Thomas' commitment to civil rights and equal opportunity?

Mr. JACKSON. Absolutely not.

Mr. WOODSEN. Absolutely not.

Reverend SOIRES. I don't, and I feel comfortable saying that because, while we may differ within the African-American community and within the religious community and the overall community about priorities and approaches, I think we all agree on goals. It does concern me that many of us are willing to place things as priorities that I don't think should be priorities. As I mentioned to Senator Hatch, if we have a 53-percent dropout rate out of the public high school in our community, I think our priority should be that issue and not whether or not the bank downtown hires our kids. I think we have to deal with the bank downtown, but we have got to start with first things first.

So I think what you will discover is that when you talk to all of us long enough, we will agree on the problems and we will agree on the goals. The question is: What are our priorities and approaches? Therefore, Judge Thomas is as committed as Jesse Jackson, as Bob Woodsen, as anyone else who is doing anything else relative to civil rights. But the priorities and the approaches may differ.

Mr. WOODSEN. I think what Judge Thomas is doing, Senator, in my relationship with him, is to probe different questions. We need different questions asked. One of the questions that he asks, and I do too, is: If race alone were the principal culprit, how is it that blacks control 8 of the 12 major cities, the school systems, the health systems, the housing systems, and yet poor blacks are no better off now than when they were controlled by whites, according to the numbers. The downtown is booming, even in the Reagan era. Eighty percent of the development dollars going to those cities went to reconstruct the downtown, not in the neighborhood. Those were local decisions.

And what Clarence Thomas and others of us are asking is how are those local decisions made to build a Hyatt Regency downtown instead of a business incubative facility with retail shops in low-income neighborhoods that could serve as an anchor for the restoration of those neighborhoods.

I think that these are the kinds of critical questions that the Thomas nomination is causing to be debated within the black community, and I think this is a healthy occurrence.

Mr. JACKSON. May I add something? And I will probably try to be a little more simplistic about it. In a speech that I was giving in Colorado about 2 months ago, I simply said, as Reverend Soires said—and which I think is so important—and this was an issue dealing with where are we going in the year 2000 and how effective affirmative action has been in the African-American community.

The question that I posed at that time—or the person posed, I should say, that I had to answer, they simply asked: Are African-Americans better off today than they were 20 years ago? And I will not call the person's name because they are a noted civil rights person, automatically said no. My answer at that point in time was to the moderator: Which group of African-Americans are you