

Attn: Vicki Santa, WMNF Staff, Personnel Committee, Board and Volunteers

This letter is to protest the cancellation of Straight Talk, in accordance with the WMNF grievance procedure. I call for the immediate reinstatement of Straight Talk. Its cancellation was unprincipled and violated the WMNF Programmers Agreement, which states that programmers have a right "to receive written notification from the Program Director or News and Public Affairs Director no less than thirty days before any program changes that may affect you go into effect." The Agreement goes on to say that the management has the right to preempt or cancel a program under special conditions, but those conditions are not defined.

I received a letter from Rob Lorei 2 weeks ago stating that Straight Talk had been renewed for 2 more years. The only "special conditions" that would logically warrant such a drastic and unforeseen reversal would be a broadcast that violated FCC rules and endangered the station's license and certainly no such act was alleged during the 2 weeks between the renewal and the cancellation. Also, I have never received a formal written evaluation of Straight Talk, as dictated in the Programmers Agreement.

For years I have been met with hostility from the management of WMNF, especially from News and Public Affairs Director Rob Lorei. I have been called into meetings to face charges based on listener complaints. Yet, when the tapes from the shows in question were reviewed the charges were found to be unsubstantiated. Unable to find justification for removing Straight Talk, the WMNF Board apparently passed a special resolution aimed at Straight Talk. These actions remind me of the method the U.S. government uses against black people — creating special designer laws just for us!

Although I have requested justification for the cancellation in writing, I have received nothing. Station manager Vicki Santa could take the time to issue a release to the press and conduct an interview with the WMNF news department regarding my cancellation, but only cares to inform me via telephone that my nearly 10 years of volunteer programming service at WMNF will be discontinued.

As I have nothing in writing to explain the reason for the cancellation of Straight Talk, I will respond to the statements made by WMNF management in its press statement and evening news story.

1) If a new resolution was passed by the Board that would affect my show, I should have had access to that resolution. It was never published on the WMNF website, distributed on the "Everyone" list serve or placed in my mailbox.

The resolution that "WMNF assigns programs to individuals, not groups or organization" (is this the entire resolution? because that is the only language that Lorei emailed to my producer subsequent to the cancellation) has been discriminatorily used against Straight Talk. Many shows on WMNF are hosted by people who are active in organizations related to the content of their shows. These hosts regularly promote events and express views related to their personal involvement in the community (I can cite many examples if asked). In my opinion this is a natural

component of community radio.

If the Board has decided to disallow such activity, the rules should be clearly defined and consistently enforced.

It has been charged that the Uhuru Movement, of which I am a member, controls Straight Talk. This is untrue. Straight Talk got started almost 10 years ago when the station approached the Concerned African-American Citizens organization and asked myself and Michelle Patty to do a show on WMNF. We had been kicked off WTMP for being too outspoken in criticizing the mayor of Tampa. When that organization dissolved and Michelle Patty left Straight Talk, I was already a member of the Uhuru Movement and was asked by WMNF to continue hosting the show. At one point Sister Jemilah co-hosted the show with me. When she left town, I continued solo. Then I asked Omali Yeshitela, who is also the founder of the Uhuru Movement, to co-host or sit in for me when needed. WMNF agreed to the role of guest host that Yeshitela would play on Straight Talk when Lorei and Santa met with Yeshitela to review the station policies and programmers agreement.

Throughout the years I have started and ended my show with the greeting "Uhuru" which means freedom and I have unwaveringly spoken out from the viewpoint of the oppressed African working class community. That is my personal individual point of view and does not constitute the Uhuru Movement "controlling the show". I have a right to speak from the truth and reality that I experience as a poor, working class African woman and to analysis and editorialize about solutions and strategies to resolve the crisis that African people find ourselves in.

2) Vicki Santa stated in the Jan. 25 evening news broadcast that the second reason that Straight Talk was cancelled is that its style is in conflict with the WMNF mission because the station has received complaints that callers are not treated respectfully on the air. Santa charged that Straight Talk does not adhere to the "Internal Style Statement" and mis-characterizes people. That's not true. The political and social critiques presented by hosts and guests on Straight Talk consistently focus on the issues. Is there a style difference between me and Rob Lorei? Of course there is. We come from 2 different worlds.

It is the station management that violates the Mission and Style Statements when it demands that all presentation be uniform. African workers have always had to struggle fiercely to survive. The world that I live in every day, with the police sweeping our neighborhood, my son dragged off to prison for a crime that a white college student would likely do community service, under constant threat of eviction and watching my community come under attack at every turn, is completely different from the reality of the middle class white liberals who dominate the WMNF Board and Staff. Straight Talk represents my community. When white callers try to discount the reality of my life and the lives of my guests, and attack our right to define and develop our own strategies for change, we have been more than patient. If there have been occasions where we have been sharp in our criticisms, I would ask you to live in my shoes before you condemn me.

I call on all principled programmers, volunteers, staff and board members to speak out in defense of the rights of poor and working class African people to have a voice of our own at WMNF and

restore Straight Talk. I am an African working class woman from the housing projects who has committed my life to the struggle of my people and all oppressed peoples for freedom and self-determination. What could be more consistent with the stated mission of WMNF?

Connie Burton

