

# Sharpton Leads Candidates In Black Support

By: Hazel Trice Edney

WASHINGTON(NNPA)—Presidential candidate Al Sharpton has twice as much support among Blacks as his closest Democratic rival, ties North Carolina Sen. John Edwards for fourth-place among all registered Democratic voters and is ahead of former Illinois Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun, Vermont Gov. Howard Dean, Florida Sen. Bob Graham and Ohio Rep. Dennis Kucinich, a new Time-CNN poll shows.

Among all Democratic voters, Connecticut Sen. Joseph Lieberman is the front runner with 16 percent, followed by Missouri Rep. Dick Gephardt with 13 percent, Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry at 8 percent, Rev. Sharpton and Sen. Edwards tied with 7 percent, Moseley-Braun at 4 percent, Gov. Dean and Sen. Graham each tied at 3 percent and Rep. Kucinich with 2 percent.

In the CNN-Time poll conducted Feb. 19-20, other candidates were favored by 7 percent of Democratic voters and 30 percent remain undecided. There were 1,299 voting aged Democrats interviewed and the margin of error was 2.7 percent.

Among Blacks, Rev. Sharpton led the field with 20 percent, ahead of Rep. Gephardt and Sen. Lieberman, who were tied with 9 percent. The other Black candidates in the race, Ms. Moseley-Braun, received support from 6 percent of Blacks, followed by Senators Edwards (5 percent) Kerry (4 percent), Graham (4 percent), Gov. Dean (3 percent) and Rep. Kucinich (1 percent). Other candidates received 7 percent of the Black vote and 32 percent were undecided. There was a margin of error of 6.5 percent.

Rev. Sharpton says the poll proves that he has broad support.

"It's not just Black," he said, referring to his supporters. "I think we are finding out that a lot of people respond to those who have been there. who have been effective and have done things and have represented things that are near and dear to them. I think that people misunderstand that public service is not based on titles. It's based on those who serve."

Rev. Sharpton is president of the Harlem based National Action Network and the only Democratic candidate who has never held elective office.

Donna Brazile, who was campaign manager for Al Gore's presidential campaign in 2000, sees the poll results differently.

"The numbers only indicate that [Sharpton] is better known. Two months ago, that same poll had [Black support] going to Lieberman," says Ms. Brazile. "So, I think as the African-American community becomes more familiar with the other candidates, they will compete. Sharpton will get a good chunk of the votes, but I don't believe he will get all of the votes."

That may be true of some candidates but not others. Rep. Gephardt, as House minority leader, was a familiar figure to Blacks. And Sen. Lieberman, as Al Gore's running mate against George W. Bush, was on a ticket that received even more Black votes than Bill Clinton.

Still, pollster Ron Lester, who worked for the Moseley-Braun campaign in 1992, thinks early political support is not that important.

"I'm not surprised at all. Sharpton has the highest level on name recognition and early polls pretty much measure name recognition," Mr. Lester says. "Whether or not it ultimately translates into voter support



Rev. Al Sharpton

remains to be seen. And the elections don't start until about 11 months from now."

Rev. Sharpton says his biggest obstacles will be raising money and overcoming the negative portrayal of him by the mainstream media. Other political observers also want more emphasis placed on issues, not the personalities.

"It's unfortunate in some ways that their (candidates') policy stances are sort of sub-ordinated to this personalizing of the campaigns," says Katherine Tate, chair of the political science department at the University of California-Irvine. "Depending on how he responds to negative media coverage is going to be a factor in his ability to win over the media and get over the bad history that the media keeps getting into. I'd like Sharpton at some point to get an opportunity to pitch to voters in a fair and open way like Lieberman and Gephardt are being treated as serious candidates."



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