

# Illinois congressman stumps for Obama

U.S. Rep. Danny Davis spoke in Winston-Salem Saturday

BY TODD LUCK  
THE CHRONICLE

With the May 6 North Carolina Primary closing in, both Democratic presidential hopefuls are eyeing the Tar Heel State.

Sens. Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama had members of the Congressional Black Caucus in the state touting each of them last weekend.

Obama supporter U.S. Rep. Danny Davis of Illinois stopped in Winston-Salem Saturday to urge local voters to support the senator, who also represents Illinois.

Davis, whose 7th district covers parts of Chicago and Cook County, spoke to a small crowd of about 20 people at the Forsyth County Democratic Headquarters. He told the crowd that Obama's appeal to voters is magical.

"I can't always explain the phenomenon of Barack Obama," said Davis, a member of Congress for more than 11 years. "I think the best I come to is suggesting that Barack has the unique ability to communicate to large numbers of diverse people all at the same time and each one of those individuals will feel that there was something in his message that related directly to them."

He said it was incredible that some Obama rallies are drawing 35,000 people — the type of crowd he expects at a ball game not a political event. Davis said people are buying into the "whirlwinds of change sweeping the country" that Obama promises.

And change is indeed happening for a black man, and a woman, both denied equal rights by the original Constitution, to run for the presidential nomination. He said that, instead of primarily basing their votes on race, voters are now looking at issues and considering who can change the country.

Change, after eight years of Republican President George Bush, is what the country is looking for, he said. Either Clinton and Obama could easily beat Republican nominee Sen. John McCain because of this, Davis theorized.

Davis said Obama will benefit from his



Fleming El-Amin, left, stands beside of U.S. Rep. Danny Davis.

Photo by Todd Luck

efforts to bring alienated citizens into the political process. People who didn't have enough interest or enough belief in the government to vote before are turning out in droves, he believes.

"I think that young people who traditionally have felt that they have no reason to get involved, that they didn't have a reason to vote, that they didn't have a reason to register, somehow Barack Obama connected with them and they are registering like they have never registered before in the history of the country," said Davis.

And they're also giving like never before too. Obama raised \$40 million in March, twice as much as Clinton. The money comes largely from small online donors. The average donation was only \$96 last month. So far over 1.3 million people have given to the Obama campaign since it began. Davis said his wife has sent in multiple donations herself, something she never did even for Davis' own campaigns.

One issue that Davis champions in Congress is helping ex-offenders reintegrate into society. He said Obama has championed that issue as well. Earlier this

month the Second Chance Act was signed into law which funds re-entry assistance for ex-offenders. Obama co-sponsored the Senate version of the bill, while Davis co-sponsored the House version. As president, Obama plans to do even more to help ex-offenders get work when they come out of prison, Davis said.

Davis made headline late last year when he was pulled over by Chicago police officers while driving three friends, all African-American, home. The white officers told him he had swerved over the center line, and he was given a ticket. Davis believes it was a racially motivated stop and is fighting the ticket in court. He said he wants an explanation as to why he was pulled over. The case has yet to be heard in court.

Forsyth County Democratic Chair Fleming El-Amin, who has made it no secret that he supports Sen. Obama, was pleased that Davis made a stop in Winston-Salem.

"We're really honored to have him here at our Democratic headquarters," said El-Amin. "His spirit really reflects the national spirit of the country for change."



This picture of James Grissom was featured in an HIV/AIDS photo exhibit.

## Grissom

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lems and came to Samaritan Ministries' Project Cornerstone in Winston-Salem looking to clean up his life. At the time, doctors had given him only six months to live. Grissom's friend Kacie Moore recalled that when Grissom arrived at Samaritan, he had Scotch tape holding his glasses together and all his earthly possessions inside a shoe box. He was scared, Moore recalled.

But Grissom overcame his fear and his addictions. Speaking about his life and his many mistakes became Grissom's passion. Even in his last days as he lay in a bed at Hospice, the phone rang with agencies and organizations requesting that Grissom come and share his story.

Grissom's talks would warn people about the dangers of addiction and unsafe sex. He told those with HIV/AIDS that there is hope for them.

For Grissom that hope came from AIDS Care Service, which assists low income people suffering from HIV/AIDS.

Like many who were HIV positive, Grissom stayed at the transitional apartments that AIDS Care Service provides. But unlike most who stayed there, Grissom found a home. He was asked to stay on as the resident manager, a position he held for five years.

Christine Jolly, president of AIDS Care Service, said that Grissom was an inspiration to many there.

"He was a beacon of hope to many of our clients and just a mentor to many people," said

Jolly.

Grissom impressed and inspired his friend, Donnie Scott, who works at Samaritan Ministries. Scott said that Grissom had his share of physical challenges but never let them get him down. He would work through pain to attend his Cornerstone support group meetings. He also didn't let it stop him, from making an appearance to raise HIV/AIDS awareness events.

"He made it a mission to just go out and speak," said Scott. "That was his gift."

Sonjia Kurosky, director of Samaritan Ministries, said that many who are in recovery would go through a very positive emotional upswing and then come down. Grissom, she said, never came down.

"He never got off that cloud of being happy to be alive and grateful for the day and just really had one of the best attitudes of any human being I've ever met," said Kurosky.

Grissom's recovery and good works was so impressive he received an Outstanding Personal Achievement Award from the N.C. Interagency Council for Coordinating Homeless Programs. The award honored his transition from homelessness and his work to help the homeless. AIDS Care Service also honored him for his service and devotion to fighting HIV/AIDS.

Grissom's family, who traveled from Oxnard, N.C. and the surrounding area to attend the service, did not speak during the program, but Grissom's aunt, Elsie Peace, did thank the community for all the support her nephew received while in Winston-Salem.

said.

"Their alumni have had more access to income, to assets, and thus could give back," Gasman said, adding that blacks also tend to give more to churches.

But at Norfolk State University, alumni giving has grown from 2 percent to 8.2 percent since 2000. nudged, officials say, by graduates who are more moneyed at younger ages.

"As we get some of the majors that we have now, for example the optical engineering, there are individuals leaving college with decent salaries," said Phillip Adams, interim vice president for university advancement.

And there are potentially more of them: 142,420 bachelor's degrees were conferred to blacks in 2005-2006, up from fewer than 92,000 a decade earlier, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

But among black colleges' top resources, say some, is alumni loyalty.

"Many of our alum respond to our institutions as providing an opportunity when many other institutions would not have. So they give back," Pinkard said.

## HBCUs

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United Negro College Fund that represents 39 private historically black schools.

Since 2006, the institute has granted more than \$8.1 million to 29 member schools for projects that include increasing alumni support.

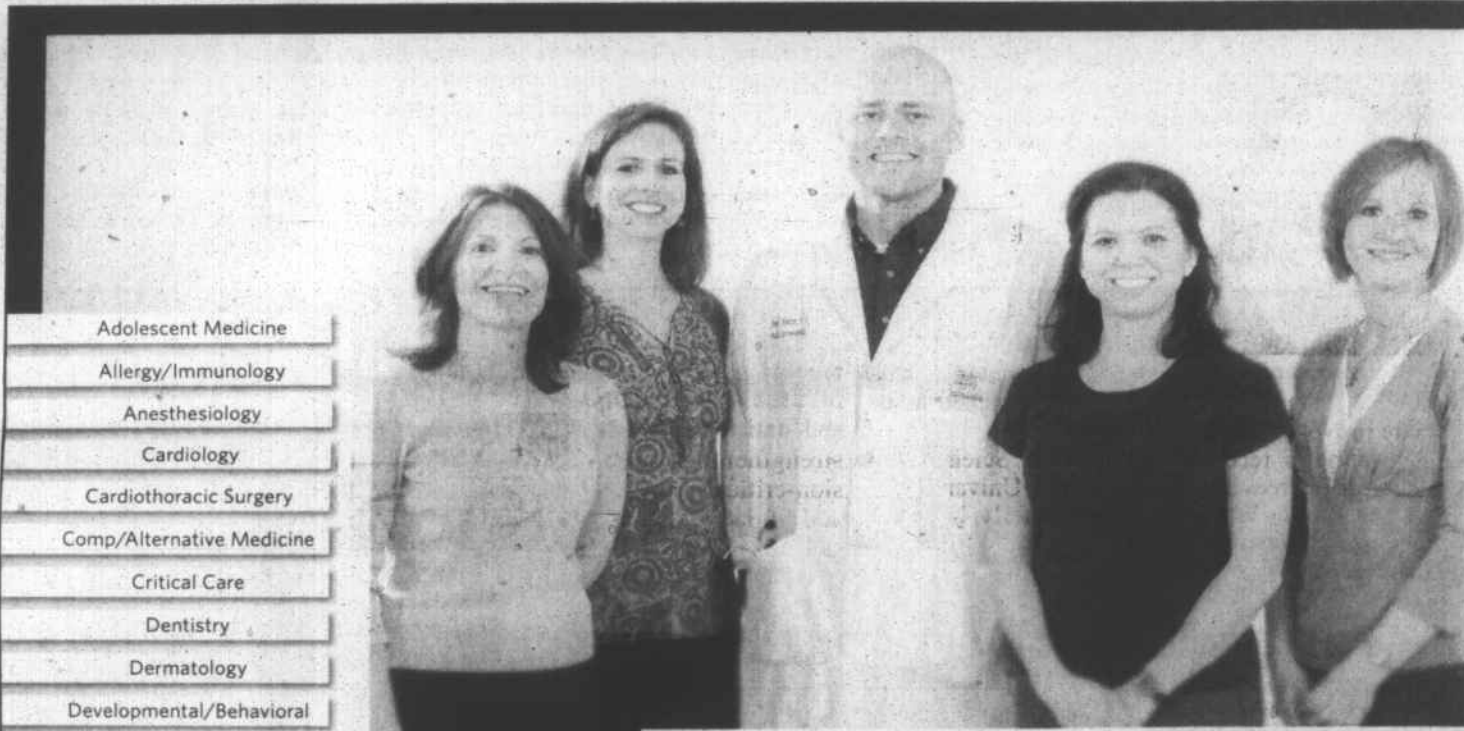
"There was a recognition that alum of these institutions represented a very important constituency that had not been tapped in any systematic way," Pinkard said.

The colleges, founded to serve blacks during segregation, have kept tuition low to help underprivileged students. That leaves little extra cash for things like fundraising, said University of Pennsylvania assistant professor Marybeth Gasman, author of "Supporting Alma Mater: Successful Strategies for Securing Funds from Black College Alumni."

They also have historically been reluctant to ask former students, already paying off loans, to give more money. At the same time, black alumni haven't always had the income of graduates from predominantly white schools, Gasman



Gasman



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