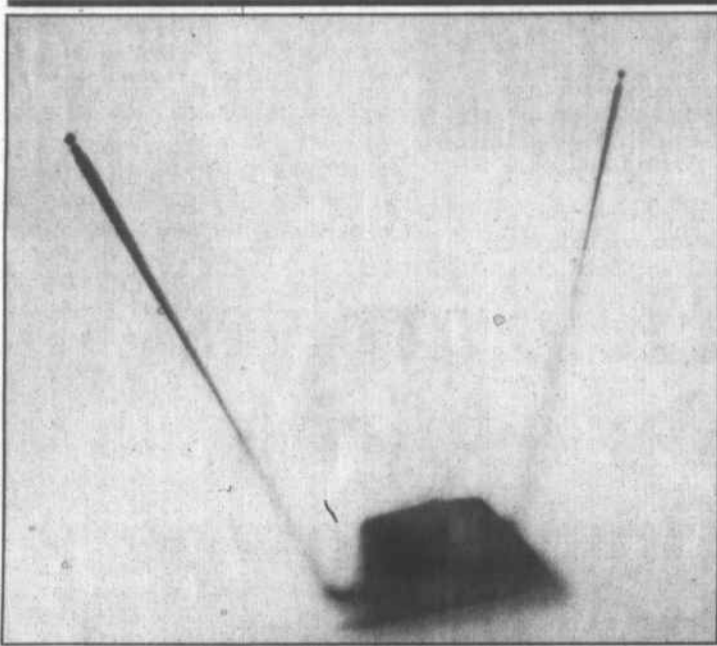
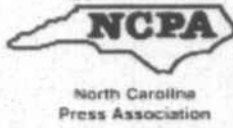


OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

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Hijacked Communications?

Editor's note: Two weeks ago, The Chronicle ran an IA story about the upcoming nationwide conversion to digital television. Below is one local woman's take on the 2009 conversion.

An illusionist entertains with the slight of the hand. While you are concentrating on the left hand the right hand is performing the trick and voila la, a card disappears; it seems, into thin air, but is really up the sleeve.

On Feb. 17, 2009, digital broadcasters with the aid of the FCC and the Congressional Committee on Energy and Commerce, will have performed a disappearing act with our right to free information and free choice on how we receive telecommunications, with its national digital law.

We have been told that this digital law will help Homeland Security, and have better clearer television. The illusion being, this is a normal progression of technology. The trick is, choice will not exist. Because of this law, all United States consumers will be compelled to purchase a new television, cable and or digital boxes if you still receive free telecommunications through the air waves, with tried and true rabbit ears or UHF.

In the beginning, televisions that were 13 inches and smaller were exempt from this law, but the FCC went back to Congress to revise this and now my \$30 seven-inch screen black and white portable, primarily used for weather emergencies, will now require a \$40 digital box.

This hijacking of our free choice of communication began when 9/11 occurred and fear gripped the minds of our representatives, rendering them impotent of reason and critical thinking. The digital industrialists however, filled their mental voids with getting rid of analogue broadcasting and have digital access across the board in the market. But market growth must come from consumer need or demand, and not from fear. Evidently consumers were not choosing digital technology fast enough for the industry so the next best thing would be to lobby government friends to take away the choice completely.

Fear is no reason to take away freedom of choice; after all, fear, is no reason.

Digital communications forced upon the American consumer will do nothing more than create a ready and consistent market of consumers for digital companies. While consumer preference may have been one reason for the slow acceptance of digital television, the FCC never asked what the consumer needed; the FCC has told you what you want and how they will proceed.

Many would consider this an intrusion of the government in their homes, and a monopoly of the digital industrialists. Yet, others would say, no, because of the diverse digital companies in the market. But choice is having an option, and no matter how you slice this, there is no other choice but digital.

It is not the same as when television came onto the American market. There was choice at that time for T.V., radio or print; then cable, non cable, or print. There was always a choice for the consumer. There is no choice with this law. You must use this system or be completely left out of broadcast communications. Even local news and community emergencies will be unattainable.

I am not against digital technology; I do however, think that there should be a choice with any product. If I want water, I can have bottled water, or I can go to the tap. This is choice. If I want to heat my home, I can use oil, gas or electric. This is choice. If I do not watch much television but still want access to emergency info, or if I want or do not want cable or digital cable, I should have that choice.

There needs to be a revision of this law to allow American consumers a choice. The FCC revised this law before, to add more televisions to aid business and they must revise it again to help the consumer.

China has state run (national) television. Russia and Myanmar (Burma) have state television. State run television does not fit the American consumer.

American consumers should not be compelled to accept any life changing event without public discussion. Is our freedom of choice and right to information worth caller ID on the screen? Is our choice for sale?

We must contact our congressional representatives and the FCC today, to compel them to have what they did not have in the beginning; a dialog with the American consumer concerning this pro-business law.

Let the illusionists know we have seen up their sleeve, peeped their hole card and we are not tricked or amused.

Chenita Johnson is chair of the Hanes-Lowrance Precinct.



Bush gas remedies are short-sighted



Donna Edwards
 Guest Columnist

When Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke appeared before the Economic Club of Chicago in 2006, he foreshadowed "the days of persistently cheap oil and natural gas prices are likely behind us."

Two years later as the price of oil surpasses \$140 a barrel, the chairman's prediction appears to be increasingly accurate. Unfortunately, the Bush Administration's efforts to address the crisis included simply a series of short-sighted remedies such as attempting to persuade Middle East oil producers to increase supply, subsidizing big oil companies through tax breaks, and pushing for leasing millions of additional acres of federal and protected lands to oil companies for exploration and drilling for fossil fuels.

These efforts have achieved no significant effect, with gas prices rising 250 percent since the day President Bush took office, leading to \$4.09/gallon and costing the average

American over \$1,250 dollars more per year for gasoline since 2001.

And while the Democrats in Congress take this country in a new direction when it comes to our energy future, they are blocked at every turn by the oil barons and their friends in the White House and on Capitol Hill.

But now more than ever, there is no doubt that much of our nation's future prosperity depends on a sound, multi-faceted energy policy that weans our nation off of oil, promotes research and development of renewable energy, and eventually eliminates the harmful emissions that contribute to global warming.

Recently, Congress took important steps in leading our country in a new direction by passing two important bills. The first, Saving Energy through Public Transportation Act of 2008 (SEPTA), will help fight rising energy costs by providing grants to mass transit authorities to reduce public transit fares, expand transit services and assist with escalating operating costs.

In the Washington D.C. metropolitan region alone, SEPTA will provide \$57.3 million dollars in federal funding for public transportation. The

second bill, the Energy Markets Emergency Act, directs the Commodity Futures Trading Commission to use all its authority and emergency powers to limit excessive speculation in energy futures markets which many believe is contributing to a rise in cost that has little to do with the traditional relationship of supply and demand and a lot to do with greed.

Still, more needs to be done to signify a fundamental change in our approach when it comes to dealing with energy costs in America. This will require strong market signals to show that innovation will create jobs and stimulate the economy.

We must tie our 21st Century energy policy to economic development by promoting deeper investments in mass transit and utility infrastructure, especially for vulnerable communities. We can also no longer delay long-term investments in clean energy research, development and production of wind, solar, and other renewable energy sources. This type of forward thinking will provide real solutions to global warming and be the catalyst of our nation's next economic boom.

That catalyst in the short-term can begin by transitioning from fossil fuels and last centu-

ry energy production to green and renewable energy development. Congress should provide funding for remodeling older homes and businesses, while developing tax policy that encourages green development and conservation.

We must cap carbon emissions by actually proposing mandatory limits of 20 percent reductions by 2020 and 80 percent reductions by the middle of the century. To achieve this goal, we must provide industries with incentives to end carbon production through clean technologies.

Once we are able to combine clean energy production with industry investments, we will be close to solving the energy crisis. Recent events have made it clear that energy costs are one of the few commodities that can affect a wide range of markets in our economy. Internationally, domestically, and individually, our dependence on fossil fuels has a tremendous ripple effect, making a revolutionary energy policy all the more paramount. The time has come to look forward.

U. S. Rep. Donna Edwards, a Democrat, represents Maryland's 4th Congressional District.

Obama distances himself from blacks



Ron Walters
 Guest Columnist

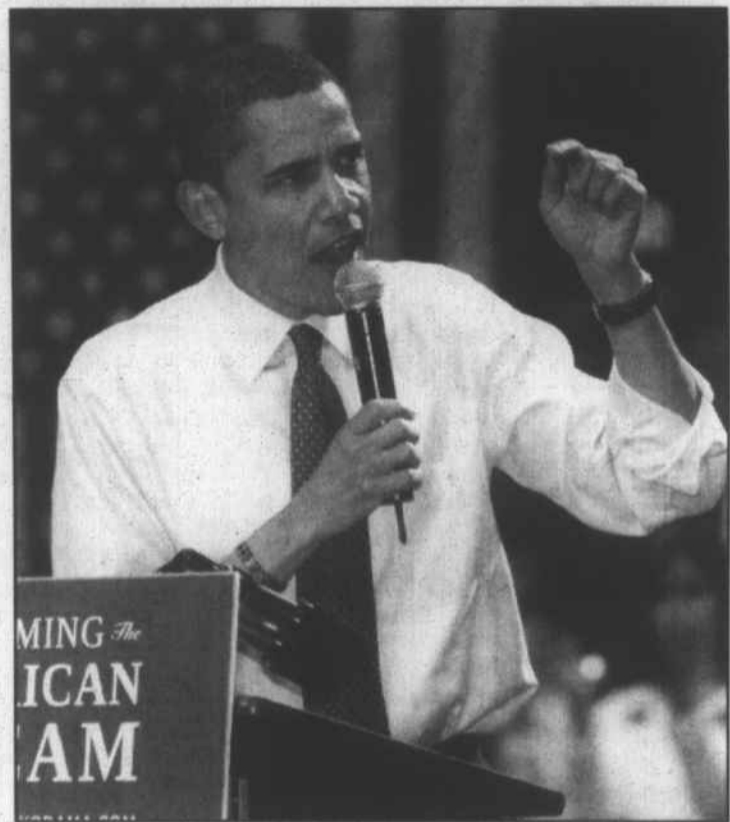
Just back from the RainbowPush convention in Chicago sponsored by Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., I was struck by the fact that neither Barack nor Michelle Obama showed up and they live virtually right down the street.

The symbol of Obama's absence was made even more vivid to me because he was out making nice with Hillary Clinton to knit together a unified campaign in the fall.

I understand that, but I also understand that he could have showed up, when Governor Bill Richardson, who lives in New Mexico not only showed up, but gave a rousing speech crediting the civil rights movement for much of the political success of the Hispanic community and his own.

I know, I know, it is common knowledge now that Barack Obama has to distance himself from Black radicals, from his church, and much of his community in order to make White voters comfortable enough with him to trust him and then give him their votes. And he will probably show at the NAACP Convention. But the troubling trend which finds him absent from other venues that are the substance of Black life looks like he is taking the Black community for granted because of their thirst for his victory.

I was not too put out when Obama did not show up at the State of Black America, because Michelle Obama was offered to Tavis Smiley and Obama was campaigning to win a touch primary in



Sen. Barack Obama is coming under fire.

Indiana.

Jackson, however, not only was material in Barack Obama's rise to the State Senate and the U. S. senate, he represents to most people the living legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

That is important because the Civil Rights movement is implicated in Obama's victories, since he won 99 pledged Delegates in nine Southern states during the primary elections. This performance was in states where Blacks constituted one-third or more of the Democratic party base, states where the Voting Rights Act worked to empower Black voters to make a difference.

Without those 99 delegates, Hillary Clinton would have won the pledged delegate race and the popular vote and most surely would have won the nomination.

The question this raises is whether the sophistication of Black voters in this case will eventually cost them. Blacks have a long history of voting for Whites when the potential returns were based on hope.

If we support a Black candidate for president of the United States, I think that it is fair to ask whether we will have more or less access - at least as much access as we did to Bill Clinton - and whether he will deliver the goods for our community.

My concern here is that theory of Black politics should be to move our community from just hoping their political participation will lead to resources, to exercising tough leverage over politicians to negotiate potential returns to our community in exchange for our vote.

In fact, one of the lessons

of Rev. Jackson's two previous presidential campaigns is that "Hope and Trust politics" is not as effective as the ability to trade votes for future support. The irony is however, that when a Black person runs for high profile office our leverage often disappears because we are asked to trust that the person will deliver based on their ties to the Black community.

The Black community didn't have to play the politics of leverage with Rev. Jackson because he had proved his fidelity to their needs through his history and in his presidential campaigns he spoke forcefully to their issues. I know, I know, he didn't win.

But I am driven to ask what the traditional notion of "winning" is worth under circumstances where the level of trust is not as high, because the message is absent and the candidate is absent. In other words, how much can the Black community count on the delivery of goods and services by a Black president who presence and message does not privilege his own community.

What concerns me is that we are involved in a great celebration without checking the guidepost that determine whether or not there will be sufficient returns to our community from a Black president in the White House. The irony is that Obama is likely to win, we will have to accept him, but under circumstances where he is essentially a White candidate, so we should "bottom line" our public policy requirements now as every other community is doing.

Dr. Ron Walters is the Distinguished Leadership Scholar, Director of the African American Leadership Center and Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland College Park.