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Obama Needs to Run Against Congress



Bill Fletcher
Guest Columnist

If President Obama wants to win in November, he will have to run against the Republican Congress. He will actually not need to spend his time on Romney. When you have people like former President Jimmy Carter suggesting that Romney is not that bad, you have a message problem and one that may not be resolvable in the short-term.

On the other hand, as a few people have suggested, if the obstructionist, wealthy Republican Congress can be tied around Romney's neck, it could quite possibly undermine Romney's campaign.

What does running against the Republican Congress mean? It means taking a message to the public about what sort of economy we need. It means picking up on the themes raised by the Occupy movement and hammering away at the policies of the Republican Congress and their support of the upper one percent. It means walking the streets of our devastated cities and speaking with the unemployed, and particularly speaking with those who have been out of work for years, people who fear that they may never be able to work again. Obama needs to become the voice of the voiceless.

President Obama needs to remind people about the economic policies that got us into this mess. This is something that the White unemployed and precariously employed need to hear time and again. Too many of them seem to be ready to go one more round in the Republican economic fun-house.

If there was one thing that Obama needs to do, and I am



not sure that he is prepared to do it, it is to encourage protests and action among the bottom 99 percent against economic injustice. I don't particularly care that he did not show up in Wisconsin to support the anti-Scott Walker recall movement. Wisconsin needed to be about Walker, not Obama. That said, the people at the base need to hear from Obama the way that we did in January 2009, when he supported the demands of the workers at Republic Windows & Doors in Chicago when they occupied - no pun intended - their factory. When was the last time that we had heard a president of the USA take such a stand? We now ask, why was that the last time we heard this from Obama?

We also need President Obama to stop trying to out-Republican the Republicans when it comes to national security. One of the best ways to demoralize segments of his base can be found in the continuing attacks on civil liberties that have been underway during his administration. "Whistleblowers" have come under attack. Peaceful, non-violent protesters - such as the

anti-war protesters in Minneapolis and Chicago - have not only come under surveillance, but also have faced various legal charges. Look, we voted for a president we hoped would expand democracy, rather than contract it.

We also voted for someone to end these senseless wars. Well, points go out to President Obama for ending the Iraq occupation, but we are still in Afghanistan and these drone attacks in Pakistan and Yemen do nothing but inflame local tensions and create more enemies.

To win, Obama needs an "Obama Doctrine" for the 21st Century, a clear, non-rhetorical statement that situates his campaign in the hearts and minds of the 99 percent. We do not need any more feel-good speeches. We need change that we can see.

Bill Fletcher, Jr. is a Senior Scholar at the Institute for Policy Studies, the immediate past president of TransAfrica Forum, and the co-author of Solidarity Divided. He can be reached at papaj54@hotmail.com.

Florida is Again a Laughing Stock



George Curry
Guest Columnist

When it comes to national elections, no state makes a bigger fool of itself than Florida. The Sunshine State was at the center of an 1876 controversy over the presidential election between Republican Rutherford B. Hayes and Democrat Samuel L. Tilden. By throwing out many votes cast by Blacks, Florida was able to give Hayes a one-vote margin in the Electoral College, although Tilden had won the state's popular vote by 260,000 votes.

The case reached the Supreme Court, here Florida's chicanery was also upheld by a one-vote margin. There is a book on the election by Roy Morris Jr. called, "Florida's Voting Scandal in 1876: The Fraud of the Century."

The 2000 presidential contest between Al Gore and George W. Bush was the fraud of another century, featuring a governor, Jeb Bush, who was brother of the Republican nominee for president, and Florida's Secretary of State Katherine Harris, with the responsibility of supervising state election procedures, serving as George W. Bush's state co-chairman.

There was widespread confusion leading up to Election Day. More than 54,000 people were purged from voting rolls supposedly because they were felons; 54 percent of the group was made up of African Americans. However, it was later determined that many of



Gov. Rick Scott

those denied access to the ballot were not convicted felons.

This year, Florida officials are not waiting until the November elections to disenfranchise voters likely to vote for President Obama and other Democrats.

Gov. Rick Scott signed an executive order that, in effect, permanently disenfranchises ex-offenders. In addition, the state eliminated early voting on the Sunday before elections, a move to disrupt "Souls to the Polls" voting campaigns organized by churches. In 2008, 32.2 percent of those who voted early on that last Sunday were Black and 23.6 percent were Latino.

To make it more difficult to organize voter registration drives, Scott signed a law requiring groups registering voters to pre-register with the state and turn in voter registration forms with 48 hours of collection.

U.S. District Judge Robert L. Hinkle ruled on a suit that challenged those provisions by the League of Women Voters of Florida, Rock the Vote and Florida Public Interest Research Group Educational Fund.

The groups said such requirements infringed on their

constitutional rights of free speech and association. Judge Hinkle dismissed the state's assertion that no constitutional rights were being violated.

"The assertion that the challenged provisions implicate no constitutional rights is plainly wrong," he wrote in his decision. "The plaintiffs wish to speak, encouraging others to register to votes, and some of the challenged provisions - for example, the requirement to disclose in advance the identity of an employee or volunteer who will do nothing more than speak - regulates pure speech. This is core First Amendment activity."

"Further, the plaintiff's wish to speak and act collectively with others, implicating the First Amendment right to association. More importantly, the plaintiffs wish to assist others with the process of registering and thus, in due course, voting. Voting is a right protected by several constitutional provisions; state election codes thus are subject to constitutional scrutiny."

The U.S. Justice Department has also objected to Florida making it more difficult for citizens to vote.

Not surprisingly, Florida officials are appealing the court ruling and the Justice Department's intervention.

George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of Emerge magazine, is editor-in-chief of the National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service (NNPA) and editorial director of Heart & Soul magazine. He is a keynote speaker, moderator, and media coach. Curry can be reached through his Web site, www.georgecurry.com.

Best of the Best



Submitted Photo
Winston-Salem Rescue Mission Executive Director Dan Parsons, left, accepts a certification for the Mission from the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions (AGRM) during the Association's recent annual conference in Orlando. Only about 30 of the nation's 275 Rescue Missions have earned this certification, which signals a Mission's commitment to "excellence in all aspects of its ministry." The Winston-Salem Rescue Mission operates three residential addiction programs. There are currently 84 men enrolled in these programs. Also pictured is Tom Zoble, a certification consultant with the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions.



Dr. McConnell

Baptist

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aside for commercial development, including banks, restaurants, hotels and shops. Clearing and grading of the site is expected to take approximately five months. Then, construction will begin on the medical office building and the outpatient center. The four-story,

60,000 square-foot building, housing physician offices is expected to be complete in the summer of 2013. The 101,000 square-foot outpatient center, a complex structure with specialized equipment, is scheduled for completion in late 2013. Phase two of the project, which includes the development of hospital beds, is scheduled for completion in 2017.

Benbow

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being able to approach them all in a respectable way and also allowing for (different) voices, I think that's what has made the show, in its own way, successful because people who would probably get hushed in another forum get to speak their mind."

The wonders of modern technology allow Benbow to host her show from pretty much anywhere. She is back home in Forsyth County for the summer, and has hosted her most recent shows from her Kernersville home using just her laptop and headphones. She interviews her guests via telephone, cell phone or online communications programs. Broadcast through the Blog Talk Radio web site, the series quickly established a fanbase.

The very first episode featured local pastor Dr. Carlton Eversley of Dellbrook Presbyterian Church. The two discussed the definition of black faith.

"I think I even told him that this is just going to be a show of my friends listening," said Benbow, who wasn't far off since only 32 people logged on to listen to the first episode.

The show's popularity surged during its second week when she landed Burns Strider, who was the senior advisor and director of Faith Outreach for Hillary Clinton's 2008 presidential campaign. The well-known political veteran talked about how faith informs politics, and people listened. The episode drew 4,000 listeners, the highest number in the show's short history.

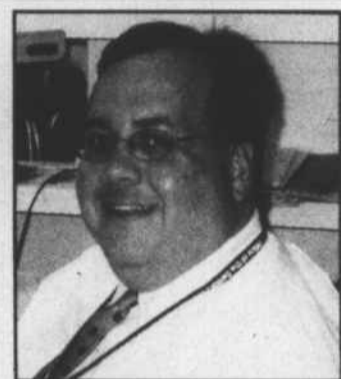
"That changed everything because there were people emailing me who I had absolutely no idea how they found the show," said Benbow. "I think (Strider) changed it in a lot of ways for me, and then made me believe it was actually possible to do this."

"Divine Dialogue" is more than talk. Benbow incorporates music clips, sermon excerpts and live calls from listeners.

Benbow said that she booked guests for the first season by the seat of her pants, often securing them just days before the broadcast. But her first-season success and her budding credibility as a cutting edge socio-religious thinker and scholar have made drawing guests for the second season a breeze. All 12 guests appearing on this season's shows were booked before the season kicked off.

"I'm grateful because 98 percent of the people I asked to be on the show said 'yes' and the other two percent just didn't get back to me," she said.

Some "Divine Dialogue" guests are Benbow's personal



Burns Strider



Dr. Otis Moss III

heroes and mentors, including one of tonight's (June 14) guests, Naomi Tutu, the daughter of Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The two women met while Benbow was earning her undergraduate degree at Tennessee State University, where Tutu once served as deputy director of International Programs.

Tutu said she knew Benbow had something special to offer the world after Benbow spoke about the challenges facing African children during a contest sponsored by International Programs. Benbow's essay and oral presentation were so impressive that she was one of two TSU students picked to travel to New York City to attend an event for the International Day of the African Child, which honors those who took part in 1976's bloody Soweto Uprising.

Seeing the potential in Benbow, Tutu started calling her "the Rev. Dr. Benbow," forging a friendship that has driven Benbow to develop and use all of her talents.

"She's an amazing young woman," said Tutu. "She is a woman of great gifts, and gifts the world really, really needs, gifts of both compassion, but also of critically looking and thinking and being prepared to ask the hard questions."

Tutu, who is now a diversity consultant, lectures around the world and recently spoke in Winston-Salem, giving the keynote address at the

YWCA's Women of Vision Luncheon. She catches Benbow's show when her schedule allows.

"The ones that I've listened to, what has been striking to me is the balance she is able to achieve, of not mollycoddling the people she's interviewing, not ducking or masking difficult and challenging questions... it is clearly about wanting to know what the person thinks, but also wanting to have this conversation to answer some of her own questions," said Tutu.

The Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III will also be featured on tonight's show. He succeeded the controversial Rev. Jeremiah Wright as pastor of Chicago's Trinity United Church of Christ, President Barack Obama's former church. The discussion topic will be "Moving Black America Forward."

Benbow, who is working on a book that centers around black religion, hopes to continue "Divine Dialogue," which garnered 1,370 listeners for last week's season premiere, and maybe even get it aired on traditional radio stations.

Divine Dialogue airs each Thursday from 6:30 - 8 p.m. Go to blogtalkradio.com/divinedialogue to listen. To listen to episodes from season one, go to blogtalkradio.com/divinedialogue.

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