

It's not Democrat or Republican, it's the Republicrats

Combined party won't do a thing to address black issues

There are forces that see the bankruptcy of both major political parties and want to profit from that fact by creating a third party to enter the 2008 election



RON WALTERS

The most current response was offered by Hamilton Jordan, White House chief of staff for Democratic President Jimmy Carter and Doug Bailey, former Republican party strategist and founder of The Hotline, in the form of a Unity08 party.

This effort, not to be confused with the Unity campaigns of the National Coalition of Black Civic Participation that run Operation Big Vote and Black Youth Vote for many years, proposes to be an entity that unites Democrats and Republicans in one presidential ticket, using a popular referendum on the internet.

My first response to this was that it is a hair-brained scheme, since the kind of unity sought by Jordan and Bailey would be monumental to achieve in an atmosphere where the conservative movement has driven not only the political parties farther apart, but has capitalized on divisive issues to split the American people as well.

Yet, these two believe there is room for such a party, because a poll they commissioned found the obvious: 82 percent of the respondents in the poll think that the existing political parties cannot solve America's problems and 75 percent want more political choices. These responses may be regarded as either normal in an atmosphere where nothing is perceived to be working, or they may be the fuel to ignite a sizeable political firestorm beginning this fall and continuing on into the 2008 elections.

So, what kind of "unity" would they be able to achieve? It will depend on either the nature of the agenda they finally arrive at, or the entrance of a charismatic candidate. I am reminded that Ross Perot was a charismatic millionaire businessman who came into the election of 1992 and capitalized on a generalized mood of discontent among the American people, fostered ironically by the failure of George H.W. "Read my Lips" Bush, who lost credibility among conservatives in his own party when he raised taxes.

Perot's constituency was difficult to define, but his movement sailed along on the strength of his personality. Then, George Wallace was not as charismatic, but his anti-civil rights, anti-government platform was enough to attract a following among several Southern states, such that he was able to keep Democrats from the White House.

Whether the Unity08 party achieves viability, it most certainly will be more of a threat to the Democratic Party since Jordan and Bailey offer a version of "centrism" that has been the leading edge of the politics of the party for more than a decade. Such a party could shave off some adherents to that philosophy inside the Democratic Party, while affecting Republicans less, because they have been more ideologically coherent as a conservative party.

This would appear to be the kind of environment within which black politics could make some headway. However, what may keep this from happening is an even more fierce loyalty to the Democratic Party prompted by the threat posed from within. The fear that Democrats might lose because of the impact of a third party has always been a strong motive for "party unity."

Simultaneously, it has kept black Democrats wedded firmly to the Party, so firmly that they were afraid to use the strategic position created by a third party to make demands in exchange for their support.

The idea of having a progressive Rainbow line looks good because it could not only counter the centrist philosophy that threatens the black agenda by becoming an official political party. It could also provide blacks with significant leverage over the party at a time when it faces a split in ranks. Is this cold-blooded politics? Yes, but look at the lengths to which a Hamilton Jordan will go to have leverage over the fate of the Democratic Party and over the political process in general.

That is really cold-blooded. The fact that we have not been up to this kind of politics is a marker suggesting why the growth in political participation by voting and electing blacks to office has not yielded the kind of dividends that it might.

So, let's get in the game, too. We've been on the sidelines far too long!

RON WALTERS is the Distinguished Leadership Scholar, Director of the African American Leadership Institute and Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland College Park.

Freedom Summer 2006: A campaign to lift America up

I recently returned from the Children's Defense Fund's Haley Farm in Clinton, Tenn., and a visit to the annual National Training for Servant-Leader Interns for the CDF Freedom Schools SM program.



JASMYNE CANNICK

The CDF Freedom Schools program is a partnership between the Children's Defense Fund and local community organizations, churches, universities, and schools to provide literacy-rich summer and after-school programs. The CDF Freedom Schools summer program serves children 5 to 18 years old for five to eight weeks, and integrates reading, conflict resolution and social action in an activity-based curriculum that promotes social, cultural, and historical awareness.

This summer, there are CDF Freedom Schools programs in 49 cities and 25 states serving approximately 7,000 children.

CDF Freedom Schools programs are staffed primarily by college-age adults committed to making life better for children. These are our servant-leaders, and this year 900 young adults are serving children this way. Their week-long intensive training session at Haley Farm prepares these young leaders to provide an enriching experience for the children they serve and to be part of a future generation of servant-leaders. Their incredible energy, enthusiasm, and dedication make them powerful role models for the students in their programs. And the strong ethic of service is always evident across generations at Freedom School sites, as community leaders support these young servant-leaders while they teach and mentor the younger children.

Our CDF Freedom Schools program is proudly rooted in the American Civil Rights Movement. Reborn in 1993 by the Children's Defense Fund's Black Community Crusade for Children program, today's CDF Freedom Schools model draws on the vision, philosophy and experience of those who conducted Freedom Schools as part of the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project of 1964. In the spirit of *sankofa*, a West African word that translates "We must go back and reclaim our past so we can move forward," we affirm our history as we move forward in sustaining, enhancing, and expanding the CDF Freedom Schools program.

At CDF Freedom Schools sites, children are engaged in activities that nurture their minds, bodies, and spirits. In the classroom, they read books that celebrate a wide variety of cultures and experiences. Children, parents, and staff are introduced to a superb collection of books that reflect their own images and focus on the theme "I Can and Must Make a Difference!"

This collection of books is part of an integrated reading curriculum in which books, activities, field trips, and games all relate to and reinforce one another. Servant-Leaders use the curriculum to teach children conflict resolution and critical thinking skills, engage children in community service and social action projects, encourage children to participate in art and athletic activities, and help children to develop a program finale in which every child is given the chance to shine. Any visitor to a CDF Freedom Schools site will see children reading and being read to, singing, dancing, laughing, and learning in a safe, supportive, and loving setting.

This year, the CDF Freedom Schools program has played an especially important role in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Soon after the storm, thanks to private funders and partnerships with two historically Black colleges and universities, the YMCA and several mayors, CDF was able to begin operating Emergency Freedom Schools after-school sites in Mississippi for 500 evacuee children with evacuee college-age teacher-mentors, providing homework help, reading enrichment, art and music, and coordinated tax and benefits help to their families.

This summer, 13 additional sites will open in Louisiana to serve more of Katrina's storm-battered children. These CDF Freedom Schools sites will be secure, nurturing havens for children traumatized by multiple losses and continuing uncertainty about their futures.

For children enrolled in the CDF Freedom Schools program, it's going to be a terrific Freedom Summer. To learn more about the CDF Freedom Schools program, visit www.childrensdefense.org.

Bennettsville, S.C., native MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN is president and founder of the Children's Defense Fund.

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What to do with poker machines

Did I promise you that I wouldn't write any more columns about the lottery? Maybe I did.

I was upset last year after we lost the battle to keep North Carolina government out of the gambling business. So, maybe in my disappointment and anger, I did issue some kind of "Nixon-esque" statement like, "You won't have my anti-lottery columns to kick around anymore."



D.G. MARTIN

Then again, maybe I didn't. I am getting along in years and don't remember everything I promise.

If I did make such a foolish promise, then I will just say that this column is not about the lottery. It is about video poker, the private gambling business that has been legal in North Carolina up until now.

Now the same legislature and the same governor who last year put state government into the gambling business have put the state lottery's competitors out of business.

Can you imagine what John Stewart would do with this on his Daily Show on the Comedy Channel?

Maybe he would just read the same news that our newspapers have printed ("Legislators celebrate establishment of state lottery to raise funds for education; legislators celebrate ban of privately-owned lottery-type video poker gambling, which has led to gambling addiction and crime.") and then Stewart could roll his eyes and wait for the big laughs.

The bill that bans video poker passed both houses of our legislature easily, 114-1 in the House, and 44-1 in the Senate. In the House Representative John Blust voted "no" because, he said, it phased out the gambling machines and it would be better to ban them immediately.

The one "real" vote against the ban came in the Senate from Hugh Webster, who has a reputation, according to insiders, as being a "Senator No" for "often casting the lone vote against bills in the chamber."

Webster apparently thought that the ban was essentially a government taking of property without compensation. By making the use of the video poker machines illegal, the government makes the machines useless, which is just the same as taking them away.

Webster has a point. According to a report in the Wilmington StarNews, a spokesman for the N.C. Amusement Machine Association, Richard Frye, estimated that the financial losses to the owners of currently legal machines would be approximately \$235 million a year.

Taking away this amount of income from anybody is something the government should not do without a very good reason.

There are good reasons. Some have been put forward by North Carolina sheriffs, who pushed for the video poker ban for years. They point to the illegal activities that often accompany gambling operations which generate lots of cash.

Then there is gambling's impact on people. The StarNews reported that Columbus County Sheriff Chris Batten said he received numerous calls "from distraught wives and husbands about spouses gambling on video poker."

Batten said, "That's the complaint I got for the most part. Husbands and wives get paid and turn around and put it in a video poker machine and expect to earn a whole lot of money."

These are convincing reasons why the government should prohibit gambling, including video poker, even though some people might suffer great financial loss.

In fact, it is easy to understand why everybody in the legislature except Senator Webster was persuaded to eliminate the activity that causes the conditions that Sheriff Batten described.

What is hard to understand is why most of those same legislators voted to have the state establish a business that causes many of the same problems as video poker.

But, having established the rule that government-run gambling games are okay, even when the same activities are otherwise "evil," here is how the legislature can take care of Senator Webster's problem about taking the video poker machines without compensation:

Buy the machines at a fair price and give them to the North Carolina lottery. Let the lottery add video poker to "Powerball" and its growing list of more and more exciting and entrancing games.

After all, when the government entices folks to gamble, it's all okay, isn't it?

Or is it? Not in my book. Not ever. D.G. MARTIN is the host of UNC-TV's North Carolina Bookwatch.

