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Black Voters Strain to Hear What Presidential Candidates Are Not Saying

By Hazel Trice Edney
NNPA Editor-in-Chief

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - The day after presumptive Democratic nominee Barack Obama announced his historic victory, the monthly jobs report showed the African-American jobless rate as being once again higher than all other racial groups.

At 9.7 percent, black unemployment is almost five points above the white rate of 4.4 percent; three points above the Hispanic-American rate of 6.9 percent, and more than four points above the national average of 5.5 percent.

From joblessness to the overall economy to dilapidated and failing schools to the criminal justice system to health care, now that the primaries are over and Sen. Hillary Clinton has thrown her support behind Obama, African-Americans across the nation are looking to hear from Obama and Republican presidential nominee John McCain exactly how they will change the disparate social impacts on the black community.

Some say they're not speaking loud enough about those issues that impact African-Americans.

"They've got to talk about job creation," says Bill Spriggs, chairman of the Economics Department at Howard University. "The big problem is that [industries are] not hiring. And the first set of folks that they're not hiring, of course, is us."

And once policy is set concerning job creation, then policy must also deal with discrimination that holds African-Americans back. Spriggs says, "America is like a train and we're the caboose. If you're in the caboose, it means you're going forward, but you're still the last car."

Spriggs says it will be difficult for either candidate to speak about the discriminatory aspects of the jobless rate during the campaign except from a policy standpoint. "That's why it's important who is around the candidate," he says, stressing the need for policy-oriented staffers on any campaign.

(Continued On Page 4)



Students from R.N. Harris Elementary School presented "The Lion King" with the Theatre Department at NCCU. See story on page 13.



Grand Opening at New \$20 million Biotech Building at NCCU. Kibben cutting at \$20 million biomanufacturing research institute and Technology Enterprise (BRITE). NCCU students will be educated and trained in biotech field from drug discovery to drug quality. From left to right are: Norris Tolson, president & CEO NC Biotech Ctr; Erskine Bowles, president, UNC; Valeria Lee, president Golden LEAF Ftdn; Li-An Yeh, director, BRITE; Charlie Nelms, chancellor NCCU; Jesse Bunn, chairman of the board of, Golden LEAF Foundation; Reuben Young, chief legal counsel, NC Office of Governor.

As Presumptive Nominee, Obama Prepares to Choose Running Mate

By Zenitha Prince

Special to the NNPA from the Afro-American Newspapers

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - On June 3, Sen. Barack Obama defied history, becoming the first African-American candidate to head a major party ticket and having a viable chance of taking the helm of the White House.

"America, this is our moment. This is our time. Our time to turn the page on the policies of the past. Our time to bring new energy and new ideas to the challenges we face. Our time to offer a new direction for the country that we love," said Obama from a stage in St. Paul, Minn.

"The journey will be difficult," he added. "The road will be long."

After ending the 5-month primary season Tuesday the way he began - with a victory in Montana - and accumulating enough delegates to clinch the Democratic nomination, Obama can now turn his attention to picking a vice presidential running mate.

"It's a simple and difficult thing at the same time," said David Bositis, senior analyst for the Joint Center on Political and Economic Studies, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank.

"The simple part is knowing what the calculations are that you're going to be looking for the vice president has to be someone who is qualified to be president if something happens," he said. "But it's not like there's a checklist that you can go down and check off."

Especially since the rubric used to guide the choice of running mates seemed to have changed given the almost universal disenchantment caused by the two-term Bush administration; the war on terrorism; the historical overtones of a race in which a woman and an African-American both stood good chances of piercing the ultimate glass ceiling but mostly, analysts say, because of shifting population and, therefore, voter demographics.

For Obama, the stakes will be especially high. Still seen by voters as an enigmatic candidate with limited Washington experience, the senator's choice of a running mate will be used to gauge his decision-making process and partly define his candidacy.

"[That choice] tells us a great deal about the candidate his judgment and what values are important to him," said Larry Sabato, director of the University of Virginia's Center for Politics.

Obama's signature message of change and a post-partisanship White House will be best served by picking someone such as Republican Sen. Chuck Hagel, said political analyst Ronald Walters.

"He's a moderate Republican senator who is leaving and who has been at odds with his party for most of the time that he's been in Congress," Walters explained. "He's likely to bring along some Republicans and independents and would strengthen Obama's point about being bi-partisan."

But before Obama makes nice-nice across the aisle, he'll have to consider how to bring unity back to a party that has been divided by his sometimes acrimonious contest with Sen. Hillary Clinton.

According to one participant in a Tuesday afternoon conference call among Clinton and members of the New York congressional delegation, she was asked whether she would become Obama's running mate and Clinton reportedly replied, "I am open to it." Clinton has announced she would suspend her campaign and endorse her erstwhile rival on Saturday.

Democratic leaders, pundits and voters have long advocated a shared ticket as a sure-to-win combination that will repair a breach formed between women, white working-class and older voters, who support Clinton and the African-Americans, college graduates and young voters who side with Obama.

"If it works out that Sen. Obama is the nominee, the strongest ticket would be Sen. Clinton as vice president. No question in my mind, because the constituencies in the votes are different," California Sen. Dianne Feinstein, a Clinton supporter, told the New York Post. "The weight of the states he carried versus the states she carried it's different. And, therefore, if you combine them both, you've got the best electoral path."

Not everyone agrees. Detractors say Clinton would bring more liabilities to Obama's campaign than assets. Not only would she not fit into Obama's theme of change, there would also be the political baggage of Bill Clinton.

"I'm not crazy about an Obama-Clinton ticket because it brings with it the past president of the United States and that's a problem for Obama," Walters said. "The question will be, 'Whose administration is it? Is it Obama's or is it Bill Clinton's third administration?'"

Walters noted, "We've seen what he can do in this campaign. He has a lot of bodies buried in Washington and around the world. He can pick up the telephone and interfere in a way that would muddy the water about who's in control."

Generally, the president and his VP should have good chemistry. However, too much ill will may have developed between the two candidates, some say.

Obama slams McCain on economy, says U.S. debt would double under

By Steven R. Hurst

WASHINGTON (AP) - Democrat Barack Obama slammed his Republican opponent for the presidency Monday, claiming John McCain would more than double U.S. debt by continuing Bush administration economic policies he called the "most fiscally irresponsible in history."

In his first campaign appearance since Hillary Rodham Clinton suspended her bid for the White House, Obama focused on the economic woes - home mortgage foreclosures, staggering energy costs and growing unemployment - that Democrats hope to use to wrest control of the White House from Republicans.

Obama began a two-week tour of Republican strongholds and swing states aiming to draw sharp distinctions between himself and McCain, the Arizona senator and Vietnam war hero. Obama is banking on building a victory by snatching votes in traditional Republican regions. McCain, likewise, is working to undo Democratic control in America's so-called blue states.

"If John McCain's policies were implemented, they would add \$5.7 trillion to the national debt over the next decade. That isn't fiscal conservatism, that's what George Bush has done over the last eight years," Obama, the junior Illinois senator, said in Raleigh, North Carolina, a state that has not voted for a Democratic presidential candidate since 1976.

Obama offered no new policies in his speech. He used the occasion to emphasize his economic differences with McCain and to summarize earlier proposals, including raising income taxes on wealthy Americans, granting a \$1,000 tax cut to most others, winding down the Iraq war, tightening credit card regulations and pumping more money into education, alternative fuels and infrastructure such as roads and bridges.

McCain pushed back, saying Obama's bid to end the Bush administration's tax cuts for upper-income Americans would only worsen the already struggling economy.

Obama criticized McCain for originally opposing Bush's first-term tax cuts but now supporting their continuation. He said he would place a windfall profits tax on oil companies while McCain would reduce their taxes.

"This (the U.S. economic crisis) was not an inevitable part of the business cycle that was beyond our power to avoid. It was the logical conclusion of a tired and misguided philosophy that has dominated Washington for far too long," Obama said from a lectern flanked by two American flags and a blue backdrop inscribed with the word "change."

And in a nod to the U.S. generation known as the baby boomers, those born in the prosperous years after World War II and now reaching retirement, Obama vowed not to tinker with Social Security government retirement benefits.

"While John McCain wants to pick up where George Bush left off by trying again to privatize Social Security, I will never waver in my commitment to protect that basic promise as president. We will not privatize Social Security, we will not raise the retirement age, and we will save Social Security for future generations by asking the wealthiest Americans to pay their fair share," said Obama, who would be America's first African-American president.

McCain, meanwhile, reversed course Monday and allowed the media into a private fundraiser, where he chided Obama for his reluctance to agree to a series of joint town-hall meetings.

The \$10,000-per-ticket reception for the presumed Republican nominee, the national party and several state parties marked the first time McCain, a champion of open government, had allowed reporters into his fundraisers. The four-term senator had kept such events off limits to the media for months with little or no explanation.

The event and a \$1,000-a-ticket luncheon raised \$800,000 for McCain and the Republican Party.

McCain reiterated his offer to Obama to join him at a town-hall meeting and field questions from voters. McCain said he would meet Obama wherever and whenever, then suggested this week in New York.

(Continued On Page 4)