

The Carolina Times

THE TRUTH UNBRIDLED

VOLUME 88 - NUMBER 16

DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA - SATURDAY, APRIL 25, 2009

TELEPHONE (919) 682-2913 PRICE: 30

First 100 Days: Key Civil Rights Leaders Give Obama 'A', With 'Incompletes' on Grassroots Economics

By Hazel Trice Edney
NNPA Editor-in-Chief

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - This Sunday, April 26, will mark the 100th full day since the inauguration of America's first black president. January 20 was a day marked with tears of joy and painful reminiscing. But it will be most remembered for the overwhelming glory of the historic moment.

President Barack Obama's initial accomplishments have included:

- * His immediate confrontation to the nation's failing economy amidst which he now sees "glimmers of hope";

- * The reversal of a string of anti-union executive orders issued by the Bush Administration;

- * The establishment of the Middle Class Working Families Task Force;

- * The closing of the controversial Guantanamo Bay lockup for alleged terrorists;

- * His tour of Europe with First Lady Michelle Obama, which raised good will for America abroad during the G-20 economic conference;

- * His trip to Mexico with hopes of stopping violent drug cartels and preventing them from entering the U. S.

- * His reaching out to Cuba for the renewed relationship, supported by the Congressional Black Caucus.

- * A new commitment to pour millions of dollars into the prevention and awareness of HIV/AIDS in America.

But, specifically, how is the new president doing on issues pertaining to African-Americans from a civil rights perspective? Pointing out that 100 days is simply not enough time to tell, some civil rights leaders give him an A so far, most also noting an 'incomplete' on the grassroots economy.

"There are some A's and a couple of incompletes," says the Rev. Jesse Jackson in a phone interview from Thailand. "I think the position against torture, an A; the G-20 conference, putting a credible face on America's foreign policy where he has trust capital and Bush had trust deficit disorder."

Jackson also listed Obama's reaching out to Cuba, Venezuela and the overture toward Iran as all A's along with his dealing with the student loan industry, which Jackson described as a "\$95 billion a year rip off."

But, the incompletes - mainly in the area of economics - are clear, he says.

"There's an incomplete on the stimulus because it must be more targeted to get to the bottom. As the states get it, they're using the term shovel ready. But, shovel-ready for those who don't have a shovel because of the lack of capital and lack of credit means they may not be ready. That could be seen as boot straps without the boots.

To be fair, Jackson conceded that the President could only demand that the money gets out of Washington.

"But, we must demand that the states get it down to where the people are," he said.

"We have to be certain that it gets down to the most unemployed the most in need of training, the most in need of business development. That's an ongoing struggle there."

As black unemployment surges toward 14 percent, National Urban League President Marc Morial agrees.

On a scale of 1-10, Morial gave the President a 9 for his first 100 days. In the black community Morial cited a need for greater civil rights enforcement and the need for help with job development.

"The creation of an agency taskforce to assist African-Americans in securing construction jobs and green jobs; and the hiring of African-Americans in subcabinet positions at Education, HUD, Labor and Health & Human Services," Morial says.

Like Jackson, he says African-Americans must press local and state government to do right by stimulus money.

"We need to remain engaged and hold mayors, governors and local school districts accountable for the stimulus dollars to ensure that African-Americans are included in its benefits," Morial says.

Morial also praises Obama for getting off to a fast start with the passage of the stimulus bill, the expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and the appointment of Attorney General Eric Holder.

Harvard law professor Charles Ogletree also applauds the President's appointment of Holder, America's first black attorney general and lists a string of observations that have impressed him within the first 100 days, including "his symbolic and substantive decisions evince a level of maturity and calm judgment rarely seen by someone so early in their term as President."

He gave Obama a 10 for adopting a stringent ethics code for his administration and for suspending the prosecution of suspected terrorists who have been detained, but not charged with offenses for nearly seven years; for outlawing water boarding as an interrogation tactic and for appointing former rival and new York Senator Hillary Clinton as the Secretary of State.

However, Ogletree's wishes for the next 100 days are just as strong as he also points to the need to connect with those at the bottom of the economic ladder.

"I would like the President to do a tour of America and ascertain the extent and the causes of poverty in America and seek a bipartisan set of proposals, comparable to a modern day American Marshall Plan to rebuild America and energize its people from the bottom up," Ogletree says. "Furthermore, I would hope that President Obama will continue to work with HBCUS to create our next generation of leaders in business and industry."

While civil rights leaders across the board applaud the new president, they almost consistently stopped short of the highest rating of 10, noting the incomplete on the issues pertaining to grassroots African-Americans.

"President Obama has tackled some of the critical issues affecting this country, reversed some of the wrongs of the previous administration and has offered hope for all Americans," says NAACP President and CEO Benjamin Todd Jealous. But, he quickly notes criminal justice issues that need work.

"Forty percent of the prison population is African-American while African-American's only make up 13 percent of the country's population," Jealous says. "We would like to see the President pass a series of laws that would do away with racial profiling, eliminate the excessive use of force by law enforcement and enforce strict guidelines on prisoner treatment."

(Continued On Page 4)



Legendary jazz artist Jimmy Heath taught a master class at North Carolina Central University prior to the annual jazz festival at the school. Related photos on page 4. (NCCU Photo by Lawson)

Analysis: Week of change for Obama

By David Espo

WASHINGTON (AP) - In a whirlwind week of change, President Barack Obama jettisoned Bush administration policy on greenhouse gases, shone an unforgiving light on its support for torture as an interrogation tactic and eased its restrictions on Cuba.

But there are limits, even to this new president's power, and a campaign pledge to seek a ban on assault weapons is an early casualty as a result.

And while the promise of change was arguably Obama's single most powerful asset in last year's campaign, the week demonstrated anew how carefully he calibrates its impact.

"We have been through a dark and painful chapter in our history," the president said in a statement that accompanied the release of once-secret memos outlining torture techniques the Bush administration allowed.

"But at a time of great challenges and disturbing disunity, nothing will be gained by spending our time and energy laying blame for the past."

That was designed as a reassurance to the CIA employees who carried out waterboarding, which simulates drowning, and the other harsh interrogation techniques that former President George W. Bush once sanctioned and that Obama has now banned - much as his decision to leave combat troops in Iraq a few months longer than he once promised was a bow to the Pentagon.

"I will always do whatever is necessary to protect the national security of the United States," he said in a statement on the torture memos that could easily have been written about the troop withdrawal.

Attorney General Eric Holder added one more assurance, announcing the administration would pay legal expenses for any one in the intelligence agency who needs a lawyer as a result of carrying out interrogations covered by the memos.

Holder also formally revoked every legal opinion or memo issued during Bush's presidency that justified interrogation programs, a largely symbolic step since Obama had already said his administration would not rely on them.

The release of the documents had been the subject of a long, fierce debate, with a deadline looming as the result of a lawsuit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union.

No lawsuit drove the timing of the new Cuba policy, which was released in the run-up to Obama's first presidential trip to Latin America and the Caribbean. And here again, Obama went further than some wanted and not as far as others had hoped.

Under the new policy, the administration lifted restrictions on Cuban-Americans who want to travel and send money to their island homeland and freed U.S. telecommunications companies to seek business there.

Some of the changes specifically undid what Bush had imposed: tightened travel restrictions on Americans wishing to visit relatives in Cuba; limiting payments to immediate family; and bans on seeds, clothing, personal hygiene items, veterinary medicines and - later - cell phones from humanitarian parcels.

But the broader embargo remains in place as it has since the Kennedy administration, its existence meant now as then to prod the Cuban government into democratic reforms.

In response to the announcement, Cuban President Raul Castro said he is ready to put "everything" on the table in talks with Americans, including questions of human rights and political prisoners. If so, that would mark a change from decades of Cuban insistence that those issues were not subject for discussion.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton pronounced Castro's comments an overture, and said, "We are taking a very serious look at how we intend to respond."

Still, despite sentiment within the 15-member Caribbean Community to lift the U.S. embargo, Jamaica's prime minister, Bruce Golding, said the organization had agreed not to push Obama too hard on the issue.

By contrast, there was little that was nuanced about the Environmental Protection Agency's announcement April 17 that carbon dioxide and five other greenhouse gases emitted by cars and many industrial plants "endanger public health and welfare."

It was prompted by a Supreme Court ruling two years ago that said greenhouse gases are pollutants under the Clean Air Act and must be regulated if found to be a danger to human health or public welfare.

Confronted with the high court's decision, the Bush administration stalled, leaving for Obama an issue he was only too happy to seize. EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson said while the agency is prepared to move forward with regulations under the Clean Air Act, the administration would rather defer to Congress.

"The (EPA) decision is a game changer," said Rep. Ed Markey, D-Mass., who is involved in drafting legislation to limit greenhouse emissions.

For all the changes Obama has piled up since taking office 87 days ago, his retreat on assault weapons is hardly unique. He has already yielded on other relatively minor issues, giving in to veterans groups during the budget debate, for example.

NC lawmaker, educator

Vernon Malone dies at 77

RALEIGH (AP) - North Carolina Sen. Vernon Malone, who was known for his passionate work in education, died April 18. He was 77.

His son, Rod, said he died of natural causes at his Raleigh home. The Democrat had represented District 14 in the General Assembly for four terms.

A graduate of Shaw University, Malone held public offices in Wake County over three decades. As school board chairman, he presided over the merger of Raleigh city schools and Wake County public schools in 1976.

He served as a Wake County commissioner from 1984 until his election to the Senate in 2002.

In the Senate, Malone continued to work in education, co-chairing the Senate's higher education committee and education budget subcommittee.

In a statement, fellow Democratic Gov. Beverly Perdue praised Malone's dedication to the state's students.

"Vernon Malone was one of my closest personal friends and was a powerful voice for North Carolina's future," said Perdue, who ordered state flags lowered to half-staff. "He fundamentally believed that every kid should have a shot at success, regardless of their background and dedicated his life to making that belief a reality."

As he watched President Barack Obama's inauguration earlier this year, Malone recalled indignities of the Jim Crow era in his childhood - his mother had to go to the bathroom on the side of the road during a family car trip because there were no restrooms for blacks.

"I don't look back on that, but you can't forget it," Malone, who had three television sets on his southeast Raleigh home so he wouldn't miss anything, told The Associated Press. "If you spend too much time on that, it creates a kind of resentment that will psychologically destroy you."

"Our best days are still in front of us."