

Presidential battle begins with South Carolina

Black voters could determine who wins Democrat primary



RON WALTERS

The South Carolina primary next year is interesting to me because it could well determine who the nominee of the Democratic Party will be. As the fourth in line, but the first to exhibit black voting power, whoever comes out of the first three (Iowa, New Hampshire and Nevada) and wins the black vote could have the kind of national momentum that could spell victory. In 2004, blacks amounted to 47 percent of the vote in primary and so it is decisive in that regard.

The battle for South Carolina has now begun with Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama there to campaign in early February. In fact, there were reports that Obama "stepped on" Hillary's visit by positioning his close to hers, so as not to give her an uncontested ride in the polls. Nevertheless, it was the first time voters had the benefit of their attention and they both showed well in a state that was won by Jesse Jackson's campaign in 1988.



Clinton

Obviously sensitive to the possibilities, Barack Obama began to roll out his connection to the Civil Rights Movement, citing his appreciation for the legacy of Rosa Parks and Septima Clark in appearances that attracted 2,000 people in Orangeburg and 3,000 in Columbia. His reference to Septima Clark was not an idle one, since Clark, a confidant of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and a major civil rights activist, was born in Charleston and taught in Columbia for nearly 20 years and is an icon in that state.



Obama

But he was also received well by some whites who came to the integrated rallies and spoke well of his chances and the contradiction that it posed to Southern whites. One white engineer, for example, said that it posed the problem of "doing the right thing culturally or doing the right thing civically." This is a key to the fact that he is probably not one of the marginal cadre of traditional white liberals who voted for Jackson, but perhaps a moderate who could be moved to vote for a black man for the first time in his life.

Meanwhile, Hillary had also made a splash among blacks who had voted for her husband and who thought, like some, that Barack did not have enough experience, but that Hillary had been a senator longer and had actually been in the White House for eight years. A key black politician, State Senator Darrell Jackson, however, got himself in trouble by suggesting that a black man at the top of the national ticket would bring the whole thing down and that every Democrat would lose as a result. It was later discovered that these remarks were not objective in that Jackson, who also pastors a 10,000-member church and has a consulting firm, was receiving \$10,000 per month from Clinton's campaign.

Nevertheless, Jackson said what many of those attracted to Hillary Clinton will be thinking. They will go with her not only because of the overhanging positive sentiments blacks have toward her husband, but because they are a practical crowd that wants to win. Many want to be close to power for whatever reason and to do that, they must pick the surest horse. How many of these will there be? I don't know. It all depends on whether the potency of Obama's attraction continues to grow or fizzles out.

Perhaps because she is better positioned to trade on the Clinton appeal, Hillary's pitch was surprisingly light. She used her appearances to highlight her views on the Iraq war, to shore up a position that seems to be less popular than Barack's, and she talked about wanting to have the Confederate flag removed from the statehouse grounds. The hard bread and butter issues played a minor part in her stump speech to audiences that were also integrated, but to Black audiences as well.

That said, the Barack Obama appears to be gaining influence in South Carolina, having been endorsed by Dick Hartpootian, the former state Democratic chair with significant contacts among white voters, and key ministers in that state. It remains to be seen who the powerful Rep. Jim Clyburn supports, since he has chosen not to endorse any one now, but to serve as a moderator of the attempts of all candidates to be presented to the black community.

If Obama continues to excite whites in that state he could win the primary and by doing so, could create a coalition formula for Democratic victory in other Southern states in the general election. And although Democratic leaders gave away the South to the Republican party in 2000 and 2004, South Carolina could be a beachhead to the White House in 2008.

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Exposing sexual assault remains a taboo subject in communities

I discovered it almost by accident. My friend had been raped. But this had not just happened; it had actually occurred several years ago. Sadly, she could tell me the exact date, time and minute that the rape transpired. I asked her whether she had pressed charges. Her answer was 'no.' I asked her whether she had spoken with her family about it, and her answer was 'no.' I sat there aghast until she filled in the story.



BILL FLETCHER

The rapist was a respected family friend. He, apparently, had been coming on to my friend who was CONSIDERABLY younger - to the point of making my friend very uncomfortable. She communicated this to a brother of hers who was friendly with the soon-to-be rapist. The brother was told by the soon-to-be rapist that this was all in the imagination of my friend and that my friend had misunderstood his words. The entire family believed the soon-to-be rapist.

Subsequently, the rapist visited the house when my friend was alone. Despite my friend's pleas that she stop, he sexually assaulted her. Raping her without a condom, he gave her human papilloma virus, a contributor toward cervical cancer. When he finished with her and was leaving the house, she told me, he informed her that he would be back.

Sexual violence against women is one of those subjects that we often prefer to ignore. When we hear the stories, we want to disbelieve them. We, very often, think about the Tawana Brawley-like stories and other such claims that turn out to be untrue, thereby writing off legitimate concerns. In fact, the climate is such that women, like my friend (and I have actually more than one friend who has experienced rape), feel that they cannot tell anyone what happened to them. My friend, despite her internal and external strength, is deathly afraid that she will be judged and blamed, and the sad fact is that she almost blames herself for the rape having occurred.

I don't know what happened in the Duke Lacrosse incident. It sounds as if the authorities handled the case like a bunch of Keystone cops. Yet, for each such case, there are countless others that either go unreported or are dismissed. In the case of my friend, the rapist was an 'upstanding' member of the community whose word was believed before the word of my friend because, after all, my friend was just a woman; in fact, at the time she was a very young woman.

It strikes me that when it comes to women of color, the presumption is almost always that they are lying. Usually, this is connected to allegations of excessive sensuality and/or provocativeness on the part of the woman. We men are all too often prepared to disregard the concerns and warning signs because it might break some sort of brotherhood or code among men. It is as if we believe that 'boys will be boys.' Among many women, however, there is also a tendency to believe that the problem starts with the woman.

We have few places in our communities to have honest discussions about sexual violence. We rarely debate it in our newspapers, or even on line, except when we are in a gossip mode. But serious discussions about prevention, sexual trauma, as well as struggling with the sexist behavior among so many men who believe that a woman exists for their own domination and pleasure, just do not happen.

After hearing this story from my friend I wanted to believe that there was something that I could say to assure her that it would not only not happen to her again, but not happen to other women. But how can I do that when our community fails to put this issue on the front burner for discussion?

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Fighting HIV a battle that must enlist blacks' aid

Grass roots organizers locked out of Magic Johnson visit

By Clinton Woods
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

I am one of the few Afro-American men in Charlotte, fighting to help our brothers and sisters in the struggle against HIV/AIDS in our community. I have worked with the Regional AIDS Interfaith Network (RAIN), Metrolina AIDS Project (MAP), and the Regional AIDS Consortium, and received the Harold Grier Award from the sole Afro-American community based organization for Afro-American men in Charlotte, Brother 2 Brother. I also played a key role in the effort to bring Magic Johnson to Charlotte.

I met Magic in July of last year, when he came to Charlotte to open up his Starbucks on the Westside. I was blessed to catch him alone and speak confidentially to him about coming here this spring. I begged and I cried, and he assured me he would. I also gave him the letter and other information attached to this e-mail. In the interim I stayed in contact with Chris Parsons in Atlanta, who helps to arrange Magic's personal appearances on behalf of Abbott Laboratories, the pharmaceutical company who has contracted Magic Johnson to do these town hall meetings in order to promote Keletra, its HIV/AIDS drug. I also worked with the HIV positive community across the state to build momentum for his arrival.

Imagine my shock when I and other Afro-American organizers received official notification of his appearance through second-hand information less than one month before his arrival. I personally informed some community HIV/AIDS Afro-American leaders who have been advocating for our community far longer than I. Subsequently no Afro-American organizations or HIV community advocates were consulted or involved in any of the planning or organizing of this event.

You may or may not have noticed that no Afro-American HIV/AIDS or organizations period, are listed on any of the promotional items. Furthermore, as unbelievable as this may sound, we have been informed that Mr. Johnson will not be meeting with any HIV positive clients, community activists or black ministers despite the fact the event is being held at Little Rock AME Zion Church! In other words, he's not meeting with anyone who may have an issue concerning HIV/AIDS or the ability to affect change in our community.

We who have been on the front lines in this fight in our community know that this is typical of many of the organizations that receive the bulk of donations, funding and grants to fight the spread of HIV in our community. They tell us that 80 percent of all people suffering from HIV/AIDS in the state of North Carolina are Afro-American, 70 percent in Mecklenburg County. Yet few organizations are run by Afro-Americans or even have Afro-Americans on their staff, even fewer Afro-American and HIV positive people. Only one in Mecklenburg County. How can this be, and yet they are supposed to be serious about ending HIV/AIDS in N.C.?

And by the state's own statistics, 80 percent of all those suffering from HIV/AIDS in N.C. are Afro-American, then shouldn't at least 80 percent of these organization's budgets be going toward those communities, if we're serious about ending AIDS in North Carolina? And shouldn't the NC HIV/AIDS Director be black if communication is key in the fight against AIDS? These are all no-brainer questions that are not being answered because, as in the case of Magic Johnson, we're not even at the table.

Please keep in mind that AIDS is 100 percent preventable. That simply by using a condom and a water-based lubricant you can automatically put yourself in an extremely low risk category. And should you become infected, with proper testing and treatment you can still live a long and productive life. This is a message that appears to have gotten across in the Caucasian community who now account for less than 20 percent of all new infections, from 80 percent less than 15 years ago.

The rate of new infections remains at the same level in the United States at 50,000 new cases each year, as it did 25 years ago at the outset of this virus. The only thing that has changed is the color. We know that the solutions are not all simple, yet we know that what worked for one community can work for ours. That is why the North Carolina NAACP has made HIV/AIDS its No. 1 health issue for Afro-Americans.

It would be a shame if this rare appearance by someone as prominent as Magic Johnson does not address any of these issues and once again HIV positive Afro-Americans in North Carolina are bused in, used and bused out by organizations funded to address their issues and yet give them so little voice and control over their own destiny. Thank you,

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Fighting for health care insurance that covers all American children

The Children's Defense Fund is fighting to make health coverage for all children a reality in America in 2007. Chronic budget shortfalls, often confusing enrollment



MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

processes, and dramatic variation in eligibility and coverage from state to state prevent millions of children currently eligible for Medicaid and for the State Children's Health Insurance Program from living healthy

and realizing their full potential in school and life. As Congress prepares to consider renewal of funding for SCHIP in 2007, CDF believes there is a special opportunity and responsibility for our nation and leaders in all parties to take the next logical, incremental, smart and just steps to ensure health and mental health coverage for all children and pregnant women in America as a significant down payment on health coverage for all.

What our leaders do this year will likely determine child health policy for the next five years. We must not let the more than nine mil-

lion uninsured children including Katrina's children be left behind. We must give them health and mental health coverage now.

How do families who need health coverage for their children cope now? CDF has talked to families across the country about their struggles, including a Columbus, Ohio family who's been forced to fight the health care bureaucracy and their toddler's childhood cancer at the same time.

Mark was diagnosed with malignant Wilms tumors in his kidneys when he was just 11 months old. Fortunately, he and his older brother were covered

by SCHIP when his condition was originally diagnosed. But it was the beginning of a long and difficult journey for his single mother, Deanna, who was forced to quit her job to take care of Mark full-time. In October 2006, Deanna discovered that Mark had been eligible for Medicaid since April 2006, so she set out to enroll him in the Medicaid program - a process that turned into a frustrating, time-consuming ordeal. For three weeks, Deanna spent three days a week for four hours at a time at the Department of Jobs and Family Services, bringing her ill child along each time. It then took six months of

waiting, but Mark was finally approved for Medicaid. Deanna also learned that Mark qualified for assistance from the Bureau for Children with Medical Handicaps, a state-administered program, and for Medicare under their disability coverage.

Although Mark's cancer is now in remission, he is in end-stage renal failure after losing both kidneys and is on dialysis for 10 hours each day.

Mark became cancer-free when they removed his second kidney in November 2006, and will be eligible for a donated kidney once he has been cancer-free for a year. It has been one uphill

battle after another for this mother and her son, but they continue to struggle through the system and the illness. But wouldn't it be better if the family could devote all its energy to fighting his cancer, instead of spending so much of it fighting their paperwork?

Mark and thousands of children like him need and deserve your voice. And any political leader who says they can't find the time or the money to help the millions of Marks who are uninsured this year should not get your vote next year.

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