

Republicans criticized for 'token' outreach efforts

By Hazel Trice Edney
NNPA Washington
Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — A string of Republican-led initiatives aimed at impressing Black voters — including proposals to increase funding for AIDS prevention in Africa, add money for sickle cell anemia research, improve technology at historically Black colleges and universities and renovate the Frederick Douglass national historic site in the nation's capital — are being dismissed by Black political observers as being all style and no substance.

"The Republican Party outreach is purely symbolic. For over 40 years, they have failed to stand up and fight for the inclusion of African-Americans in all walks of life, from civil rights to affirmative action to the appointment of judicial candidates who turn back the clock on voting rights," says Donna Brazile, chair of the Voting Rights Institute of the Democratic National Committee and a political science professor at Georgetown University.

"So until Republicans come down from their high mountain and roll up their sleeves to fight for and represent the aspirations of all African-Americans who seek to be included in the great mosaic of our nation, African-Americans should dismiss this annual rhetorical ritual coming from the Republican Party," Brazile said.

Over the past month, Republican leaders have announced support of several high-profile causes designed to win them votes:

- Missouri Sen. Jim Talent has proposed expanding services for people with sickle cell anemia, a blood disease that afflicts African-Americans. The bill, S.874, calls for federal matching funds for sickle cell-related services under Medicaid. The Finance Committee is reviewing the proposal;

- Virginia Sen. George Allen offered a bill that passed the Senate 97-0 to provide \$250 million for technology improvements at historically Black colleges and universities. The bill is now making its way through the House. It is uncertain whether there will be funding for the bill and whether President Bush will sign it;

- House Speaker Dennis Hastert's has launched an initiative to secure nearly \$1 million to complete renovations at the Frederick



Donna Brazile, chair of the Voting Rights Institute of the Democratic National Committee, calls Republican-led initiatives "purely symbolic."

Douglass national historic site, called Cedar Hill, in Washington, D.C. It was the home of the former slave who became a noted author, newspaper publisher, orator and abolitionist. The resolution, H.Res. 224, is being reviewed by the Committee on Resources;

- Senate Majority Leader William Frist of Tennessee supports legislation that would expedite \$15 billion for AIDS treatment and prevention in African countries over the next five years. The bill, S.1009, passed the Senate unanimously May 15; it passed in the House last month; and

- Texas Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison held a two-day African-American leadership summit on Capitol Hill last week with 400 mostly Republican African-Americans.

"They're good on the photo ops, but there are a lot of false promises," says Terry McAuliffe, chairman of the Democratic National Committee. "The Trent Lott debacle was an accurate portrayal of how Republicans feel. It's a good try. They're doing a few things here and there, but overall, their policies in the African-American community are regressive."

Marc Racicot, the Republican National Committee chairman, denies that his party is trying to polish its image after Mississippi Sen. Trent Lott insulted African-Americans last year by expressing support for former Sen. Strom Thurmond's 1948 segregationist presidential bid. The party's standing among African-Americans also has been hampered by President Bush's decision to oppose voluntary affirmative action programs at the University of Michigan.

Republicans claim their efforts to reach out to African-Americans are sincere.

"There's no question that it's substance," says Racicot, the GOP leader. "We are finding a great many of our fellow citizens who are African-Americans find the value and the ideals of this party and its policies very attractive. And I think that that

presents a certain amount of fear and trepidation to those who have relied upon or taken them for granted for a long time."

That was an indirect reference to Democrats, who routinely receive 80 to 90

percent of the Black vote each election.

Toni-Michelle Travis, a government professor at George Mason University, says the Republican efforts to recruit Blacks are more show than substance.

"Republicans tend to find a showpiece," says Travis. "These are projects that show that someone remembers that there is an African-American community. They are positive steps, but they are not comprehensive programmatic initiatives."

Travis says Republicans would be more attractive to Blacks if they supported af-

firmative action and stop supporting Right-wing judges.

Hutchinson defends the GOP on both issues.

"There is not a question that President Bush and the party are nominating judges who are going to uphold civil rights. They have stellar records," she says. "We are trying to come up with the right approach on access to colleges and universities. I don't think we have the right formula yet to make sure that we do have a diverse student body. There is disagreement about how you achieve affirmative action or access for African-Americans."

Like Bush, Hutchinson prefers the term "affirmative access" instead of "affirmative action."

She says, "I don't think there's a difference except that I think affirmative action is, I think, connected with quotas and affirmative access is trying to get that level playing field, trying to get entry that is equal opportunity."

But, Shirley J. Wilcher, president of Wilcher Global LLC, a consulting firm that specializes in affirmative action and diversity management, points to Hutchinson's explanation as proof that Re-

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