

Black Republicans remain an anomaly—even in own families

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — No one can ever accuse Clarence Sailor and his wife, Rev. Deanna M. Petit-Sailor, of fitting the typical stereotype.

A staunch Republican and former president of the Republican Women's Forum of Detroit, Petit-Sailor is an avid supporter of affirmative action. Her husband, a retired union man of 30 years from the Ford Motor Co. and faithful Democrat, argues against affirmative action.

The Detroit couple is not a pairing one finds every day.

"I was a little perturbed with President Bush because of affirmative action," Petit-Sailor says of Bush, who announced his opposition to affirmative action in the University of Michigan cases last year on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. "I just feel that each American should be able to sit in a position that they're qualified for."

Petit Sailor, a Bush supporter and pastor of the Christ United Methodist Church in Inkster, Mich., says though she sides with the Republican party on certain free enterprise issues and supports Bush on his faith-based initiatives, it is her personal experience as a Black woman in America that keeps her in support of affirmative action.

"Being in the work system since I was 16 years old, I do know that there have been times that I felt that I was qualified for a position and I did not receive that position. And I knew in my heart and I knew by the mannerism of the supervision that it wasn't based on my qualifications. It was based on race," she says. "Affirmative action will help qualified African-Americans to get positions where they should be."

One of her staunchest detractors is her husband.

"Affirmative action is like you feel like someone is giving you something," he says. "We always worked and we never wanted anyone to give us anything. We endured, kind of like making our own way."

Nevertheless, Sailor says he supports the campaign of Sen. John Kerry — a strong supporter of affirmative action — because he agrees with his opposition to war. "I hate it," says Sailor, who served in the U. S. Army for three years in the early 1960s. "I believe he would be the right man because I don't believe in war."



Clarence Sailor and his wife, the Rev. Deanna M. Petit-Sailor, after her graduation from the Methodist Theological Seminary in Ohio. He is a Democrat, she is a Republican.

The Sailors say they don't frequently argue over politics.

"I think the only thing that we kind of butted heads on was affirmative action," she explains. And when that happens, they agree to disagree.

In 2000, 90 percent of Black voters supported the Democratic ticket, leaving about 8 percent to support the Republican ticket and 2 percent who voted for other candidates. Therefore, Black Republicans — even within the context of their own families — often find themselves a minority within a minority.

Bill Thomas, who calls himself a "Goldwater Republican" — a reference to Sen. Barry Goldwater of Arizona, the archconservative 1964 presidential nominee — recalls humorous spats with his "die-hard Democrat" mother.

"When I got my daughter into helping me with Republican activities, she would customarily threaten my daughter with not taking her to Disneyland," chuckles Thomas, director of governmental relations at Hampton University, a historically Black University in Virginia.

Even though his wife is a Democrat, Thomas says his two college-age sons, and his daughter, now 17, are leaning more towards the GOP.

"They're more interested in what the government can get out if it leaves them alone with lower taxes and having the ability to do things for themselves rather than following the edicts of fighting a civil rights battle, which they clearly don't understand," he says. "The struggles that we saw and that her mom and I had growing up as children are oblivious to them."

With the Nov. 2 elections drawing closer and the Bush-Kerry race getting hotter, so are family gatherings.

"Usually at breakfast, that's when we're all sitting around reading the newspa-

per. My mom is fixing breakfast. She's already read the paper. My dad is reading the paper," says Republican Van Koppedge, whose parents are both Democrats and retirees from the White House after 30 years. "Then, I come down and we begin to talk about news and we talk about the issues and things like that."

Koppedge, a cab and Sedan driver, of Fort Washington, Md., says he expresses himself from a Christian perspective when discussing social issues with his parents, such as his opposition to

same-sex marriages and abortion.

"They look at it as kind of weird, but they're respectful," Koppedge says.

In many Black families, the importance of spiritual well being overrides political differences, argues Terone B. Green, a Richmond, Va. native who is the only Republican in a family of Democrats.

"They don't pay any attention to it because it's not an issue," he shrugs. "I mean, we don't talk politics. Black folks are more concerned

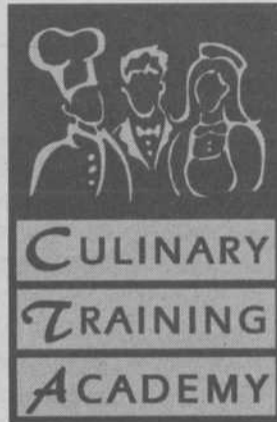
about spirituality and values than political affiliation."

Still, the Republican Party has not been able to attract more than 15 percent of the Black vote in the past three decades.

Even intra-party politics can become overheated.

For example, Green, a protégé of former Virginia House Speaker S. Vance Wilkins, once sent a scathing letter to then Virginia Republican Chairman Randy Forbes, now a Congressman, announcing: "I am not your

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