

Democrats, GOP intensify ad blitzes in stretch run

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — With slightly more than a month left before the presidential election, campaign workers for John Kerry and George W. Bush are rushing to register new voters before the deadlines, which in some instances are just days away, and aggressively going after those already registered.

Kerry, who promised two months ago to spend a record amount with Black media, has unleashed a new ad campaign directly targeting Black voters, featuring former Clinton Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman.

"When President Clinton appointed me to be the first African-American Secretary of Labor, I felt proud to represent our community. But pride has turned to anger after four years of George Bush's failed policies," Herman says in a radio commercial now airing. "Since George Bush became president, 1.6 million private sector jobs have been lost and over 384,000 more African-Americans are out of work. African-American household income under George Bush is down by more than \$1,500 a year. George Bush has opposed every effort to raise the minimum wage."

Kerry campaign spokeswoman Divana Dolliole says the general election phase of the Black media buys takes the Kerry campaign into the second phase of an unprecedented purchase with Black media.

The campaign bought \$2 million in print, radio and television prior to the opening of the Democratic National Convention in Boston on July 26, the largest and earliest commitment by a Democratic presidential candidate. Dolliole says the campaign will not say how much it is spending in the closing days of the campaign because it would be strategically un-

wise.

"By the end of this election cycle, it will be an unprecedented amount of money that will be spent [for media] by a Democratic presidential candidate ever in the African-American community," she says.

Although Bush spokeswoman Sharon Castillo would not disclose the amount it plans to spend seeking Black voters, she said the GOP has made a second Black radio buy.

"The new ad is a 60 second spot. It's called values. It highlights the commitment of the president and of Republican congressional leaders to

the values that are important to African-Americans," Castillo says. "Faith, economic opportunities and educational excellence."

The script reads, in part: "I realized I'm tired of being taken for granted by John Kerry and his allies in Congress... And while I don't always agree with President Bush and our leaders in Congress, I do find myself agreeing with them on the values that are most important to my family..."

"Equal opportunity... to choose a better school and free my children from our failing neighborhood school... support for our faith

based organizations we turn to, to help people around here in times of need... tax relief for our hard-working family... tax relief that's actually allowed us to put college money away for our kids, which we could never do before."

Though written to favor the respective candidates, some say the commercials and ads will help voters see the differences between the two candidates.

Children's Defense Fund President Marian Wright Edelman says, "This is a defining election for the Black community. And the choices are stark and clear."

Manage

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traditional Black organizations.

"We believe that there are traditional organizations in this country that have worked these states and these precincts for decades. They have done phenomenal work that has bolstered the ability of Democrats to win," says Gaspard, national field director for ACT.

"There isn't anything about our philosophy or our approach that was constructed in response to any kind of deficit that we see in these organizations."

Gaspard says ACT has not contracted with any major voter groups — Black or White — except the Hip Hop Summit Action Network because of its specialized outreach to young African-American voters. For organizational and accountability purposes, he says, ACT has decided to recruit its own people from state to state rather than turn to established groups.

"Everywhere we go, we make sure to hire local talent who, in turn, hire other local talent and development leadership to go into communities to do this work. However, we are determined that America Coming Together is its own free standing organizing tool," Gaspard says. "We believe that in order to be able to track and measure and quantify our voter contact, it makes the most sense for us to be able to run programs that are directly controlled and administered by the organizing leadership that's hired in these states, that's developed in these states."

The bi-partisan McCain-Feingold, Shays-Meehan campaign finance reform act, signed by President Bush in 2002, allows 527s to raise and spend unregulated and unlimited money while political campaigns cannot. Tension between Black grass-root organizers and the 527 controversy peaked weeks ago when Walters sent a scathing letter to Harold Ickes, former Clinton White House aide, who runs the Media Fund.

"Since the 1970s the National Coalition for Black Civic Participation has operated 'Operation Big Vote' and in recent years 'Black Youth Vote' and in this election cycle, the Unity '04 Campaign has been established, staffed and has attempted to raise funds for its activities with meager success. So, we are now to understand that The Media Fund, an entity that is com-

pletely unknown in the Black community, but which contains some Black PR firms, has a plan for Black messaging and the resources to enact it," Walters wrote.

"But it is a plan that has been drafted outside of our community, that is to say, without the collective sign-off of any significant collection of Black leaders. Therefore, why should we accept it and cooperate with it? This is an arrogant and divisive usurpation of power and it is destructive of our efforts that began most recently in the Civil Rights movement where the efforts of Blacks to provide their own leadership in the act of political participation was understood to be the source of their power in the policy system as well."

Gaspard, also speaking for The Media Fund, which works hand-in-hand with ACT, says that Ickes has read Walters' letter.

"We definitely were not at all dismissive of any of the points that he raised in the letter. All I can speak to is the work that we're doing on the ground every day in these states and in these communities," Gaspard says. "And we have a tremendous amount of respect for his history, the history of the organizations that he cites that he's been involved with and the thoughtfulness and critique in his letter."

Ron Lester is a political consultant to Voices for Working Families, a small 527 that has raised about \$6 million to mobilize Blacks and women. He says Blacks are particularly upset that ACT is headed by a former ally, AFL-CIO ex-political director Steve Rosenthal.

"They feel as though ACT is kind of infringing on their territory. They [ACT] want to come into the Black community and do their thing, but they don't want to include the people who have been doing it in the Black community, like Melanie, for 20 years. They want to bypass Melanie and do it on their own. It's ugly," Lester says.

Campbell says NCBCP is investigating alternative financing for Unity 2004 and has established a fund-raising website, Unity04donate.org.

"What can we do as a community to try to deal with the bigger picture? We want to fund our own politics," she states. "We're going to Black people. It's about the small checks to the big checks. We're calling this a united community appeal."

Teens

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a small amount of anecdotal evidence," said Sue Hensley, spokeswoman for the National Restaurant Association, which is participating in EEOC's new outreach effort. "However, we certainly feel strongly about the importance of this program and that it will be beneficial to teens in this industry."

More than half of restaurant industry workers are under age 30, the association says.

The awareness campaign includes visits and presentations at high schools nationwide. Educational videos and materials, including bilingual comic books are being distributed to educate young workers about their rights at work.

EEOC has created a website on the issue, and also plans to hold forums involving employers, workers and labor experts.

Lynn Bruner, EEOC's district director for St. Louis, said she became concerned about teens in the work force when she discovered that all but one of her district's sexual harassment cases last year involved women under age 21.

One case involves an 17-year-old female restaurant employee who charged that she was followed to her car after work by a cook who demanded oral sex, pulled on her clothing and exposed himself.

He threatened to kill her if she told anyone.

EEOC's San Francisco district office has noted an increase in sexual harassment complaints, many involving teens. There were seven such suits last year. The office generally files 30 to 40 total suits a year, said Joan Ehrlich, dis-



trict director.

A recent, \$75,000 settlement involved three young women, two who were 16 and the other 18, who worked at a country club. They were harassed by the executive chef there, who asked them for lap dances and touched

them inappropriately, Ehrlich said.

More education is needed to let these young workers know "that they don't have to put up with the harassment. What is happening to them is illegal and should stop," she said.

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