

C O M M E N T A R Y

Kerry not keeping eyes on White House prize

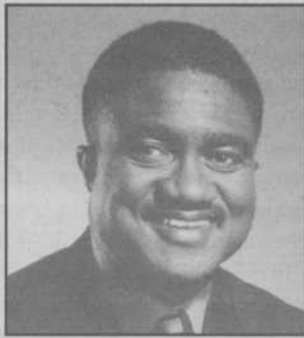
By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

For months, I have been perplexed by John Kerry's campaign strategy. His dogged determination to go into combat again over his record in Vietnam and continuously debating Bush about Iraq — a subject that most Americans have already formed an opinion about — seems to be setting Kerry up to be Bushwhacked on Nov. 2.

I keep asking myself: Is Kerry trying to lose to Bush?

If Kerry isn't, he's doing an excellent job of pretending. Every minute that Kerry spends answering pro-Bush veterans who never served with him in Vietnam is a minute not spent on addressing domestic issues that Bush doesn't want to discuss. Bush has no viable domestic program to speak of; more than 1.6 million jobs have been lost on his watch and he has turned a \$236 billion surplus into a deficit projected to be \$422 billion in 2004, rising to \$2.7 trillion in 10 years.

Moreover, Bush has run up massive deficits while simultaneously providing tax breaks that primarily benefit the wealthy. At the Republican National Convention in New York, he outlined new programs that would cost \$3 billion. In the meantime, he has quietly put federal departments on notice to expect deep cuts in the budgets after the Nov. 2 election.



GEORGE CURRY

Yet, Kerry is not capitalizing on these weaknesses. He has allowed Bush to put him on the defensive and he keeps challenging Bush on Iraq from different angles, first questioning Bush's go-it-alone strategy and, more recently, talking about the wasteful spending in Iraq and questioning Bush's leadership on foreign policy.

I feel like placing tape over Kerry's mouth every time he mentions Iraq or Vietnam and reading him his rights. They should change his website from JohnKerry.com to MoveOn.com. At a meeting this summer with a half-dozen Black columnists, Kerry said despite what Bush says during the campaign, his retort will be "jobs, jobs, jobs." But Kerry has been off message for some time.

Fortunately, there are some signs that the Kerry campaign is about to turn its attention to bread-and-butter issues. A radio commercial featuring former Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman, for example, takes Bush to task for his record job losses. In addition to saying that a record number of Americans are losing their jobs, the Herman commercial should point out that it's time for Bush to lose his job. That's the kind of zinger that would impress his core supporters. Kerry operatives need to dispense with those safe radio spots that motivate no one.

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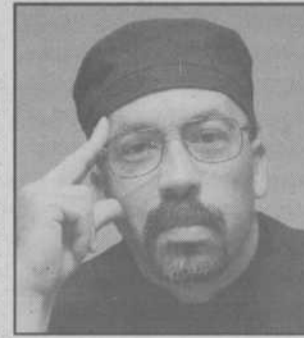
When Bush talks, world rarely, barely takes heed

By Bill Fletcher Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

I want to take you back to Sept. 21 and the speech given by President Bush at the United Nations. I keep thinking about that address. Nothing was more striking nor telling than the fact that the world's leaders did not stand and cheer the president's remarks. In fact, the only applause that sounded was upon the completion of his remarks. The polite applause had the same effect as silence.

Bush's speech was remarkable as a study in the science of propaganda. Ignoring the reality of the situation on the ground in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine, the president reiterated his view of what he would like us to believe is transpiring. In fact, the speech reminded me of the manner in which the comedian George Wallace would end his commentaries on the Tom Joyner Morning Radio Show: "That's the way I see it," Wallace would say, closing by adding "...and that's the way it ought to be."

Despite the CIA's own reports that the situation on the ground in Iraq is unraveling and there is no prospect of stability, President Bush suggested that things are improving. Despite the open acknowledgment that there are entire sections of Afghanistan which are no-go zones for U.S. troops, President Bush applauded the alleged accomplishments of the pro-Bush regime in Kabul. Despite the criminal at-



BILL FLETCHER JR.

tacks on the Palestinian people and the continued refusal of the Israeli forces to withdraw from the Occupied Territories, President Bush commented on the Israeli/Palestinian crisis by focusing largely on his criticisms of the Palestinians! Who is occupying whom, Mr. President?

Yet, President Bush did not stop there. He suggested to the world's leaders that the U.S. has been stepping up to the plate to address the world's crises in the arenas of HIV/AIDS and poverty. In contrast, the Bush administration, having promised \$15 billion over five years in assistance to confront the HIV/AIDS pandemic, has delivered on only a portion of this and has mystified most observers by its failure to press for the full funding from Congress. Additionally, the Bush administration, rather than fully support the United Nations Global AIDS Fund, has offered limited assistance and instead created its own bureaucracy for the delivery of HIV/AIDS assistance, despite the positive record of the UN Global AIDS Fund.

In the area of poverty, the Bush administration likes to hold up its so-called Millennium Challenge Account, its creative method for allegedly expanding foreign aid. Despite all the hype around this highly politicized method for dispensing aid, the U.S. continues to lag behind the rest of the world.

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Kerry reverts back to underdog role—but can still win

By Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

It is clear that John Kerry has resumed the underdog role in this campaign. The upcoming presidential debates will give him an opportunity to regain the advantage, provided he changes course.

With poll number flying around that indicated domestic issues were uppermost in the minds of Americans, John Kerry flew into the Democratic National Convention and declared that he was "reporting for duty." That is to say, his campaign had decided to challenge Bush for the role of commander-in-chief in the middle of a war. That is a tough act and a formidable risk.

Common sense should tell you that despite the fact that the war has become an albatross around the neck of George Bush and the American people, they still gave him high marks for fighting terrorism and had bought the line that Iraq was somehow connected. So, the campaign had to disconnect them, not only boost Kerry's credentials as a war hero but to answer Bush's assertion that was his vulnerability and Kerry offered precious little difference.

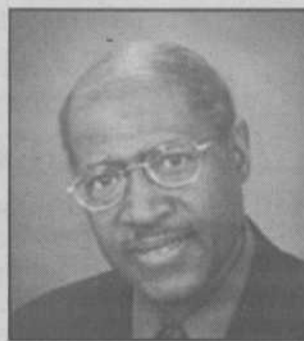
Since playing to Bush's strength did not work, perhaps during the upcoming debates, Kerry will begin to play into the strengths of Democrats. How many times must it be said that for the Democrats to attempt to become Republicans rather than try to play to their

own strength is a losing game. The seduction to walk like Republicans and talk like Democrats is Bill Clinton's game, but perhaps people had caught on and just perhaps Clinton was better at it than Kerry.

In any case, if I were Kerry, I would focus on domestic issues, not just by presenting great new domestic proposals, but I would use the powerful resentment built up against the war as perspective to address the domestic agenda. Thus, you could show that one of the main reasons people feel they are hurting is that precious resources are being squandered in Iraq.

That is the best way for a Democrat to attack the war, not to climb into a tank or strike some other ill-fitting pose, looking and, in fact, being totally out of place.

Republicans are the war party; they are the party that wants to use guns and force to resolve human political problems. One could make the case that this is an immature and dangerous strategy in a world where the means to manufacture and deploy weapons of mass destruction is proliferating to Third World countries with little technological sophistication. One could focus on George Bush's speech where he said: "I believe that America is called to lead the cause of freedom in a new



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century," a line straight out of the "Project for New American Century," created by the William Kristol and his company of neoconservatives. And I would focus on another line: "We see America's character in our military, which finds a way or makes one." But the question is where would we rather have our character vested?

A Democratic candidate could pose an alternative to this militaristic view by creating a vision that addresses the difficult human challenges and mobilizes our vast resources to address them. Kerry began this with his health care debate, a debate on one of the most substantial issues that faces an entire generation of Americans who are coming into mature age. They should provide a constituency for such a debate.

Kerry should initiate a more substantive debate on "No Child Left Behind" which, although it passed as a bipartisan piece of legislation, has monumental flaws both in its conception and in its implementation. He should replace it with a new vision that is supported by the education community. Then, he should attack the economic program of Bush more vigorously, showing that massive "flip-flop" of a party that could be for balanced budgets in one age and against them in

another. He should note that the billions of dollars of debt that now accrue and the trillions of debt that will come should be set against these human needs priorities.

I think that there is a constituency for this line of attack that is not being cultivated successfully, probably because the Kerry campaign is afraid that it could be vulnerable to Bush's popularity on the war front. But the greatest vulnerability in this race right now is Kerry's abstinence on his Senate record and I cannot believe that his public policy experience is less than Bush, especially on issues of human needs.

So, I would expect that he could exploit Bush's weaknesses on these and other issues of concern to Blacks and Hispanics that have received scant attention, such as boosting job training, implementing multi-lingual education for Hispanics and Anglos, increased child care funding, eliminating mandatory minimum sentences, closing the health gaps in treatment and insurance for minorities, making minority business enterprise a true minority opportunity program, enforcing civil rights, and supporting affirmative action.

Bush is weak on these issues and Kerry's constituency is strong on them. The coming debates provide an opportunity for Kerry to come back home.

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