

Fresh off defeats, Democrats acting like GOP

Special to Sentinel-Voice
WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Republicans are rewriting the book on how to win presidential elections. And the Democrats are not only reading that book, they are trying to apply the lessons.

"We learned that we don't have the kind of grassroots organizations that they do. We brought a lot of people in from the states. But they had people in their own communities knocking on doors. That's what we want to do," says Howard Dean, former Democratic presidential candidate and new chairman of the Democratic National Committee.

"They have people talking to people, for example, in their churches. It had more success than bringing people in from other states. In the rural areas, it's much more effective when someone that

you know talks to you. So, we're looking to create grassroots organizations in the community. And in the African-American community, a lot of the grassroots organizations already exist."

The Democrats lost the November elections — expanding the GOP stranglehold in the House and the Senate — because Republican operatives beat them at their own game of grassroots organizing, says Dean, who replaced Terry McAuliffe this month as the party's chairman. Republicans have maintained control of the House for 12 consecutive years and now hold a 232-201 majority. They currently hold a 55-44 advantage in the Senate, with one independent. In Ohio, Republican outmaneuvered Democrats by mobilizing the rural vote to offset Democratic majorities in big

cities. In addition, the GOP benefited from Blacks going to the polls to support a Republican-led referendum to prohibit same-sex marriage. Approximately 90,000 Blacks or 16 percent of the Black population supported Bush. If that group alone had voted for Democrat John Kerry, that would have been enough for Kerry to claim victory in a state that ultimately decided the outcome of the election.

If Democrats are to be successful in 2008, they must improve their grassroots organizing efforts.

The grassroots strategy was actually mastered by Jesse Jackson Sr.'s Rainbow Coalition for his 1984 and 1988 quests for the Democratic presidential nomination. By forming grassroots Rainbow chapters and connecting with existing organi-

zations, Jackson created enough momentum to win 1,200 delegates in 1988 and to get Blacks elected to local and state offices.

"There was a very interesting increase in Black elected officials, a very interesting increase that hasn't been repeated since then," says University of Maryland Political Scientist Ron Walters. "That came from a mobilization affect. The highest turnouts in the Black community have been when we have a movement effect. You have a lot of emotion in the turn-out."

Dean says one problem is that the Democrats lose momentum between elections. "They sometimes get disconnected from the Democratic Party. We get them revved up every four years, but we need to have them revved up during school board elections, mayoral elections. We don't get quite involved in those elections," he says.

Many African-Americans feel that Democrats take them for granted. The Black vote for Bill Clinton in 1992 and in 1996 was about 83 percent. In the Bush-Gore election in 2000, Blacks sup-

ported Gore with 90 percent of their vote. In November, Blacks supported Kerry with 88 percent of their votes. Blacks have voted more than 80 percent for Democratic presidential candidates over the past 30 years.

"I think it remains to be seen, the extent to which Blacks will become leaders, at least at this iteration of the party," says University of Missouri political scientist K. C. Morrison. He points to the late Democratic Party Chairman Ron Brown as the last example of significant Black power at the DNC. "We haven't achieved that level of leadership since then," he says. "The party is in a desperate situation in trying to find a way out of its minority situation. We should expect to have a greater role and greater presence."

Former campaign manager for Jackson, the late Brown made history in 1989 when he became the first African-American chosen to lead a major U.S. political party. He served in the role from 1989 through 1992, when President Clinton appointed him secretary of commerce. Brown led the Demo-

crats to victory after three consecutive presidential defeats.

Dean says greater Black inclusion in Democratic leadership must begin with diversity within the DNC itself.

"My thought is on how to fully integrate on every level. The way we'll deal with that is the same way that we deal with diversity at the DNC," he says. "When you put people in charge of operations at the DNC who are people of color, then you'll have a much better likelihood that people [of color] will be hired."

DNC spokeswoman Daniella Gibbs says of the five vice chairs under Dean, she says one is an African-American, one Hispanic-American, and one Asian-American. The other two are White, including a White Jewish woman, she says.

Republican National Committee spokeswoman Tara Wall declined to give the racial makeup of the Republican National Committee leadership.

According to the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, Blacks made (See DNC Dean, Page 6)

Julius Chambers back in thick of N.C. school desegregation

By Cash Michaels
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WILMINGTON (NNPA) — In a legal maneuver that could challenge the racial re-segregation of public school systems and the school choice movement in North Carolina, Attorney Julius Chambers has filed a legal motion in Wake Superior Court charging that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public School System (CMS) denies Black students a "sound basic" education because the student assignment plan relegates them to high poverty, inner city schools.

CMS employs school choice, which ultimately allows White parents to send their children to predominately White and resourceful suburban schools, while most Black and Hispanic parents are forced to send their children to older, crumbling, poorly staffed city schools.

Chambers, one of the nation's top civil rights attorneys and the former chancellor of North Carolina Central University and head of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, made the motion recently based on the ruling by Wake Superior Court Judge Howard Manning, Jr. in the 10-year-old Leandro case.

That ruling made it clear that every North Carolina public school student is constitutionally entitled to a "sound basic" education by the state. Judge Manning compelled lawmakers to come up with \$220 million to help underfunded school sys-

tems in poor counties to meet that goal.

In the case of CMS (which was one of the plaintiffs in Leandro), Attorney Chambers, filing the motion on behalf of three high school students and one middle school student, argued that pupils attending high poverty schools are denied the same quality education as their White suburban counterparts and should, thus, be considered under the same criteria as Leandro.

The CMS School Board met in emergency conference to figure out a way to counter Chambers' motion, which they're taking seriously. It later released a statement that CMS "firmly believes that the students' interests are being adequately represented by the school district."

CMS, however, is already in Judge Manning's crosshairs.

He has scheduled a hearing for March 7 for CMS officials to explain how one-third the district's 17 high schools have pass rates on state examinations below 50 percent, even though CMS spends \$2,400 per pupil, more than many other school districts its size.

Manning says poor management is responsible for "these sorry scores." CMS officials disagree.

Last week, Judge Manning indicated that he will not consider Chambers' motion on student assignment until after the March CMS hearing.

Chambers will be allowed

to ask questions of CMS officials at that time.

"There's no rush whether we take that up or not," Manning said. "I've got the big picture we need to look at."

CMS, in its answer to Chambers' motion, noted that three of the four students named are in schools they chose. The other has left the district. Only one of the students, CMS maintains, is attending a high poverty school, and has not opted out when given the opportunity.

The case has statewide implications. If Judge Manning rules in Chambers' favor, that means every school system allowing parents to racially decide where their children attend public school, will be legally required to ensure that predominately Black and Hispanic inner city schools are funded properly to guarantee each child a "sound basic" education.

Currently, many critics allege, that is not the case.

For Chambers, "separate but unequal" education for Black students is an old issue. In 1970, Chambers successfully argued before the U.S. Supreme Court to have Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools desegregated, forcing the CMS to bus Black students to better schools. That practice ended a few years ago when a federal judge, citing no further need for it, ended the desegregation order. CMS then went to school choice in 2002.

Cash Michaels writes for the *Wilmington Journal*.

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