

Obama: Bush wasted chance with court choice

*By James Wright
Special to Sentinel-Voice*
WASHINGTON (NNPA) - President Bush's nomination of Judge Samuel A. Alito of the U.S. 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals to be an associate justice to the U.S. Supreme Court has drawn a respectful but unenthusiastic response from members of the Congressional Black Caucus.

Bush's first selection, White House Counsel Harriett Miers, dropped out because of concerns regarding White House documents being turned over to the Senate and the lack of support she had among conservative Republicans.

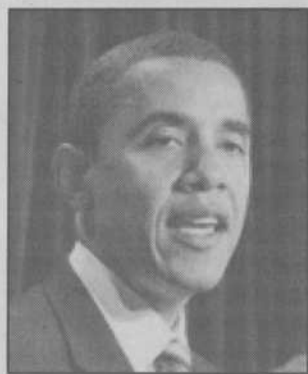
The only CBC member who will vote on Alito's nomination, Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., said: "Though I will reserve judgment on how I will vote on Judge Alito's nomination until af-

ter the hearings, I am concerned that President Bush has wasted an opportunity to appoint a consensus nominee in the mold of Sandra Day O'Connor and has instead made a selection to appease the far right-wing of the Republican Party."

Rep. Mel Watt (D-N.C.), chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, said:

"The members of the Congressional Black Caucus congratulate Judge Samuel A. Alito on his nomination to the Supreme Court and will closely evaluate his record. We will hold our collective judgment and carefully weigh Judge Alito's record on issues of importance to the African-American community, as we have on prior nominations. We believe it is our duty to do so."

Alito is known as a solid conservative and is believed to be in the same mode as



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— Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill.

Associate Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia in terms of intellect, writing ability and judicial reasoning.

Alito received an associate bachelor's from Princeton University in 1972 and a law degree from Yale University in 1975.

He has worked as a law clerk, an assistant U.S. attorney, an assistant to the U.S. solicitor general, deputy assistant U.S. attorney general

and was appointed U.S. attorney for the District of New Jersey by President Reagan in 1987.

He served in that capacity until 1990, when he was appointed to the 3rd Circuit by President George H.W. Bush.

Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Calif., said: "I am disappointed but not surprised that President Bush has missed the opportunity to nominate a candidate who would com-

mand a wide public support to fill Sandra Day O'Connor's seat on the Supreme Court.

Judge Alito's record on issues such as discrimination, civil rights, a woman's right to choose and basic labor protections, just to name a few, is far removed from the mainstream and is profoundly troubling.

"I believe that if the Senate fulfills its obligation to examine his record thoroughly, the American people will realize how radical a candidate he is."

The Senate Judiciary Committee will commence confirmation hearings in January.

James Wright writes for Afro Newspapers.

Study: Minority kids disciplined more

*By Starla Vaughns Cherin
Special to Sentinel-Voice*
FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (NNPA) - Are we bad or are we just Black? African-American students in Broward County are three times more likely to be disciplined with out-of-school suspensions than White students.

In elementary school, Black students comprise 30 percent of the population but account for 80 percent of out-of-school suspensions.

The overwhelming numbers, not just in Broward but also in the state, paint a bleak picture for students that act out. Zero-tolerance policies make it easier for administrators to wash their hands of problem students and turn them over into the justice system. Five to 10 day suspensions add up to failing a school term, being retained a grade, dropping out of school and going to jail.

The NAACP, the Advancement Project and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund Inc. are holding public hearings on school discipline throughout the nation.

The Advancement Project's report, "Education on Lockdown: The Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track," documented school discipline in three sites: Denver, Chicago and Palm Beach County, Fla. It demonstrates that schools are "shifting disciplinary issues from the principal's office to police stations and courtrooms."

The office of the State Attorney tries 14,000 juvenile cases a year. Attorney Maria Schneider noted the number of cases might not represent individual students because, often, students have two cases against them once they violate probation. Being on school property can result in a probation violation.

"There is a law on the books that makes it a crime to disrupt school functions. We don't get to pick and choose the laws we apply, but we do have discretion. We are still processing the same amount of cases that we have for 20 years. We don't keep track of where the incidents happened or the number of children. We are viewing cases that can, perhaps, be handled better elsewhere. We

have seen an increase in battery cases. This is a community issue, and we all need to take responsibility for it," she said.

Once a student enters the justice system, it is very hard to get out. It's a myth that juvenile records are dissolved once a child reaches the age of 18. Background checks for jobs, such as teacher, police officer and doctor, require a background check that reveals juvenile records. The consequences of being arrested can plague a child throughout their lives.

"The zero-tolerance net is cast so big. Make no mistake, the justice system is not rehabilitative in nature. Some students are not meant to be there, and this is diluting resources for behaviors that are disrespectful but are not criminal," said Attorney Melinda Blostein, from the Broward County Public Defender's office.

According to Fort Lauderdale Police Department Captain Michael Gregory, there isn't one set way they deal with students. "The principal helps set the tone for what is acceptable and unacceptable.

In a truly criminal incident, it is up to the parent or child whether they want to prosecute," he said.

Parents testified at the hearing about incidents involving their children. Gary Harris is still waiting for a hearing from the Broward County School Board regarding his son, who was charged with felony-aggravated battery.

"The district attorney asked for a misdemeanor because they couldn't prove my son actually hit the child," he said.

Broward School Superintendent Frank Till said the school system is working to decrease the incidents of indoor suspension.

"We've decreased the number for 45.2 incidents per 1,000 to 38.2. We don't jump immediately to five and 10-day suspensions. I strongly believe in mentoring and that if we work together to get children reading we wouldn't be here. We're also looking at programs like teen court. My wife is working with that," he said.

Till and Broward School Board Member Ben Williams both agreed: it takes a partnership between the parent and the school to stem the tide of school suspensions.

"We must come in contact with parents to make sure children do what they are required in school."

Starla Vaughns Cherin works as a writer for the Westside Gazette.

Edwards presses fight vs. poverty

*By Kanya Simon
Special to Sentinel-Voice*

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (NNPA) - There are 37 million people living in poverty in this country, and the very thought of it seems to agitate former U.S. senator and former vice presidential candidate John Edwards.

"To have 37 million living in poverty every day is wrong," Edwards said. "This country has seen the face of poverty in the wake of Katrina ... and it's largely a face of color. The window of opportunity (to help) is open. Will it stay open or close?"

Edwards says the only way the window can remain open is through the work of young people, namely college students.

Edwards recently called on students at Florida A&M University, including the College Democrats, the National Council of Negro Women FAMU Chapter, S.I.S.T.U.H.S. and the Student Government Association, in the College of Pharmacy's Blue Cross Blue Shield Auditorium.

"(The poor) need a champion," he said before a packed room. "I came here today to ask you to be that champion. We need to start a grassroots movement. Young people changed this county. It is time for that kind of movement again. This is the place to spark that movement. There is a void of moral leadership that needs to be filled."

FAMU was Edwards' ninth stop in the 10-campus anti-poverty "Opportunity Rocks Tour."

While on campus, Edwards introduced an upcoming launch of a FAMU Center for Promise and Opportunity. City Commissioner Andrew Gillum and state Rep. Curtis Richardson, D-Tallahassee, were also in attendance.

Not only did Edwards express a deep concern with poverty in this country, but also revealed that about 3 billion people in the world are living in such conditions.

But what seemed to stir many emotions in the audience was Edwards' honoring the legacy of the late Rosa Parks and her role in the Civil Rights Movement. He discussed how her fight for equality is just as significant today as it was then because equality seemed to be an issue when it came to the way Katrina survivors had to suffer.

"Why didn't they leave?" Edwards asked after criticizing the government for its slow response. "They didn't leave because they couldn't leave. The poor always get hurt the worst. They are worried about which bills to pay, if they will be able to pay their light bills or put food on the table."

Edwards told the students not to wait on politicians to do something about the conditions in this country because they blew their chance.

"The people we are waiting on are us," he said. "This is not about charity, it's about justice. It's about treating them with integrity."

As for the students Edwards came to inspire, it seems that he may have accomplished his goal. He asked them to dedicate 20 hours a week to community service.

FAMU students murmured and nodded their heads in agreement. They seemed to be ready for take-off.

Kanya Simon writes for Capital Outlook.

Mayor

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43, contended that race was not an issue. Pepper said the city would benefit from their spirited campaign.

"This city has, frankly, needed a real mayor's race for a long time," he said. "We have not had real elections, and the result

has been years without moving forward."

Mayor Charlie Luken chose not to seek re-election.

Pepper, a lawyer and two-term City Council member, is the son of a former CEO of the Procter & Gamble Co. Mallory comes from a prominent political family.