

Grading NAACP on its grade of Congress

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

If the last presidential election and the Supreme Court confirmation hearings of Samuel Alito proved nothing else, they showed how certain issues — especially abortion rights and gay marriages — get pushed to the forefront while issues of true concern to most African-Americans get relegated to the background.

That's why I always look forward to the NAACP Report Card covering the most recent session of Congress. Like labor and other special interest groups, both liberal and conservative, the NAACP identifies issues of importance to African-Americans and then grades members of the Senate and House, based on their level of support. The NAACP has been doing this since 1914, just five years after it was founded.

Not surprisingly, there is a major difference in how members of the two major parties vote. For the most part, Democrats support the pro-civil rights agenda of the NAACP and Republicans, by and large, are hostile to civil rights. No Republican in either the House or Senate scored higher than a C. In fact, most earned F's, including likely presidential candidates Senator John McCain of Arizona and Bill Frist of Tennessee. The so-called Republican moderates — Lincoln D. Chafee of Rhode Island and Olympia Snowe of Maine earned a C and a D, respectively.

Republican strategists who contend they want a larger share of the Black vote are like umpires — they talk a good game, but they don't play ball. Not with the majority of African-Americans, that is.

No group in its right mind votes against its self-interest. But African-Americans are asked to do just that.

In many instances, the Report Card shows that most Republicans were not even close

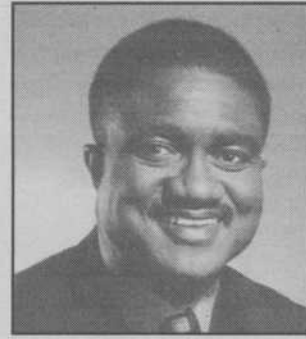
to making a D. In the Senate, Jeff Sessions of Alabama; McCain and Jon Kyl of Arizona; Charles Grassley of Iowa; Sam Brownback and Pat Roberts of Kansas; Mitch McConnell and Jim Bunning of Kentucky; Thad Cochran and Trent Lott of Mississippi; Chuck Hagel of Nebraska; John Ensign of Nevada; Judd Gregg of New Hampshire;

James Inhofe and Tom Coburn of Oklahoma; James DeMint of South Carolina; Frist and Lamar Alexander of Tennessee and John Cornyn of Texas all voted right only 5 percent of the time. Put another way, of the 20 issues cited by the NAACP, they voted wrong 19 times.

The one issue they generally supported the NAACP on was reauthorizing the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Act. Most of them opposed the NAACP and supported the nominations of four far-right judges — Janice Rogers Brown, William H. Pryor, Priscilla Owen and John Roberts; voted against increased funding for AIDS; rejected additional funds for low-income home energy assistance; voted against a successful amendment that preserved \$14 billion in Medicaid funding over five years and against a move to lift the minimum wage from \$5.15 an hour to \$7.25 an hour over 26 months.

The entire Congressional delegations in six states — Alaska, Idaho, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Oklahoma and Wyoming — earned F's. If the A-votes of Bennie Thompson, the lone Black member of the Mississippi delegation, were excluded, the Magnolia state would also have an all-F lineup.

Only two states — Massachusetts and Rhode Island — produced delegations that earned all A's.



GEORGE E. CURRY

The Report Card includes a list of what the NAACP calls its "legislative quarterbacks," defined as members of Congress that have "championed the NAACP's legislative priorities or by offering an NAACP-supported amendment during floor consideration."

This is where the NAACP dropped the ball.

Why give an NAACP "salute" to Senators "Norm" Coleman of Minnesota, John Ensign of Nevada, Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, Gordon Smith of Oregon and Representative Mike Castle of Delaware, all of whom earned an F on the NAACP Report Card? Not only did they receive failing grades, none supported the NAACP's position more than 45 percent of the time; of 20 highlighted votes, Ensign voted against the

NAACP 19 times.

They didn't carry the ball for Black America, they fumbled it.

The NAACP should be ashamed for sucking up to the enemies of civil rights by anointing them as quarterbacks. As the NAACP should know from rushing to the defense of Philadelphia Eagles Quarterback Donovan McNabb in a dispute with the president of the local NAACP chapter, a quarterback is a team's star player. He directs the team's offensive plays. The voting record of some of the NAACP's quarterbacks is offensive — and perhaps that accounts for the NAACP's confusion.

One piece of advice to the NAACP: If you're going to assign them a position on the gridiron, call them defensive linemen. Then, there would be no confusion about their wanting to prevent any forward progress.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service.

'N-word' under attack

By Andre Coe
Special to Sentinel-Voice

DALLAS (NNPA) - "Before we begin, let me see the hands of all the niggas in the room. That's right. Put them up high.

"Let everyone see."

Dallas' Carter High School teacher Curtis Ferguson begins many of his speeches to local elementary students this way. It ticks off many people, he says.

Everyone from parents to teachers, administrators to townfolk, "educated" to "uneducated" people tell him that he is encouraging bad behavior and that he ought not ask that question or say those things.

In their minds, he's setting a bad example.

They're wrong, he says. He's only showing them that, "Your kid thinks he's a nigger. I just proved that."

And that's a day in the life for Ferguson. For the past 10 years, he has taken it upon himself to combat, protest and educate any and everyone about the word nigger and all its various forms and associated mindsets.

For those who haven't gotten his message already, he's taken his mission a step further. From Jan. 8 to Jan. 18, Ferguson camped out in front of the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center and went on a hunger strike to campaign against and protest the use of the "n-word." He wanted to go further, but his doctor advised him not to.

Despite reaching some Dallasites, be they Black or White, he doesn't think he achieved his goal. Ferguson and his students will launch a campaign beginning Feb. 1 to further combat and protest the word. He has already presented a proposal to the Dallas Independent School District to "totally ban" the word from its campuses among all its students and teachers, he said.

Ferguson advocates his proposal through school board meetings and wants supporters. He's letting school board representative know

that how many support the district wide ban.

His actions have been noticed. He appeared on Oprah Winfrey's talk show Sept. 28, 1999 and Jan. 13, 2000, after a student of his told the talk show host about him, and he has gained the attention of the Associated Press and other media in his area.

The publicity is not what he is after though. He compares himself to a soldier in Iraq and says he's in a war against ignorance.

"Which word has more death and blood attached to it?" He asks. "What one word has the history of lynching attached to it?"

"That's what I tell so-called educated folks about," he said. "What amazed me when I was on the vigil, White people drove from [other counties] to shake my hand. They had

[B l a c k] people tell them they could say the word, but they couldn't. ...Two White cops approached me to shake my hand, also. They hear the word being used all the

time in the South Dallas area, but if an officer like them uses the word they will lose their job right away."

It's with that same trepidation that some people fear the mere acknowledgement of a double standard concerning racial slur words. Perhaps that is why many people have told Ferguson he shouldn't ask that "how many niggas in the house?" question. However, it is a question that he is willing to ask and one that he hopes will one day be eradicated from everyday usage.

All people need to hear his message.

"It's like we are psychologically addicted to this word and we don't want to leave it alone! We just don't want the responsibility," he said in a phone interview.

"As long as we fall back on the word nigga, we don't have to accept any responsibility. And people tell me we have bigger fish to fry?"

Andre Coe is a staff writer for the Dallas Examiner in Dallas, Texas.

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and financed it through a Black-owned credit union. Both transactions made me feel real good.

That's just one example of what we can do, even if it is a little nontraditional, even if it is logistically cumbersome, even if it takes a little longer. Try it; it will make you feel good, too. The next time you need to make a major purchase, look around and see if it is possible to make that purchase from a Black company.

And that extends to tax time. As I say every year, check out Compro Tax. If there is no Compro Tax office near you, there is probably a Black tax preparer somewhere close-by. Let the brother or sister prepare your tax forms.

I get sick every time I hear these other companies pitching their business to Black folks. They insult us with their goofy commercials that always feature some Black person who is in a hurry to get his or her refund. "I can't wait; I need my money now." And, they will give it to you now — at a huge interest rate.

Hey, even if you can't wait, you don't have to be insulted by some company that does not care about you, a company that is not interested in building businesses in your community. Compro Tax is just the opposite of the tax preparation companies that portray you as some buffoon who will pay any amount of interest to get his refund. Compro

Tax is a company with a conscience and a consciousness; and Compro Tax loves and respects its customers. You should support this company and other Black-owned tax firms.

Yes, it feels good to buy Black. Why? I know that by spending whatever I can with other Black folks I am helping to empower them; I am helping their business grow. How can we continue to say that economic empowerment is the primary issue for our people and not do the very minimum and obvious thing that leads to economic empowerment?

By empowering our businesses, we empower ourselves, not by being customers alone, but by giving feedback to business owners, letting them know when they are doing a good job and when they have missed the mark.

Please, don't insert your Black business horror stories here. Don't start searching for excuses not to support them. Don't send me e-mails decrying all of the negatives. I already know about them; I teach entrepreneurship and, believe me, I stress the positive aspects of business owners taking care of their businesses and doing right by their customers. But for now, I just want to feel good about Black business; I want to rejoice in them; I want to honor them; and I will continue to support them. You should, too.

James E. Clingman is an adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati's African-American Studies Department.

"Which word has more death and blood attached to it? What one word has the history of lynching attached to it?"

— Curtis Ferguson
Carter H.S. Teacher

