

New Orleans's Black voters caught in the middle with Nagin

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Ray Nagin is in a political bind. A former cable TV executive, he was elected mayor of New Orleans four years ago with strong support from the corporate community. Blacks voted against him and after his first term in office, they remain convinced that they made the right decision.

Entering Saturday's election, the corporate community has abandoned Nagin in favor of two White candidates, Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu and former Chamber of Commerce Chairman Ron Forman. Nagin has no chance of getting re-elected without carrying the Black vote, the very people that rejected him four years ago and, many say, he rejected while serving as mayor.

Now the charismatically-challenged Nagin is plastering billboards throughout the city, urging people to vote for "our mayor."

Not only is Nagin in a bind, he has placed Black residents of New Orleans in one as well. They are faced between voting for Nagin, knowing that he has not served them well, or helping a White person become mayor of a city with a two-thirds Black majority for the first time in nearly three decades.

According to a poll conducted last month by Ed Renwick, director of the Loyola University Institute of Politics, Landrieu was

leading the mayoral field with 27 percent of the vote, followed by Nagin with 26 percent and Forman with 16 percent. More than one in five voters were undecided.

Among Black voters, Nagin led with 41 percent, followed by Landrieu with 28 percent. Forman, who was endorsed by New Orleans' *Times-Picayune* and is the favorite of big business, received 30 percent of the White vote. With 22 candidates vying for mayor, a May 20 runoff is all but certain.

Landrieu would pose a major challenge for Nagin. His father, the last White mayor of New Orleans, was considered a progressive part of the "New South" who hired African-Americans in unprecedented numbers. Landrieu's sister is a U.S. Senator. And more than any other candidate, he has been able to fashion a bi-racial coalition of voters.

Despite early predictions that Hurricane Katrina would wash out Black political power in New Orleans, early indications are that Black voting strength in this election will be equivalent to what it was four years ago. Although final figures were not available at press time, during the first four days of early voting last week, African-Americans made



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up 70 percent of voters. That compares favorably to the 68 percent Black population of New Orleans and 65 percent Black electorate.

To understand the dilemma of Black voters in New Orleans, we must remember that it hasn't been all that long that we've had African-Americans control City Hall, even in predominantly Black cities like Selma, Ala. and Jackson, Miss. One of the mantras of the modern civil rights movement was: "We want a Black face in a high place."

Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas painfully reminds us that having a Black face in a high place is not enough. If that Black face is going to vote against the interests of African-Americans, we're better off with that Black face being in a low place. Or, better yet, no place.

For the past month, I have been co-moderating mayoral debates/forums for the candidates in Houston, New Orleans, Atlanta and Baton Rouge. In Houston and New Orleans, Nagin boasted that he is the candidate with the best record and, therefore, best qualified to serve as mayor.

He didn't mention that he was MIA for several days, or that he failed to carry out his

own evacuation plan for people without transportation. He said simply judge him on his record.

The record shows that until shortly before Nagin filed for mayor, he had been a registered Republican. And while in office, he committed political suicide by endorsing an unsuccessful Republican candidate for governor. With his ranting and cursing immediately following Katrina, Gov. Kathleen Blanco, a Democrat, wasn't inclined to work hand-in-hand with a mayor who had sought her defeat. Now, Nagin wants Blacks to trust him to be "our mayor." Yet, he has said nothing on the campaign trail or in his position papers that would indicate that the Ray Nagin today is any different from the Ray Nagin that abandoned African-Americans before and during Katrina.

Nagin shouldn't get a pass simply because he's Black. We've gone down that road too often with too many politicians. Let all of them compete for the Black vote. Let's hear all of the plans for restoring the Lower Ninth Ward and making sure Black business owners get a fair share of city jobs and contracts. It should be on that basis that a candidate receives our vote. Not because they have placed us in a political bind.

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

Oil companies continue to tighten the noose on supply

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

How do we do that, you ask? Stop buying as much. How do we do that? Cut down on trips, especially those unnecessary ones.

Think before you hop into your automobile and drive off to some place you really do not have to be. Many times, we take our situation for granted and fail to recognize the habits we have formed.

Driving is one of them, and the gas companies are making huge profits from our habitual and conspicuous consumption of their product. Wasn't \$36 billion enough for Exxon last year?

Conspicuous consumption? Yes. A few years ago, people were raving about owning one of those gas-guzzling SUV's that passed everything on the road except a gas station. Well, now we are paying the price for our lemming-like attitude and for falling for the hype perpetrated by slick advertisement and marketing campaigns.

Our consumption excess has now manifested itself into a no-matter-the-cost depen-

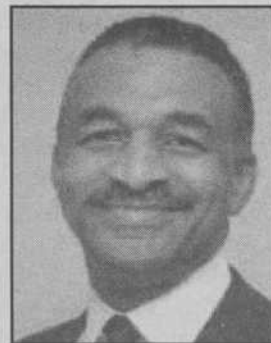
dency on gasoline never before seen in this country — and four or five companies are laughing all the way to the bank. Talk about elastic demand; this is ridiculous.

Have you seen the profits posted by those four or five oil companies lately? All the while, consumers are paying outlandish and, I must say, capriciously set prices at their local pumps.

Gas prices change almost everyday. The price for the same gas in the ground changes four or five times before it is completely sold. What's up with that? When you are always on the demand side of the economy, however, those are the breaks, as Curtis Blow would say. Bottom-line: These crooks are ripping us off, big time.

Let's see if we can straighten this thing out.

They tell us supply is low, which causes the price of gasoline to go up. Well, it stands



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to reason that if their supply goes up, or even stays the same, the price will come down. So, let's create greater supply, at least for some oil companies and help them with their problem.

Here's how: I am sure you have heard the latest call for economic sanctions against the largest oil company, Exxon/Mobil. I started my

personal campaign against that company some time ago. And now I have added another company: Shell. I know I have to buy gasoline, but I don't have to buy it from them.

If we would stop buying from two or three of these gas gangstas, depending upon which ones dominate your local area, they will have plenty of supply and obviously less demand. With that as an issue, prices will decrease.

We cannot simply complain about these thieves and continue to support them. So what are we to do? Some would say we are at their mercy; we can't do anything. But, I beg to

differ. We can choose those with whom we want to do business, and as the gas companies on the outside begin to feel the pinch, when they find themselves being open all day but getting little or no business, they will have to make some changes. It's as simple as that. If we are not willing to make small sacrifices to get what we need, the thieves will always win. Find out which gas company represents the largest market share in your particular area. It may not be Exxon/Mobil where you live. If you are going after the largest company, find out which one it is in your town, and then call for sanctions against that particular company.

A large vocal group of consumers, calling for withdrawal of their dollars from a certain gasoline company will go far in bringing the prices down.

Less demand for certain gasoline will increase the supply of that gasoline. When it comes to lower profits, the big boys will make a change and they will see to it that the little guys do likewise.

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year is now less than one-third of the average hourly wage of American workers, the lowest since 1949.

As it stands, it would take more than \$9 to match the buying power of the minimum wage of 1968, and poverty rates are higher now than they were in the 1970s making the United States a downwardly mobile society instead of an upwardly mobile society. An increase to just \$7 per hour would provide at least 7.4 million with a wage boost, and \$9.50 per hour would lift millions more out of poverty. The largest group of beneficiaries would be children whose parents would have more money for rent, food, clothing and other basic necessities.

The business leaders who constantly claim that raising the minimum wage will "destroy jobs" and "hurt small businesses" are full of it. Studies based on the effects of past increases in both the federal and state minimum wage levels show otherwise.

Because the working poor spend everything they earn, every penny of a minimum wage increase goes back into the economy, increasing consumer demand and adding at least as many jobs as are lost. Most employers actually gain, absorbing the increase through decreased absenteeism, lower recruiting and training costs, higher productivity and increased worker morale.

The Census Bureau reports that 12.7 percent of all people are in poverty and 31.2

percent are at twice the poverty level. The 2005 poverty level for one person is defined as income below \$9,570; for a family of four it is \$19,350.

Of those, Blacks represent 24.7 percent of the people at the poverty rate, and 48.7 percent of the people are at twice the poverty rate. White representation is at 8.6 percent the poverty rate, and 23.7 percent are at twice the poverty rate. Hispanics represent 21.9 percent at the poverty rate, and 52.2 percent at twice the poverty rate.

A job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it. Minimum wage keeps you in poverty when you have to choose to pay rent or pay for child care. When we as a nation endeavor to pay a minimum wage instead of

a living wage, which allows people to have just the basic necessities, we are an America that's living the American dream in reverse. If America does not work for working people, it is not an America that works.

So, when you see the minimum wage initiative on the ballot in November, remember the words of Nelson Mandela:

"Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life."

Vote yes to raise the minimum wage and help to provide people with a decent life.