

Patrick has stuff to be governor

By Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Deval Patrick, an African-American Democrat, is running well ahead of his opponent, Republican Lt. Governor Kerry Healey at this writing. And as such, I have to admit being wrong early on about Deval Patrick's chances to become the first Black governor of the state of Massachusetts. The record shows that rarely has someone been elected to the top job in a state without prior electoral experience.

A clear exception is California, where Arnold Schwarzenegger, an actor, is the governor, but that is in a state where being a movie star have always provided access to political office, as the career of Ronald Reagan would attest. Elsewhere, you would not only be required to have political experience but to have had the tacit support of the state party, which Patrick didn't.

This causes one to wonder whether the Deval Patrick race is more of a national bellwether that signals a crushing vote for Democrats. For example, in the state of Maryland, Michael Steele, a Black Republican, is running for the Senate against Ben Cardin, a 10-term House Democrat. And, although Steele is clearly the more charismatic candidate in

the race, he is running 11 percent behind Cardin at this writing. The major reason is that the strong opposition of most voters to the war in Iraq has provided a stiff wind against which Michael Steele could be more competitive than under normal circumstances.

Massachusetts is somewhat like Maryland in that it is a nominally Democratic state that has elected a Republican governor (several in the case of Massachusetts), but it has a Democratic state legislature. Right now, opposition to the War in Iraq is running so strong in Massachusetts that I think it is carrying Deval Patrick along with the tide.

Of course, there are local problems in Massachusetts, such as the quagmire including issues of school integration, the failing economy, problems with the tunnel called "the Big Dig," and other things. The usual Republican fix has been to win elections there by calling for a cut in income taxes and being tough on crime. But Patrick has parried with a call for a cut in the property tax and noted that the current Republican adminis-



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tration has cut the police force significantly. The local issues, however, are not the dynamic force deciding this race.

So far, Deval Patrick's opposition to the conduct of the war has enabled his campaign to build a broad-based coalition of supporters at the grassroots, and more recently has begun to solidify his support among Massachusetts legislative leaders and the business establishment in the State. And in the first debate between the candidates, recently held, the charismatic Patrick achieved his campaign objective by not making any mistakes, thereby giving neither his opponent nor the press much to chew on afterward.

All of this signals a return to a Democratic administration in Massachusetts. Added evidence of this is that the former African-American Senator from Massachusetts, Ed Brooke, recently spoke before a Republican Party meeting and exhibited his frustration that their failure to run an effective campaign may result in the loss of the statehouse.

Nevertheless, with this election, Blacks could have another political star on the hori-

zon, the second Black governor since Doug Wilder of Virginia. And although Wilder briefly toyed with the idea of running for President, one would expect that if Patrick wins he would become an instant star in the country, but another Black star politician, Barack Obama, is blocking his way to the top right now. So, he would probably settle down to politics in Massachusetts and potentially become the next Ed Brooke in time.

In any case, the stars appear to be aligned for whatever reason. An important sign is that while there was considerable doubt that Democrats would take the Senate now as many as 10 seats (all statewide offices) are in play in the most recent polling. Add this to the possibility that parts of the Republican base are so disaffected they may not turn out to vote because of the recent scandal involving indecent communications by former Florida House Republican Mark Foley with some male House pages. It, therefore, is beginning to look like, Deval Patrick's charisma aside, the Massachusetts election may be a harbinger of what is to come.

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Affirmative action levels playing field

By Harry C. Alford
Special to Sentinel-Voice

What a perfect response to a naïve question. Recently, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin held a press conference to announce formally his 35 percent Disadvantaged Business Enterprise procurement goal for all city projects and contracts. He made the announcement at Baker Ready Mix, a concrete plant owned by National Black Chamber of Commerce Board Member Arnold Baker. A Fox News reporter approached Arnold and asked a question: "Why is the mayor doing this? Can't Black business owners network their own way into business development without such affirmative action?" Without raising his voice or showing his anger, Arnold simply said, "Here's the deal — your grandfather did not and would not play golf with my grandfather. In essence, this is why we are here today."

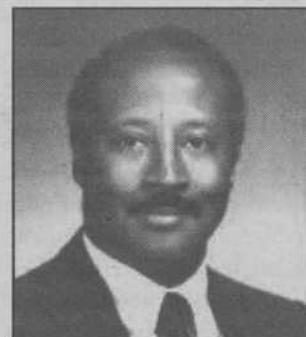
It is concise but is also so profound. It reminds me of my personal story, which isn't much different from yours, depending on which generation you fall into.

My grandfather was born and lived as a

sharecropper. He did not network with Whites, business wise or personally. In fact, in Louisiana it was against the law and downright unhealthy if one would attempt. He never spent a day in school.

His 10 children were obligated to work with him nine months a year. In the winter months of December, January and February, (no crops to work) they were allowed to attend school three months a year, and schooling stopped at the eighth grade. The nearest high school was 40 miles away in Shreveport and the tuition and boarding was totally cost prohibitive.

Such was the plight of my grandfather. The reporter's grandfather certainly played by different rules, as the sky was the limit. Schools were public and access was certain. His grandfather lived the American dream and everything his father had was passed onto him and his siblings. He had inheritance, land, networking infrastructures and other advan-



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tages that were very valuable to ensuring that the future would be bright. My grandfather's father was born a slave and, like his son, was illiterate and boxed in by a society and nation that treated him as a bona fide third-class citizen. The contrasts are enormous and the fact that the times have changed is a testament to the courage of the generation that came after my grandfather.

That next generation, my father, decided to make a difference. He took his eighth-grade, three-months-a-year education, moved to California during World War II and worked the docks of Ventura County, then bustling from the war effort.

He later became a local truck driver, while my mother was a domestic for Whites whose fathers and grandfathers made big bucks owning gigantic farms and ranches in the Golden State. He was resolved to make a good living, buy land and demand public access at all levels for his children — espe-

cially when it came to education.

For this, there were multitudes of death threats. We woke up one morning at 4 a.m. and there was a 10-foot burning cross in our front yard.

He would often say, "They have us up against the Pacific Ocean; all we can do now is fight."

One of his proudest achievements was a lifetime membership in the NAACP. He was never intimidated really. I guess the fact that his father would have been lynched for the positions my father fiercely stood up for and remained alive was true progress.

My grandfather didn't know what golf was, and my father never dreamed of playing it. If they had, it would not have been a networking event, and no Whites or business brokers would be anywhere around to cut deals and make profitable plans. No, it was my generation that finally got to the golf course — and that was very late in life. As we attempt to enter this capitalistic society for the first time in the history of this nation, it is obvious that we are playing a very big game of "catch up." Our college degrees are fresh and our skills are newly learned. We enter boardrooms as a groundbreaking event. Although we have been paying taxes since the Emancipation Proclamation, access to this economy has been extremely limited.

So, now, we go into the great system of capitalism. Through our (African-American) oppression, we are neophytes to programs that exist for those who had an unfair advantage, benefiting those who really didn't deserve such. Don't think the field is level and nothing ever happened to make you (Whites) on top. Affirmative action is here to right the present wrongs that were built through exploitation and unfair rigging. The playing field is far from level.

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ingenuity of the people. There are talented artists living in every region of the country, and they are eager to negotiate an acceptable price for their works. The arts and crafts are impressive. And if I were to count people in Haiti who tried to sell me something rather than seek a handout, the entrepreneurs would lead at least by a 4 to 1 margin. Carvings. Fruits. Paintings. Beads. Jewelry boxes. Knives. Canes. You name it, they had it.

Ron Daniels, Black America's unofficial at-large ambassador to Haiti, had a two-fold goal for this mission. For one, it was to take 50 people with him to see for themselves

what Haiti is like in hopes of making them ambassadors; also to announce a "model city" program in which the Haiti Support Project would adopt Milot and actively aid in its economic and educational development.

Because of the consistent work of the project led by Ron Daniels and his wife, Mary, the touring African-American guests received access to the highest levels of government. Legislative leaders and cabinet ministers attended receptions in the group's honor; Janet Sanderson, the U.S. Ambassador to Haiti, hosted a reception at her residence and President Rene Preval gave a fare-

well reception in the group's honor at the Presidential Palace. But neither of those events was the highlight of the trip.

That honor came when Ronald Daniels was unveiling the architectural plan for an empowerment and visitors center in Milot. Hundreds of children had gathered for the presentation, and when the drawing was unveiled, they cheered loudly, excited that descendants of Africans in America had not forgotten about the descendants of the Africans in Haiti.

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