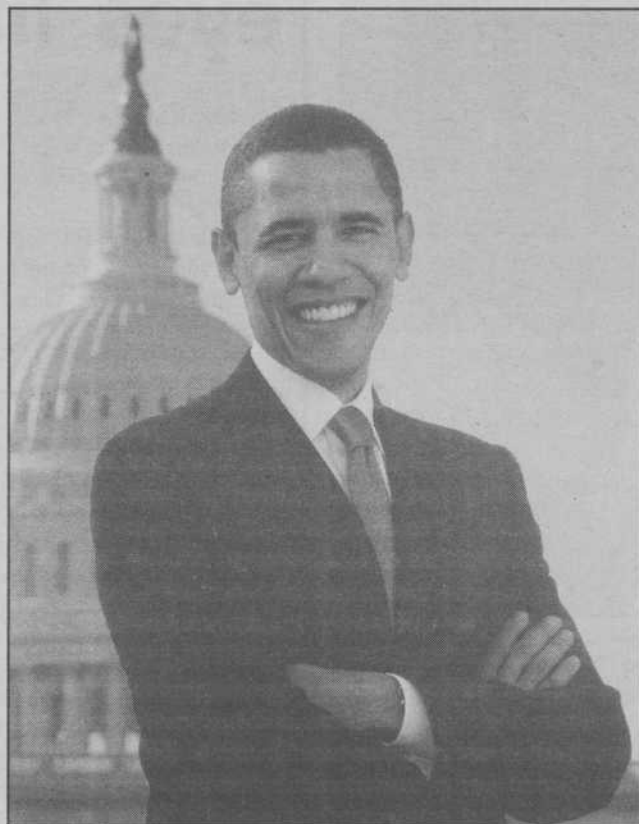


President Obama? Maybe

By Brandon Perry
Special to Sentinel-Voice
INDIANAPOLIS (NNPA) - After saying for months that he intended to service his full six years in the Senate, Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois reversed field Sunday, admitting for the first time that he is at least considering a run for the White House in 2008.



Ill. Sen. Barack Obama is a potential presidential candidate.

Speaking on "Meet the Press," Obama said: "I am still at the point where I have not made a decision — to pursue higher office," he said. "But it is true that I have thought about it over the last several months."

Appearing on the cover of *Time* magazine last week, Obama has been urged to seek the Democratic nomination, though he has been in the Senate less than two years. Currently, he is on a national publicity tour to promote his new book, "The Audacity of Hope."

Earlier, Obama made a rare stop in Indianapolis.

The popular and charismatic politician visited the Circle City to support and attend a fundraiser for Joe Donnelly, Brad Ellsworth and Baron Hill — Democrats running as challengers in three of the nation's closest congressional races (2nd District, 8th District and 9th District, respectively).

Obama convened a brief news conference to discuss why voters should support the candidates, but much of the discussion was devoted to his thoughts about various issues.

First, he was asked about bipartisan attempts by former Indiana Congressman Lee Hamilton and former Secretary of State James Baker to bring more international partners into the effort to rebuild Iraq.

Obama called for "a renewed realism around our foreign policy and a recognition that building alliances doesn't reflect weakness, it reflects our strength. We can defeat any nation on Earth, but rebuilding democracies and creating order involves everybody."

Two predictable ques-

tions, posed in different ways, were directed to Obama about his thoughts on running for president in 2008. Although he didn't rule out the possibility, Obama said such questions are premature and his focus is on this year's election.

"I have actually focused on trying to get more Democrats in the House and Senate so I can get a bill passed," he joked. "As a member of the Illinois Legislature and as a U.S. senator, I've been in both the minority and the majority, and being in the majority is more fun."

On serious note, he added that efforts to address issues like providing healthcare for children, controlling energy costs and finding a pragmatic way to "bring the troops home" can't be accomplished until there's "some balance" in Washington.

"People are responding to the fact that we have an ideologically driven group that has consolidated power and has lost touch with what ordinary people want," he stated.

Obama, who was born in 1961, was asked about his party's commitment to educating people about new laws passed by some states (including Indiana) that require

voters to show a form of photo ID at the polls. He said minorities, low-income persons and seniors who are less likely to have a birth certificate or driver's license are all burdened by it.

"It's constitutionally problematic, and I suspect that it will be challenged," Obama said. "I am confident the Democrats will ensure that we've got lawyers and others onsite in all polling places to make sure that the right to vote is protected. However, another concern is people who have the ID to vote and just aren't doing it because they feel too cynical about the political process."

After speaking to reporters Obama rushed to a private event held for Congresswoman Julia Carson, who represents the 7th District that covers most of Indianapolis. Carson was not among the candidates included in the press confer-

ence, presumably because she is an incumbent and not (according to most analysts) running in a "close" race.

Obama is currently the only African-American in the U.S. Senate, but that could change on Election Day, Nov. 7, if Democratic Rep. Harold Ford wins a close race in Tennessee and Republican Michael Steele pulls an upset in Maryland.

Some observers at the press conference, though pleased to see Obama, quietly remarked that they wished he was available to talk more about "bread and butter" issues. Others however, expressed amazement at the fact that Indiana Democrats brought in Obama — a Black urban freshman senator, to endorse White candidates seeking to represent mostly rural districts.

Mike Edmondson, executive director of the state Democratic Party, explained that because of his optimism and ability to connect with voters, Obama has become a top campaigner for candidates in tight races, including those in Indiana.

"Indiana is in the national spotlight, and the national figures go where they're needed," he said. "Our state has become a target for both national parties. These congressional races could provide the number of seats needed to take back the House."

Obama was on the cover of this week's edition of *Time* magazine, which is a sign that he has already become a key figure on the national landscape after less than two years in the Senate.

Brandon Perry writes for the *Indianapolis Recorder*. The NNPA News Service contributed to this story from Washington.

Court agrees with casinos

WASHINGTON (AP) - The federal government can't make rules for the ways Las Vegas-style games are played at Indian casinos, an appeals court ruled Friday in a blow to efforts to regulate the booming, \$22 billion tribal gambling industry.

The decision by a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit arises from a dispute in Arizona between the Colorado River Indian Tribes and the NIGC, National Indian Gaming Commission, the federal agency that oversees Indian casinos.

The commission tried in 2001 to audit the tribe's casino in Parker, Ariz., to ensure compliance with recently enacted federal standards for how games like blackjack and slot machines are run. The tribe objected, contending the commission was overstepping its authority under the National Indian Gaming Regulatory Act.

A federal district court sided with the tribe, and the appeals court agreed in an 11-page ruling. While federal law gives the gaming commission some authority over games like lotto and bingo on Indian land, the big moneymakers like blackjack and slots — classified as "Class III" games — are outside the commission's jurisdiction, said the ruling written by Judge A. Raymond Randolph.

"What is the statutory basis empowering the commission to regulate Class III gaming operations?" the ruling asked. "Finding none, we affirm" the lower court's decision.

Tribes can open Las Vegas-style casinos only after they sign a "compact" with their state's governor, and the court asserted there was no federal role in regulating the game-playing.

Tribal gambling has grown explosively since Congress established the legal framework for it in 1988, and there are now more than 400 Indian gambling facilities operated by 223 Indian tribes in 28 states.

With the growth have come conflicts as tribes have asserted their sovereignty as independent governments. Local and state governments have sought to sketch out some authority, and the federal government increasingly has attempted to regulate aspects of Indian gambling from labor to slot machine standards.

The National Indian Gaming Association welcomed the ruling as a victory for tribal sovereignty.

"Today, the federal court of appeals told us what Indian tribes always knew — it is not the NIGC's job to establish federal regulations that override the sovereign decisions of tribes and states made through Class III gaming compacts," the association's chairman, Ernest Stevens Jr., said in a statement.

Officials with the National Indian Gaming Commission did not immediately return calls seeking comment.



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