

Rangel's rant masks hidden goal

By Linn Washington Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The burst of politically charged hot air unleashed recently by respected Black U.S. Rep. Charles Rangel won't provide anyone in Harlem with any heat this winter. Rangel emitted this hot air while castigating remarks of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

Unlike Rangel, Chavez — also known for verbal volcanoes — actually provides chill-chasing warmth to thousands of low-income Americans, including many in Rangel's Harlem district.

Chavez heads a program supplying home heating oil at discount prices to poor citizens in select U.S. cities. This program Chavez launched last year operates through CITGO, the U.S. subsidiary of Venezuela's national oil company.

Chavez, according to Rangel's rant at a Black church in Harlem, plunged into inappropriate conduct by blasting President Bush for multiple failings in remarks, a day after delivering a blistering speech at the United

Nations headquarters in New York, where Chavez called Bush the "devil."

Rangel blasted both the focus and forum of Chavez's remarks.

"You don't come into my country; you don't come into my congressional district, and you don't condemn my president," Rangel pontificated in his widely televised reaction to Chavez's anti-Bush barbs.

"I just want to make it abundantly clear to Hugo Chavez or any other president: Don't come to the United States and think because we have problems with our president that any foreigner can come to our country and not think that Americans do not feel offended when you offend our chief of state," continued Rangel, garnering some applause from conservatives for defending Bush against their latest Latin boogiemans.

A Rangel press release acknowledging the



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heating oil program as "Venezuela's generosity to the poor" still body slammed Chavez, declaring that program does not give Chavez "license" to attack Bush.

Rangel's rant about only Americans can criticize Bush "is plainly absurd," Seton Hall Law School Professor Shavar Jeffries correctly said in a posting on www.blackprof.com.

Rangel's reserving Bush criticism to "Americans only" is the type of American arrogance that undermines the image of American democracy abroad at a time when many doubt the efficacy of the democracy the United States touts — and often rams down Third World throats by force.

Chavez questioned the character of American democracy during his U.N. address.

"What a strange democracy," Chavez said. "They say they want to impose a democratic model... It's the false democracy of elites... What type of democracy do you impose with Marines and bombs?"

One surprising aspect of Rangel's rant fencing off free expression — supposedly one of the most precious rights of democracy — is that it came from Rangel's mouth.

Asinine attitudes about who can exercise free speech, where and how, usually come from conservatives and Republicans, not liberals and Democrats like Rangel — an elected official who, for example, dares challenge America's absurd isolation of Cuba.

Those asinine anti-free speech attitudes are abundant across Pennsylvania — the professed birthplace of American democracy due to the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights being drafted and ratified in Philadelphia.

State legislators, for example, relish rhetorically dropkicking France over French criticisms of fundamental unfairness rampant in Pennsylvania's justice system. The arrogance that faults French reminders of flaws in the state's fulfillment of basic rights yet fails to fault repeated refusals of state officials to fix flaws that fuel criticism is the type of double standard that provides folks like Chavez with ammo for their rhetorical weapons.

The consistent refusals of conservatives to realistically address problems from fixing justice system flaws to simply faulting Bush for flaunting law on domestic spying and

sanctioning torture is a point Jeffries noted in his commentary on Rangel.

"The prejudices underlying patriotism too often are indistinguishable from those motivating racism, sexism and the other lines of social division folks like Charlie Rangel have fought long to eradicate," Jeffries wrote.

Rangel's anti-Chavez rants gives license to Bush's Republican cronies in Congress, emboldening those who censored one of Rangel's Congressional Black Caucus colleagues by removing her right to speak for 24 hours after she requested international monitors for the 2004 presidential election to prevent repetition of the 2000 Florida vote fraud that placed Bush in the White House.

This suppression of U.S. Rep. Corrine Brown's free speech rights was partisan, prejudicial and didn't provoke outrage from Rangel comparable to that he leveled at Chavez.

While Chavez is not perfect, perfectly understandable reasons drive his criticisms of Bush. The Bush administration flaunts its efforts to undermine Chavez, seeking his ouster, in part, because he uses Venezuela's oil wealth to improve living conditions for his nation's poor ... who are disproportionately Afro-Venezuelan.

The Bush administration backed an unsuccessful coup against Chavez a few years ago and forced him to undergo two post-coup elections.

International monitors — demanded by Bush — certified both of these elections as free and fair.

So, was Rangel's rant attributable to adle-brained remarks of an aging elder statesman or a partisan ulterior motive?

Like too many spineless Democratic leaders, Rangel's anti-Chavez rant attempted to placate Republican voters subliminally by bashing their boogiemans du jour.

Rangel tried to score points with Republican voters in an effort to counter the White House's desperate campaign to demonize Democrats to beat down potential Democratic victories in November's election.

Instead of capitulation to misguided Bush supporters, Rangel should support the right to criticize the wrongful actions of Bush that bled America's dwindling moral authority rather than criticism comes from Brown or Chavez.

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Patrick: Compromising values not a consideration

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Deval Patrick, former Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights in the Clinton administration, said he has set aside neither his civil rights principles nor his Black identity in a quest that is expected to make him the first African-American governor of Massachusetts.

"I know and knew before I started this that

win or lose, I would have to look myself in the mirror," Patrick said in an interview with the NNPA News Service. "And so I wanted to be sure that I was doing this in a way that respected my

"I am running as myself. It's not just about issues. It's about leadership."

— Deval Patrick
Candidate for governor of Massachusetts

And he's done that in Massachusetts, a state with a population of 6.4 million, 87 percent White and only 7 percent Black.

Although there is lofty talk about Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois seeking the Democratic nomination for president in 2008 and the possibility of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice running as a Republican, increasingly, the most successful route to the White House runs through the governor's



mansion. Four of the last five presidents — Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush — previously served as governors.

If Patrick is successful in Massachusetts and African-Americans can duplicate his efforts in other states, that platform might provide more Blacks with a realistic chance of winning the White House, if the recent trend continues.

Though there have been significant numbers of statewide-elected African-Americans, including 11 lieutenant governors and three U.S. senators, there has been only one elected Black governor — L. Douglas Wilder of Virginia.


Wilder told the NNPA that Patrick not only has a chance to make history in his state but to open doors for Black gubernatorial candidates across America.

"Obviously he's qualified, and he's done his diligence. He's shown his abilities, and he's shown an appeal for everybody — for all people," said Wilder. "I would be so pleased to see him elected for several reasons. One, because I know he would be an excellent governor and would do a great job; but also, it would end the thinking that it couldn't happen and that what happened in Virginia is just a matter of luck, a matter of

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