

# Political wars still loom for Blacks

## Win by Democrats on Capitol Hill, in U.S. statehouses, not a panacea

By Hazel Trice Edney  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Even though Democrats wrested control of the U.S. House on Tuesday, paving the way for Congressional Black Caucus members to chair some key committees, African-Americans will still need to remain active to make sure their needs are met, say political observers.

"This is a great opening. This is the first time we will have more than one chairman. We will have significant power, and we will have the majority in the House for a party in which we have invested more than 90 percent of our vote," said Democratic activist Al Sharpton. "The question is whether or not we are betrayed or fulfilled. The question is can we hold them accountable? I think that we won a battle, but the war is not over because we have to make sure that those with whom we have remained aligned also remain aligned to the goals and principles that we believe in."

As of early press time, Democrats had picked up at least 17 House seats, two more than they needed to regain control of the 435-member chamber. They had taken three Senate seats from Republicans, with the outcomes

of two critical ones being determined—Virginia and Montana, with victories expected in both.

"If we went to the polls, then we might do a 10-minute celebration, but then we really need to be vigilant and really hold the Democrats to the fire. This is politics and they will go after the loudest voice. And at any given time, it seems that ours is not the loudest," said Desiree Pedescleaux, political science professor at Spelman College in Atlanta. "There are other issues that will certainly drown out the concerns of African-Americans." It's been a long wait for veteran CBC members. Reps. John Conyers (D-Mich.) of the House Judiciary Committee, Charlie Rangel (D-N.Y.) of the Ways and Means Committee, Bennie Thompson (D-Miss.) of the Homeland Security Committee, Alcee Hastings (D-Fla.) of the House Intelligence Committee and Juanita Millender-McDonald (D-Calif.) of the House Administration Committee. All are poised for chairmanships. Under the new Democratic order, Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) is set to become the first female Speaker of the House, replacing Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.). Former CBC



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chairman Rep. Jim Clyburn (D-S.C.) is slated to replace Rep. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) as Minority Whip. At least 15 subcommittee chairmanships could also go to members of the CBC. CBC Chairman Mel Watt (D-S.C.) sounded a note of caution.

"We can be a lot more aggressive than we have been," said Watt. "You may not see immediate results, but I think you'll start to see some [votes] on some of those issues."

Watt said a major focus will be placed on the war in Iraq, and what he describes as a new level of "transparency and oversight" of President Bush. "We will be asking questions about the allocation of resources and the priorities of our country," he said.

Watt said Democrats will move swiftly to increase the

minimum wage, with a vote likely within the first 30 days. "There will be an up or down vote on the minimum wage, and I think it will pass. That's a concrete thing that I think we're going to see."

But that's not enough says University of Maryland Political Scientist Ron Walters.

"The criminal justice issues have not been dealt with. Half of everyone locked up in America is Black. That really begs the revocation of 'Three Strikes You're Out,' and mandatory minimum sentencing and doing something with drugs and drug-sentencing programs and the whole series of the complex criminal justice issues that are feeding the incarceration binge even though crime has gone down," said Walters.

"So, it's issues like these that I'm talking about that's

critically impacting on our community that we need to raise up in a very forceful way... The war is not going to take up all their time."

Walters is worried that presidential politics might complicate things for House leaders. "They are not going to want to deal with issues that have greater specificity to the African-American community, primarily because they are going to be positioning themselves for 2008," he explains.

"So many of the agenda items that they're going to highlight are going to be the agenda items that they think will get them a Democratic president elected," he said. "Our issue is whether we are sympathetic to that and tuck our tails or whether or not we mobilize and push our issues forward so that the nominee in 2008 understands what that agenda is about."

Melissa Nobles, president of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists, says if Republicans retain control of the Senate, which might not be decided for weeks, Democratic gains in the House might be neutralized.

"They're going to have a fight on their hands just to get something to come through the Senate," said Nobles, a

political science professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "It's going to be compromise. If the Democrats win the Senate, the president could opt to exercise his veto power, but on key issues, he will likely work with the party in power. I think we're going to see a gentler and milder-sounding George Bush." Democrats maintained power in the House for 40 years until 1994, when Clinton was in the White House.

In other hot campaigns around the country:

White Democratic Rep. Ben Cardin defeated Black Republican Lt. Gov. Michael Steele in Maryland's Senate race.

Republican Bob Corker beat Democratic challenger Harold Ford Jr. in the Tennessee Senate race.

The Proposal 2, a referendum to end affirmative action in Michigan, passed. Democrat Deval Patrick, former head of civil rights division of the U.S. Department of Justice, became the first Black governor of Massachusetts and the second in the nation, trouncing GOP Lt. Gov. Kerry Healey, who had hoped to be the state's first female governor.

Former Republican U.S. (See House, Page 13)

# Taking advantage of the disadvantaged

By Harry C. Alford  
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For each program designed to implement Title VI of the Civil Rights Act (affirmative action), there are attempts to front or commit fraud and abuse of such programs. Usually a front-operation has a Black person listed as owner, acting as if he or she has majority ownership and management, when the real operators are behind the scenes and very much Caucasian. Most of this activity happens at the local level, as the penalties for committing federal fraud are certain and hard: three to five years in federal prison is not out of the ordinary.

However, with the coming of high-powered, very slick lobbying firms in Washington, D.C., a new era has come to be. The 8a program, which is the best federal affirmative action program in existence, has now been infiltrated. Congress, the Congressional Black Caucus included, has allowed lobbyists to get some of their high-powered Caucasian clients into the 8a program by representing themselves as Alaska Native corporations, or ANCs.

That's right. ANCs have 8a benefits — and they don't have to actually be Alaskan Natives. They don't have to be small or disadvantaged, either. In fact, most ANCs are businesses approaching a billion dollars in annual revenue. They sit back in the offices

of their D.C. lobbyist and "cherry pick" federal contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars or even \$1 billion-plus.

Remember, these dollars are credited as minority dollars and, in effect, are taken from the pools set aside for real minorities such as Blacks, Hispanics, etc.

Keep in mind that real Native Americans still have to apply to get into the 8a program and meet stringent certification. They have to show that they live as American Indians, such as on a reservation, or culturally live as an Apache, Cherokee, etc. But the ANCs only have to have a subsidiary of their corporation show a paper relationship with some tribe in Alaska, such as giving a small portion of the net profits to help the tribe. It is less than pennies on the dollar.

What the lobbyists have created with the ANC program is a genuine license to steal federal contracts from bona fide and qualified minority businesses. They are not minority and they are not small (free to have large contracts as opposed to legitimate 8a firms).

They had me going for a while. Federal agencies began showing great increases in small and minority business contracts. The



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reality was, they had all gotten on the ANC bandwagon. It became very apparent when Katrina hit us. The first minority business report from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers showed huge numbers. After I studied and dissected it, we found that 98 percent of the "minority business" was White-owned ANCs. Black firms had less than 0.5 percent.

It's outrageous. Congress should not accept minority procurement reports with ANCs in them.

These ANCs are based in places like Greenbelt, Md., Charlotte, N.C., Alexandria, Va., Chesapeake, Va. and many other such fine communities thousands of miles south of Alaska. They give themselves names like Akima, Chenega, etc. They are so arrogant that they are now getting no-bid contracts in excess of \$1 billion and subcontracting to corporate giants like Lockheed, Boeing, etc. It is blatant abuse and quite racist in that it is parasitic to legitimate minority owned 8a firms.

It has now gotten worse. Alaskan Native corporations that have exploited Title VI of the Civil Rights Act are now declaring themselves exempt from Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Yes, they are saying they can dis-

criminate in its hiring and employment practices and be free from litigation.

Listen to what one person has informed me: "In May, 2006, I was discriminated against and terminated from my position as Deputy Division Director. I was the last surviving African-American senior manager in the company. There were previously two other senior managers who were also discriminated against and constructively force to resign, both within a six-month period. After filing a complaint with the EEOC and participating in the mediation process, it was discovered and claimed by the attorneys for Chenega Corporation that they and their subsidiaries hold sovereign immunity of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and the US Codes governing civil rights because of their identity as a registered 'Indian tribe.'"

It is inconceivable that with an employee compliment of over 500 and a revenue base of well over \$650 million that [the offending corporation] and other ANCs, that are primarily operated by Caucasians, have a 'license to discriminate' without repercussions."

Folks, we can't make this up. This is your federal procurement system making way for corruption and abuse. As long as it is hurting Blacks, it's OK.

Harry C. Alford is the President/CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce.