

# Time for newer direction on AIDS

By **Phill Wilson**  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Rep. Nancy Pelosi, the presumed new speaker of the House, says voters sent a clear, simple message on Election Day: "It's time for a new direction."

That was the Democratic leader's own message all year on the campaign stump, and it's her promise now, as her party regains control of Congress for the first time in 12 years. The Black AIDS Institute couldn't agree more. And we desperately hope the Democrats are serious about charting that new course, because Washington has allowed the AIDS epidemic in Black America to run amok for far too long.

Congress has failed to do the hard work of reforming the 16-year-old Ryan White CARE Act to keep up with an ever-changing epidemic. The law was due for congressional reauthorization in 2005, but the pols have yet to act on that mandate. Lawmakers — including Democrats — have been too busy bickering over how best to divide up inadequate funding among the varied cities

and states to see the bigger picture: There's not enough money in the program.

Given the disproportionate impact the AIDS epidemic is having on Black America, the Congress's decision to break without reauthorizing the Ryan White CARE Act — one of the primary resources for care and treatment of poor people living with HIV/AIDS — was a direct assault on the health and welfare of Black America. While the administration and Congress fiddled, the AIDS Drug Assistance Program has collapsed.

The program, called ADAP, subsidizes lifesaving anti-HIV drugs for about 30 percent of those getting treated in the U.S. Just last week, AIDS advocates in South Carolina announced that three people have died while languishing on the state's 300-person waiting list for AIDS treatment. As of the last reporting period, there were waiting lists in six states — a number that will most certainly



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grow if the Congress does not set a new direction in the fight against HIV/AIDS quickly.

Funding for the Ryan White CARE Act has remained all but flat during the last three Congresses. Meanwhile, the U.S. government estimates an additional 200,000 Americans have contracted HIV since 2001. According to the Congressional Budget Office, as of January 2006, we were spending \$200 million a day on the war in Iraq.

According to the coalition of local officials and advocates that has monitored the program since its inception, with the equivalent of what we spend in Iraq in one day, we could fully fund the AIDS Drug Assistance Program. But, the AIDS Drug Assistance Program is not the only part of our national response to the domestic AIDS epidemic that is failing. Local health departments and clinics around the country, particularly in the South, report having to cut or limit services

they offer in order to meet growing demands with limited resources.

Addiction treatment, support groups, transportation assistance — all have had to fall by the wayside in some places. The Centers for Disease Control's prevention efforts are being starved by lack of resources. Who suffers? African-Americans represent nearly 50 percent of the estimated 1.2 million Americans living with AIDS today and 54 percent of the new cases in our country.

When care and treatment services are cut, Black people don't have access to treatment. When HIV prevention efforts are undermined, Black people get infected with HIV.

If Rep. Pelosi is true to her word, she'll indeed steer a dramatically new direction on AIDS. She can start by demanding that the House pass a budget that adequately funds comprehensive prevention efforts, and puts enough funding into the CARE Act to keep Americans living with HIV/AIDS alive, no matter what state they live in.

Phill Wilson is CEO and founder of the Black AIDS Institute in Los Angeles.

# Black GOPers unable to elevate status

By **Hazel Trice Edney**  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - As Democrats recaptured control of the House and Senate last week, Black Democrats won more than half of the 13 statewide offices they competed for, while Black Republicans won none, debunking what the GOP had billed as "The Year of the Black Republican."

The Black Democratic wins yielded one governor, two lieutenant governors, one attorney general, one secretary of state, one state treasurer and one commissioner of labor. Black Republicans ran for governor in Ohio and Pennsylvania and for the U.S. Senate in Maryland.

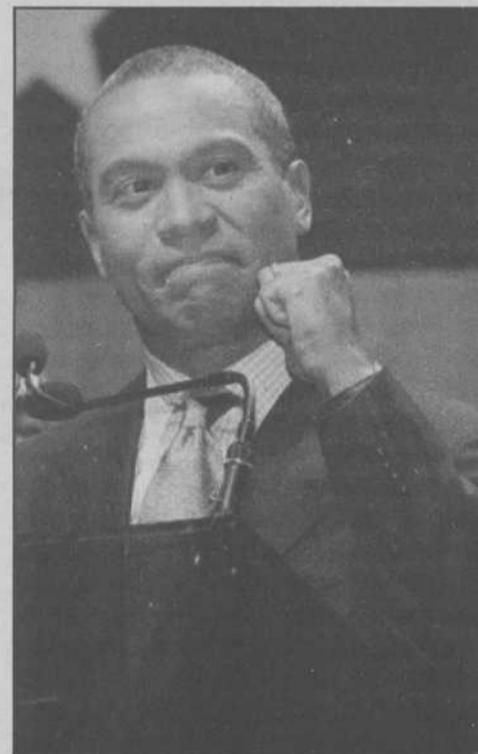
"It was a great year for Democrats," said David Bositis, senior analyst for the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, referring to both Black and White party members. Only 11 percent of Blacks voted for Republican congressional candidates, according to exit polls conducted by Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International for the Associated Press and television networks. That percentage is consistent with the share won by Republicans in the 2004 presidential race.

Terone B. Green, a Black Republican operative in Virginia widely known for his outspokenness and activism, says the Black Republican losses were fueled by more than just opposition to extended U.S. presence the Iraq.

"People are going to say it's the war, but Republicans just don't have a solid strategy to prevail in the Black community," he explained. "You can run a Black Republican all you want to, but it's clearly evident that Black folks don't believe in them because Black Republicans do not prop up African-Americans in any significant way. Black people just don't trust Republicans. That's the bottom line."

Much of that distrust comes from the failure of Republicans to support issues favored by African-Americans. On the last NAACP Report Card, 98 percent of all Republicans in Congress received F's, compared to only 2 percent of Democrats.

In recent years, only two Black Republicans have won U.S. House seats. They are former Connecticut Rep. Gary Franks (1992-



Democrat Deval Patrick pumps his fist while giving a speech after winning the election to become the next Governor of the State of Massachusetts at a rally in Boston.

1997) and Oklahoma Rep. J.C. Watts (1994-2003). They were the only Blacks elected to the House since 1932 and both won in districts that were at least 90 percent White districts. The only Black Republican elected to the Senate since Reconstruction was Sen. Ed Brooke who served from 1967 to 1979.

Republican Party Chairman Ken Mehlman, who had boasted that this would be the "year of the Black Republican," now says he will leave the chairmanship by January after this year proved to be the year of neither the Black nor White Republican.

"Give us a chance, and we'll give you a choice," he told the annual conference of the Conservative Political Action Committee in Washington, D.C. in February. Blacks rejected that choice, according to exit surveys.

Green said, "They just don't get it. They want people that they feel comfortable with. But they need to find Black candidates that can really identify with the Black community." So far, that has been an uphill struggle.

All three of the statewide Black Republi-

can candidates failed to get more than 25 percent of the Black vote. They were: Ohio Secretary of State J. Kenneth Blackwell, who lost his gubernatorial bid with 20 percent of the Black vote; former Pittsburgh Steelers wide receiver Lynn Swann, who lost his Pennsylvania gubernatorial bid with 13 percent of the Black vote; and Maryland Lt. Gov. Michael Steele, who lost his senatorial bid, received 25 percent of the Black vote. No Black Republicans ran for lower statewide offices.

Republican National Committee spokeswoman Tara Wall argued that this election represented progress.

"That's historic for any Republican to get 25 percent of the Black vote. We have definitely made strides," she said. You can compare that with the last Republican that ran for that seat in '88. I think we've made great strides."

That candidate was conservative Republican activist Allen Keyes, who got 14 percent of the Black vote in that campaign, losing to incumbent Democrat Paul Sarbanes.

"So, I think you see that there is an increase of the number of African-Americans who are voting for Republicans," said Wall. "This is just the beginning. This is not the end. These three folks have very bright futures in this party."

Of 13 Democrats who ran in the Nov. 7 elections, seven won: Deval Patrick Massachusetts' gov.-elect; David Patterson, New York Lt. gov.-elect; Anthony Brown, Maryland Lt. gov.-elect; and three who were re-elected, Thurbert Baker, Georgia attorney general; Jesse White, Illinois secretary of state; Denise Napier, Connecticut treasurer and Michael Thurmond, Georgia commissioner of labor.

The six losing Democrats were: U. S. Rep. Harold Ford (D-Tenn.), candidate for U. S. Senate; Mississippi senatorial candidate Erik Fleming; Georgia state superintendent of education candidate Denise Majette, a former congresswoman; South Carolina secretary of state candidate Cheryl Footman; Ohio state auditor candidate Barbara Sykes; and Ohio Supreme Court candidate Ben Espy.

Bositis says the problems of the three statewide Black Republican candidates ex-

tended beyond their race.

"Blackwell made big enemies of everybody else in the Republican Party and so they really wanted him to lose," Bositis explains.

Largely credited with Bush's controversial win in the 2004 presidential race, Blackwell has been beleaguered with legal problems afterward, including a suit that found that Ohio election officials had, in violation of state law, informed former felons that they could not vote. He also directed his office to accept voter registration forms printed on paper of at least 80-pound weight only, a decision that he later reversed under pressure from voting rights groups. This year, Blackwell issued an advisory that said voter identification cards must have their current addresses, a requirement that was contrary to state law.

Bositis continued, "Lynn Swann wasn't going to win. The Republicans were desperate when they picked him. I mean, he's a football player, what do you want? And Michael Steele, you know, Maryland is a Democratic state, that's why he lost."

Democratic wins in Congress are ultimately expected to amount to a 232-203 majority in the House and a 51-49 majority in the Senate. That majority will probably be expanded with support coming from independent Bernie Sanders, a socialist; and Joseph Lieberman, a Democrat turned Independent. Both have said they will caucus with Democrats.

Democratic governors are also celebrating a majority they have not had in 12 years. They now have a 28-22 edge in statehouses. Ohio, Colorado and Arkansas are among states that returned to Democratic hands after eight years or more of Republican occupation.

"Lost in all this talk about the House and the Senate is the governorships," says Daniella Gibbs Leger, a spokeswoman for the Center for American Progress. "Often you have a lot of governors complaining that they are shouldering the burden of a lot of domestic issues because they can't get the help that they need from Congress."

States look to the federal government for help on many issues impacting low income  
(See Republicans, Page 13)