

# Democrats need tactical agenda

By Ron Walters

Special to Sentinel-Voice

That the Democrats are about the take over the House of Representatives and the Senate and there is relatively clear lineup of Blacks and others that may control both major and minor committees has set off a whirlwind of expectations. However, I believe that we should approach this both thoughtfully and tactically.

First, the thoughtfulness about our agenda. The Democrats in both the House and Senate are severely hampered in whatever set of policy proposals they may want to see enacted by the fact that there is a conservative Republican in the White House who is poised to utilize the veto pen during the next two years.

That brings the major objective into focus. In the next two years, they will be attempting to use both houses of Congress as a campaign vehicle, to run several key issues up the flagpole and see if they flutter with the American people. If they do, that agenda will become the foundation for the party's approach to the 2008 election cycle.

The key to this is Nancy Pelosi's agenda that she has rolled out a so-called "100 hour

set of issues." The set contains: raising the minimum wage, cracking down on lobbyists, reducing interests rates on student loans, permitting government negotiation with drug companies to reduce Medicare drug costs, supporting stem cell research and enacting the 9/11 Commission recommendations.

Like the Campaign "on" America issues of the Republican revolution in 1994, some thought has been given to the popularity of these issues and how much flak they will attract from Republicans. If they pass, all to the good, but if they are opposed, Republicans can now be labeled the "obstructionists."

With respect to tactical moves, we should mount a "Black campaign" for 2008 that would be both autonomous and coincide with Democrats to some extent. Blacks were important to many of the Democratic victories. Let's see: Webb won in Virginia, but Whites voted 58 percent for Allen, and Blacks 85 percent for Webb; McCaskill won in Missouri, but Whites voted 55 percent for Talent, and Blacks voted 91 percent for



RON WALTERS

McCaskill; Cardin won in Maryland, but Whites voted 50 percent for Steele, while Blacks voted 74 percent for Cardin; Menendez won in New Jersey, but Whites voted 50 percent for Kean, while Blacks voted 82 percent for Menendez. You get the picture? Whites supported Republicans in four of the most critically close races that gave Democrats control of the Senate, while Black votes made the difference.

Now on the basis of that record, we should be in a strong position to tender our own agenda. It would consist of issues, such as Katrina, minimum wage, closing racial gaps in healthcare and HIV/AIDs, Black voter disenfranchisement in elections, jobs/poverty and other economic goals, preventing No Child Left Behind from robbing Black children of their diplomas, etc.

This list could obviously be expanded, but there is a decision that leadership must make. Would it be wise to play our card now? — the one which says that because Blacks made the difference in the midterm elections in the

Senate (and probably in the House as well) that we push for our whole shopping list. Or would it wiser to tender a more selective list of objectives? — that do not give Republicans the obvious targets they need to derail the Democratic Party for the 2008 elections (Katrina, minimum wage, health care) but that we would demand be supported by our own choice for president in 2008.

Then, once having played the role of electing that person, we pull out the whole list. This is a tactical move that lines the community up with the Democratic Party somewhat, capitalizes on the alienation in the country over the war that has caused some Whites to cross over and vote Democrat, yet leverages our voting power to select a candidate going into the election.

Of course, I would throw this all over if I knew that there was more serious move toward independent politics. But it has to begin now.

Otherwise, tactical thinking is the game of the day.

Ron Walters is the Director of the African American Leadership Institute and Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland College Park.

## Black America: Put demands on leaders

By Bill Fletcher Jr.

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Like most of the folks that I know, the day after Election Day, I was excited. I was excited because the Republicans, generally, and President Bush, in particular, had their collective noses rubbed in the mud. (I was going to use another imagery but I am being polite.) The anger and frustration that millions of people have had — with the Iraq war, the attacks on civil liberties, the corruption, the mean-spirited government, the cuts in services and the polarization of wealth — just added up. And, oh, by the way, a side benefit of our outrage: Rumsfeld is gone.

Now that we have that out of our systems, we need to turn our attention to the Democrats. Frankly, they were lucky. There is no other way to put it. They won despite the fact that they had no clear message regarding the war or anything else. They tapped into the anger and frustration with the Republicans and were beneficiaries of that, but they were not leading anything.

So, the point is that Black America, and

### Alford

(Continued from Page 10)

House of Representatives, and they voted against it 400-2. It was a pure stomping.

But the old draft isn't what Congressman Rangel is talking about. The upcoming chair of the House Ways and Means Committee has another scheme for the draft.

This nation is seriously deep in debt. We owe the world more than \$12 trillion and don't have a clue how we are going to get out of it.

There are two simple options that no one will face: 1) They can tax us out of it — but no American public is going to take that pain without voting out the entire Congress, and

all others that share our desire for social, economic, political and environmental justice cannot sit back and hope that the Democrats do the right thing. They lack a clear alternative plan. If history is any judge, without pressure, the Democrats will cave in to, if not actively support, the general direction of the Republicans.

Consider for a moment the Iraq war. Increasing numbers of people in the U.S. recognize that not only is the Iraq war a no-win proposition, but it was wrong in the first place.

Thus, there must be an approach that is fundamentally about removing all U.S. troops (including bases) and offering reparations to the Iraqi people for the horrible damage that the U.S. illegally inflicted upon them.

This must be the stand that our political leaders take, but too many are ready to offer compromises in the name of bipartisanship,



BILL FLETCHER JR.

particularly, offering a lack of specifics in terms of how quickly the U.S. will pull out and what it will actually do to assist the Iraqi people.

There is no point in waiting for the Democrats to come up with a plan on Iraq — or any other significant area. Rather, people like you and me need to place demands on the Democrats and insist on a change of course for this country. In that regard, we must learn a valuable and painful lesson from the Bill Clinton era.

When President Clinton was elected, there was a sigh of relief that spread across this country, much like the sigh that many of us heard or experienced on November 8 after the Republican defeat. Having suffered for 12 years under the Reagan/Bush administration, it felt great to have, what appeared to be, a different direction for the country.

At that point, one movement after another demobilized. It was amazing to watch it happen. Clinton was able to get a pass from organized labor, as well as the African-American movement and the women's movement.

When he supported NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, there was resistance, but his actions were forgotten.

When he abolished welfare, there were murmurings of discontent, but little public outcry came from the mainstream leaders of liberal and progressive America.

When he advanced his anti-terrorism act, there was little concern about the arbitrariness of the provision.

When he attacked Yugoslavia, too many of us accepted that this was an alleged humanitarian action. Movement after movement was prepared to stick an apple in its own mouth because any other action would embarrass "our friend..." in the White House and give ammunition to the Republicans.

The results of this demobilization could be seen in the Republican victory in the 1994 midterm Congressional elections and their Contract with America. It could be seen in the declining number of Democrats elected to office during the Clinton era. And it could be seen in the conditions being laid for the assumption of office by George W. Bush. In other words, people of conscience gained absolutely nothing.

If we learn from that experience, then we can go forward. If, however, we sit back and wait for the Democrats to do the right thing, we are living in a fool's paradise. Remember the old saying: "Trick me once, shame on you. Trick me twice, shame on me."

No time for shame but definitely time to struggle. While the door is open, let's keep pushing.

Bill Fletcher Jr. is a labor and international affairs activist and immediate past president of TransAfrica Forum.

2) We can seriously cut down our spending — but no pork-barrel-addicted Congress is going to bring itself to facing up to this. You can't make a "crackhead" voluntarily put down a crack pipe.

So, here is Rangel's new option. Let's have a nouveau draft. Let's force young Americans to work in our airports, highways, borders, national parks, etc. at very low wages and still have a heavily populated military ready for Halliburton and "the boys" when they need more non-bid contracts.

We can work our way out of this humungous debt by hiring able-bodied men and women to work for "peanuts" on gov-

ernment jobs. Replace the lucrative GS pay schedule (federal employees) with the super cheap E-Pay schedule (enlisted troops). This is so slick and cunning.

America, please wake up to this scheme and call it what it is: a plain old evil and despicable draft that is no better than the previous one. We must not discuss it or even debate the merits. There are no merits. Our youth did not get us in this debt mess and shame on us to stick them with the bill. Cut the pork. Run our government with accountability.

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