

OUR VIEW

Job Ready?

The race to become the new City Council office holder for Ward 5 is quickly devolving into the mudslinging affair so typical of modern-day politics. The contest pits Ricki Barlow against Stacie Truesdell. In many ways, it's a small-scale version of the national jockeying between Ill. Sen. Barack Obama and New York Sen. Hillary Clinton for the Democratic presidential nomination: you've got a Black man and a White woman doggedly competing for the right to govern. However—and totally unexpectedly—the Barlow-Truesdell race is the one setting the tone for playing dirty.

Barlow, a longtime city employee and former liaison to since-decamped Ward 5 councilman Lawrence Weekly, has billed himself as the consummate insider, familiar with the ward's issue and able to seamlessly transition into government. Truesdell is a lawyer, daughter of powerful attorney Richard Truesdell and has promised to be a staunch advocate for Ward 5 on the City Council and an attentive ear for all its residents. If only credentials were the main factor in politics, Barlow would be the prohibitive favorite. Where some would lament his being an insider—"part of the system"—others would undoubtedly look at his experience as a plus; there'd be much less of a learning curve which would, presumably, give him the ability to jump right in and be effective.

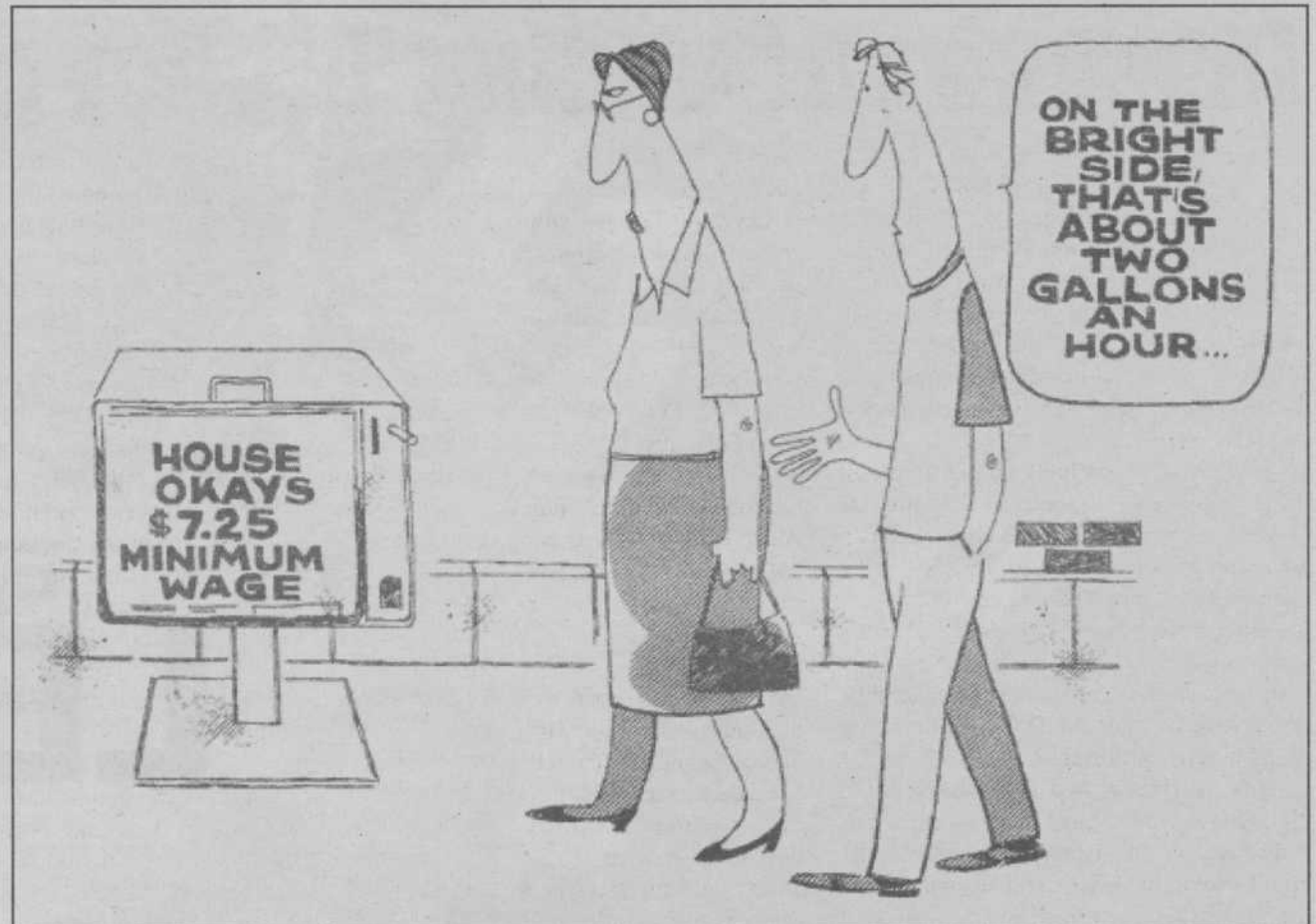
But politics is a dirty game, as Barlow—who received 43 percent of the primary vote to Truesdell's 29 percent, forcing the June 5 run-off election—is quickly finding out. In a bit of Karl Rove-type mudslinging rarely seen before in local politics, Truesdell supporters have inundated the Internet (and, recently bought television time) with character-assassinating stories on Barlow's past transgressions. There's no need to rehash the mudslinging. There is, however, a need to provide some clarity, to clear the air about what really matters in this heated campaign. Rather than subterfuge, the focus should be on addressing the quality of life in Ward 5, particularly in poor urban areas (West Las Vegas and parts of downtown).

Such negative campaigning will likely have an effect on Blacks entering politics, as many will be concerned that past transgressions will come back to haunt them.

It must be said that this in no way makes light of any questionable actions or activities Barlow may have engaged in in the past—the *Sentinel-Voice* has not and will not be a Barlow apologist. Those sins (alleged and proven) have no bearing on his ability to do the job. In the same way that the Monica Lewinsky debacle, disheartening as it was, isn't a measure of Bill Clinton's generally successful presidency, nor are barbs being flung at Barlow indicative of his leadership. His familiarity with the ward, having served as Weekly's liaison is invaluable. He knows the issues and knows that solving them takes more than rhetoric, that we can't arrest our way out of gang violence, that it's one thing to talk about economic empowerment in socioeconomically challenged communities, and another to deliver on that promise.

Having grown up in similar neighborhoods, Barlow knows first-hand the challenges of building strong communities without much help from the community itself, he knows about the importance of mentoring youth and under no delusion that West Las Vegas can be turned into Summerlin in one term. In other words, he's job ready.

At this point, it's not crystal clear whether Truesdell is up to the challenge. Having a well-financed campaign and creating scathing ads that Jerry Falwell would be proud of does not a good politician make. Her pedigree and personal accomplishments are notable, worthy to be praised. However, plaques and letters at the end of your name don't mean that you will be an independent and brave voice for Ward 5, arguably the city's most neglected (in terms of investment and interest) jurisdiction. Nor does it mean you'll be an effective advocate of the issues of the large African-American and growing Hispanic populations. Or that you'll bring in the type of enterprise that pays livable wages. Or that you'll address West Las Vegas' unemployment rate—nearly four times the state average. If she is elected, Ward 5 residents better hope Truesdell is job ready or it could be a long four years.



Black Dems fight war, funding

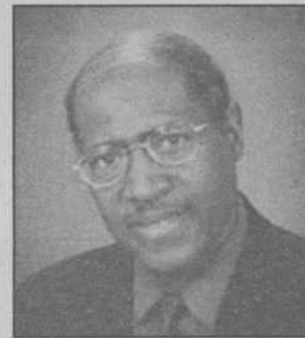
By Ron Walters
Special to *Sentinel-Voice*

Only six Black members of the House of Representatives voted for the recent passage of the \$124 billion Iraq supplemental, which passed 280-142, while 31 of their colleagues voted against it. However, Democrats largely voted against it 140-86 while passage was made possible with 194 Republican votes, only 2 voting against it.

The Congressional Black Caucus was accountable on this vote, since Blacks have been the strongest community against war in the Middle East. As an example, a Pew Center poll in 2003 showed that while 44 percent of Blacks supported the war, 73 percent of Whites supported it.

But a recent Gallup poll found that 85 percent of Blacks say the war was a mistake (53 percent of Whites) and a poll by Blackmilitaryworld.com says that 73 percent of Blacks feel that the disastrous 50 percent drop in Black military recruitment is related to the war. So, Blacks have been and are still firmly against the war.

Blacks in the leadership had a more difficult time since there appears to be a price, as both Jim Clyburn, Majority Whip, and Bennie Thompson, Chair of Homeland Security, who voted for the bill on passage, discovered. However, to say they were merely following the leadership may be too simplistic, since Speaker Nancy



RON WALTERS

Pelosi outright voted against it, and David Obey, Appropriations Committee Chair, said on the floor of the House that although he worked on it, he "hated it."

Staunch war opponent, John Murtha, Chair of the Armed Services Committee, voted for it because money for the troops would run out in a few months, making them more subject to casualties, and thus, making Democrats politically vulnerable to Republican charges of having created the situation. Murtha's basic reasoning was that there was only a one-vote majority in the Senate, which prevented a policy change at this moment (so an opposing vote would be merely symbolic). This reasoning was repeated by Rep. Kendrick Meek of the Black Caucus on C-Span one day before the vote as a guide to his own action.

Nevertheless, other Blacks felt free to oppose this bill because it had such strong Republican support and, therefore, the party would not be vulnerable for having failed "to support the troops." Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton both voted

against the Iraq Supplemental, not wanting to be vulnerable to their own constituencies. But if there could be no basic change of policy because Democrats have such a thin margin in the Senate, then the Clinton and Obama votes (add the rejection of John Edwards) were symbolic as well.

But let's get down to brass tacks. Most members of the CBC were also released from voting for the war spending bill knowing that there was going to be a huge Republican vote for it, and that this would be enough to carry forward the domestic measures ("sweeteners" they are called) in the bill that Democrats had inserted. The bill contained new money for Katrina and Rita disaster relief, bolsters funding for Medicaid and Medicare, and increases the Minimum Wage to \$7.25 per hour. This amounts to about \$24 billion, money that they delivered by riding on war spending and might have had difficulty getting otherwise.

Such tactics have become substitutes for direct legislation dealing with critical problems that face urban areas where large populations of the "undeserving poor" are involved. Direct legislation for such purposes is now routinely held up, subject to the question, "Where is the money coming from?," while priorities favored by the powerful get taken care of, even if the funding has to come in the form of budget deficits.

Even with respect to this bill, George Bush and the Republicans railed against the domestic spending as "pork" that should be taken out. So, this Appropriations bill that extended the funding for the Iraq war was not only a deal between Democrats and Republicans that traded "benchmarks" for a date-certain timeline for withdrawal, it was also a deal that traded war funding for some critical domestic priorities.

Undoubtedly, because of the strong Republican sup-

(See Walters, Page 15)

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Email: lvsentinelvoice@yahoo.com

Contributing Writers:
Frank Albano
Debbie Hall
Lés Pierres Streater
Kanika Vann

Ramon Savoy, Publisher, Editor-in-Chief
Parker Philpot, Copy Editor
Don Snook, Graphics
Ed & Betty Brown, Founders

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