

Demos debate at Howard swings, misses

By Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Reading many of the accounts of the Democratic debate at Howard University, I conclude that they were either too narrow, in that they focused on Barack Obama exclusively, or they missed the point substantially.

First, Tavis Smiley is to be congratulated for his leadership on fashioning this event because, as crafted, it was better focused on issues important to the Black community than, for example, the South Carolina debate.

In fact, I still wonder how such an event, sponsored by a journalist, could have better focus than one sponsored by high-level politicians. It has to do with control. In his post-event interview on C-SPAN, Tavis spoke about the difficulty of encouraging the Public Broadcasting System to come aboard and this sponsor — very different from either FOX or CNN (news networks with their own agendas) — eventually supported the project.

Second, some were critical because of the limited number of issues covered. But the coverage on the issues — race, or the color-line; education, HIV/AIDS, tax cuts, criminal justice, Katrina, outsourcing jobs (employment), and Darfur — given eight presidential candidates, was nothing short of miraculous. I say this because if you heard or read the answers given by the candidates to

these issues, they were broad enough to generate a wide-ranging discussion about many of the sub-issues involved.

For example, in the debate about the color-line, all agreed that issues of racism and class, wealth, slavery and the responsibility for it all, were important.

In the discussion on education, the No Child Left Behind program was critiqued, with most suggesting that it be scrapped entirely or fully funded; but, in any case, they mentioned other issues, such as universal pre-school, paying teachers what they deserve to keep them, funding Head Start, dealing with poverty and the lack of funding due to the war in Iraq.

The attention to HIV/AIDS also yielded knowledge that they were informed about the state of African-American women and the disease, the need for AIDS testing, sex education and the general issue of the lack of health insurance. That was important in the proposals of those who would extend Medicaid coverage to this disease.

The issue of tax cuts for the wealthy generated discussion about tax fairness and the availability of federal funds for essential gov-



RON WALTERS

ernment services, together with balancing the budget as fiscal accountability.

They also referred to the success of the growth policies of Bill Clinton — especially Hillary and Bill Richardson, both close to his administration.

Then, all acknowledged that the criminal justice system was not colorblind; that mandatory minimum sentencing, racial

profiling, the war on drugs as a war on Blacks, as well as the crack cocaine and powdered cocaine sentencing issue were all crucial issues to address.

All of the candidates agreed that the Katrina issue had been handled badly by the Bush administration and that urgency was warranted, indeed urgent, that a federal law should be passed guaranteeing reconstruction of the damaged areas and the right of former residents to return.

There was also agreement that the outsourcing of jobs was a problem because American workers had been neglected in trade deals. But Obama gave the best answer in his view that not only is the educational system challenged to upgrade technical education, trade deals need to protect workers, but that the federal government must rein-

vest in community left behind or burdened by globalism when companies move out.

Finally, the issue of Darfur also raised passionate proposals, especially from Joe Biden who believed that America should establish a "no-fly zone" and put troops on the ground.

Obama seemed confused and proposed a moderate suggestion, but Richardson would involve China due to its direct economic ties to the Sudan government.

I agree with the polling data that suggest Hillary Clinton won the debate and that Barack Obama came in second. This was Obama's house and most expected him to take it. However, it appeared that he was speaking to the nation rather than to Howard folks. But what was more striking from the Black perspective was that there was precious little difference among the candidates, and if any of them were to win the office, they would be committed to a similar set of responses to the problems considered urgent by Blacks.

So, in this case, the many differences among the candidates are not as important as the fact that they all have been put on the record. That fact makes this debate imminently worth the effort.

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Iraq: Mission done now mission impossible

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Seems like such a long time ago when people were complaining about the 2000 presidential "selection" by Clarence Thomas and the Supremes. The battle cry of those who felt betrayed by what they thought was the "people's government" is, "Wait 'til 2004!"

The next time around, the battle was shifted from the land of Florida and then-Secretary of State Katherine Harris to the territory of Ohio Secretary of State Kenneth Blackwell. Same fight; same result. Bush Wins! Bush Wins!

In the interim of the two most bizarre elections in American history, we suffered a national blow by a handful of "terrorists" with box cutters, who managed to bring down the Twin Towers in New York City in broad daylight. To avenge the deaths of just under 3,000 persons, George Bush started a war with Iraq. It's only been 6 1/2 years, but it seems like an eternity.

Just a few weeks after Colin Powell gave his famous presentation before the United Nations, and shortly after Condoleezza Rice

issued her stern warning about that "mushroom cloud," America was basking in the sunlight of victory as we witnessed George Bush strap on a military flight suit and make his triumphant landing on the deck of an aircraft carrier.

He strutted across the flight deck, displayed his newly acquired machismo, took his place behind the microphone and spoke the words everyone wanted to hear. Major combat operations in Iraq were over. We had victory in Iraq!

Striking a "patriotic" pose for the cameras, Bush reminded me of another George in a movie I saw years ago — "Patton." Remember his pose in front of the American flag? — resolute, focused, unyielding and brave? George Bush was our Patton, McCarthy, Eisenhower, Marshall, and Mr. Top Gun himself, Randy "Duke" Cunningham.

In the backdrop of all the pomp and cir-



JAMES CLINGMAN

cumstance, in perfect camera shot, there hung a banner with the words: "Mission Accomplished."

Bush was in his glory, and all was right with the world.

Then we have a guy who brings new meaning to the word "vice" — Dick Cheney.

Now, after two presidential selections, there is a litany of corrupt acts of their greed and thievery:

—Billions of dollars are missing in Iraq.

—We have the highest gasoline prices ever.

—Prescription drugs are out of reach for those who need them most.

—More soldiers have been killed fighting the ghost of Saddam Hussein and the shadow of Osama Bin Laden than civilians killed in the Twin Towers.

—There are deaths from record heat and forest fires, record droughts, dirty water and air and tainted food.

—There is administration sanctioned torture, eavesdropping on American citizens, no-fly lists, an assault on habeas corpus, diminishing freedom from unlawful, unconstitutional detention.

—Katrina victims are still waiting for relief while thousands of mobile homes still sit empty in, of all places, Hope, Ark.

We are left with Chertoff, the demonic pre- and post-Katrina puppet master of Michael "Brownie, you're doing a heck of job" Brown, while Karl is still roving, Tom is still delaying, Gonzales is still speeding, and Libby has scooted away.

We, the people, are left to face 18 more months under the rule of a "prince not fit to lead a civilized people."

We have no WMD, despite what Powell said. Saddam, his family and friends have

been killed. Al Qaeda is "on the run," as Bush told us.

Tony "Snow job" disses April Ryan, the only Black person I have ever seen at White House press briefings.

Ron Christie, a black (small "b" intended) court jester and former aide to the "vice" president, carries water for Bush.

The executive branch of government has morphed into all three branches and rides roughshod over everyone in Congress and everyone in this country, maybe even around the world!

When he said he had earned political capital and intended to spend it, George Bush was certainly not lying about that. He has been spending his political capital and taxpayers' capital like a drunken sailor.

Iraq has cost nearly a trillion dollars, and there is no end in sight. Congress is impotent to stop this race to the bottom.

U.S. cities and their citizens are suffering from neglect by the government they rely upon, and we can't wait for the next election; so much so that billions are being raised and spent nearly two years prior to the November 2008 soiree at the polls.

Mission Accomplished has become Mission Impossible with the Bush administration, the soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, and with those of us who live in this country. The Brits kicked Tony Blair out of office, but we have to wait for Bush to leave because no one has the nerve, the backbone or the sense to just do the right thing to get rid of Bush and his gang. — except Keith Olbermann of MSNBC's "Countdown" in his Special Comment on July 3.

Meanwhile, we are in a death spiral — economically, politically, environmentally, socially and morally. No nation can stand forever, especially when it abuses its power and starts to think it can do whatever it wants,

(See Clingman, Page 10)

Alford

(Continued from Page 8)

viding. When she got through with us, we all had it down — everyone!

This included the new immigrants flowing in from China and Mexico. They had functional English by the third grade. By the time we got into high school, we could handle anything they threw at us. By the time we grew up, being unemployed was actually inconceivable to my crew.

The question was, "How far do you want to go? How wealthy do you want to be?" Today, these questions seem so remote. This new organization can defeat the shameless state of our educational performance as a starter.

From there, we can move to the next shame. In regards to Africa, we can simply drill a water well in every village. That alone would eliminate the majority of annual child deaths in the continent. It can be done for about \$100 per well.

I just don't know where the billions of dollars go that get spent by USAID, the United States Agency for International Development.

The answers are right before us. We just need an organization that is committed to it and geared for it.

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