

Caucus seeks Obama, Clinton for FOX debate

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice
WASHINGTON (NNPA)

The Democratic Presidential campaigns of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton are standing firm that they will not participate in a controversial FOX News Channel debate, although former Congressional Black Caucus Chairman Elijah Cummings vows to win over one candidate in order to get the other.

"We're going to get them," said Cummings in a recent interview reflecting on the All-American Forum that focused on issues of importance to Black voters.

"I think what we're trying to do now is get one of the major candidates like Obama or Clinton, and once one comes, the other comes."

Cummings was able to broker a similar FOX News Channel Democratic presidential debate in 2004 despite heavy criticism that the ultra conservative station is not friendly to African-Americans.

But, a key element is missing in the plans so far. That is the two top candidates, both of whom have declined the FOX debate, saying they will participate in those debates sanctioned by the Democratic National Committee.

The first FOX News debate, sponsored by the Congressional Black Caucus Institute, will be Democratic candidates on Sept. 23 in Detroit. The second Democratic debate, scheduled for January 2008 on CNN, will

Campaign

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"We recognize the greatest deterrent to crime in our streets is education and good-paying jobs," Dorn said. "We must provide good-paying jobs for our young people and our seniors. That has been the problem; not creating enough opportunities. Living wages is the only way to go. We stand behind that."

Some of their programs include a SCLC-L.A. pre-apprenticeship program, a pre-employment prep class at the National Black Business Council and a petition drive, spearheaded by the Community Coalition, for the creation of a Construction Technology Academy at Dorsey High School.

The petition drive began about 18 months ago, said Marqueece Harris-Dawson, executive director of the Community Coalition. The idea behind that aspect of the movement: providing local high school graduates the dual options of going directly into a trade apprenticeship program, or applying to college.

"We are sick and tired of vocational programs that prepare people for minimum wage jobs," Dawson said. "You cannot live on a minimum wage job."

The campaign will also seek to hold L.A.'s mayor, city council, school board and other

take place in South Carolina. The Republican debates are still being planned.

"We will only be participating in the upcoming six sanctioned DNC debates. Thank you," said Clinton spokeswoman Traci Otey Blunt. Obama's campaign spokeswoman, Candice Tolliver, was slightly less firm.

"At this juncture, the campaign has committed to six sanctioned DNC debates. At this point, we are standing by our earlier statement that we are only committing to the CBC Institute's CNN debate in South Carolina in January," said Tolliver.

Ironically, Tolliver was also a spokeswoman for the Congressional Black Caucus Institute earlier this year, defending the Institute against attacks from activists critical of the debate being held on FOX.

"Our goal was, number one, to get broadcast partners who would enable us to reach the greatest number of households. And CNN and FOX news, whether they are liberal or conservative, are the largest cable news networks in the world," she said in an NNPA interview.

FOX News boasts 86 million viewers while CNN boasts 105 million.

Cummings, an announced Obama supporter, says the Institute is moving ahead with plans for the debate, despite steady criticism from ColorofChange.org, an online lobbying group aimed at promoting and resolving

issues affecting Black Americans.

The group's executive director, James Rucker, accuses the CBC of "legitimizing a network that calls Black churches a cult, implies that Barack Obama is a terrorist, and uses the solemn occasion of Coretta Scott King's funeral to call Black leaders 'racist.'"

Rainbow / PUSH Coalition's Rev. Jesse Jackson has also opposed the debate on FOX, calling it the "Fox guarding the henhouse." Thousands of phone calls, letters and emails have inundated the Institute's Capitol Hill offices. But, Cummings remains adamant.

"Let me be real clear. FOX was willing, when nobody else was willing, to take our debate and to take it beyond a 1,500-room auditorium. It's nice to have a debate, but if you're going to limit it to 1,500 people as opposed to millions, that's a no-brainer for me," he said.

FOX News Chairman Roger Ailes has issued a statement expressing pride in their agreement with the CBC.

Cummings noted that all of the major stations have a ways to go in their racial inclusion and fairness.

But, as for FOX, "Again, they were the ones who stepped up to the plate. The key is to get — and we did — African-Americans asking key questions like this. That's what we're looking for."

elect officials more directly accountable for their anti-poverty strategies, said SCLC-L.A. president/CEO Eric Lee.

"The Poor People's Campaign will not rest until we hold everyone in this city accountable for the issues of poverty that are providing a poor quality of life to people who deserve better," Lee said. "We will seek out politicians. We will seek out businesses. We will seek out community-based organizations to join us in this campaign for dignity and respect for all people."

The announcement was made near the state Employment Development Department building at Crenshaw Boulevard and 54th Street. The site is symbolic of the campaign's aims, Freeman said.

"We want to make it so that this building is not useful at all. If everybody's working, then this building will have little use in our community," Freeman said. "We can just turn it into a training center instead of a place to go look for a job because we all already have one. The reality is that we're going to deliver on everything that we talk about today, what we put out there."

Gene C. Johnson Jr. writes for the Wave Newspapers.

Nelson Mandela marks birthday among 'Elders'

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) - Nelson Mandela celebrated his 89th birthday Wednesday by joining with other Nobel peace laureates, politicians and development experts to form a "council of elders" dedicated to fostering peace and resolving global crises.

The event kicked off with about 250 people, including former President Jimmy Carter, singing "Happy Birthday" as a beaming Mandela took the stage, accompanied by an aide and leaning heavily on his cane.

"How God must love South Africa to have given us such a priceless gift!" former Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the chairman of the elders group, told Mandela. "You bowled us all over by your graciousness, magnanimity and generosity of spirit."

Mandela was imprisoned for nearly three de-



Former South African president Nelson Mandela (center), celebrating his 89th birthday on Wednesday, is flanked by ex-president, Jimmy Carter, right, and former UN chief, Kofi Annan, during the launching ceremony of the group known as The Elders in Johannesburg.

CADES for his fight against apartheid. Released in 1990, he led negotiations to end White rule. In South Africa's first fully democratic elections in 1994, he was elected president.

He left office in 1999 but has continued to work to reduce poverty, illiteracy and

AIDS in Africa.

The new humanitarian alliance, called the Elders, was an idea of British entrepreneur Richard Branson, who shares a birthday with Mandela, and musician Peter Gabriel. Branson helped (See Mandela, Page 4)

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