

Officials seek to steal election from Obama

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

After complaining in 2000 about George W. Bush being selected instead of being elected president, Democratic Party insiders are being equally duplicitous by maneuvering to steal the Democratic nomination from Barack Obama — even as he continues to run up impressive wins over Hillary Clinton, as he did over the weekend and on Super Tuesday.

In a brazen attempt to hand the election to Clinton, who is proving every day that she would be a weak alternative to Republican John McCain in the general election, Democratic Party leaders are hinting that, despite their earlier decision to punish any state that violated their edict not to move up their primary or caucus to a date earlier than Feb. 5 (in order to compete with first-in-the-nation attention showered on Iowa and New Hampshire), they are on the verge of seating delegates from Florida and Michigan.

Both states defied the party's directive and held elections prior to Feb. 5. Adhering to the rules, Obama dutifully did not campaign in either state, and his name was not even on the ballot in Michigan.

Yet, Clinton, who conducted a stealth campaign in both states while pretending to comply with the rules, is now arguing that a combined 350 or so delegates from Florida and Michigan should be seated at the convention

next August in Denver. It's another example of the anything-goes politics that Obama denounces at every campaign stop.

Even with Obama's name missing from the ballot, 40 percent of those going to the polls in Michigan supported a slate of uncommitted delegates instead of voting for the New York Sen. Clinton.

In addition to Hillary Clinton, some key elected officials in Florida and Michigan, already pledged to her, are making the specious argument that delegates from their state should be counted.

Michigan Democratic Sen. Carl Levin, for example, asserts that 600,000 Democrats participated in the primary and that it "would not be fair to throw out the results of the election." What is unfair is that party leaders in Michigan decided not to play by the rules and now want to be rewarded for violating them.

Demonstrating a clear lack of character, Clinton is eager to claim delegates she would not have won in a head-to-head contest against Obama.

I understand that voters in Florida don't want to be disenfranchised. But they shouldn't be empowered at the expense of Obama or the democratic process; therefore, the only fair way to satisfy the interests of



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both the voters who were betrayed by their leaders and basic fairness is to allow Florida and Michigan to hold a second primary or caucus. Then everyone can play by the same rules, and voters can have their voices heard.

But there is already grumbling that this proposition is too expensive. We're willing to spend millions to ensure fair elections in Iraq, yet are unwilling to make that same financial or ethical commitment to citizens of Michigan and Florida.

The second attempt to derail Obama comes in the form of super delegates, usually party insiders accorded special privileges by virtue of their status.

It is becoming increasingly clear that by June 7, the last day of voting, neither Obama nor Clinton will have the 2,025 delegates needed to clinch the nomination; therefore, attention is shifting to the 796 super delegates that may determine the party's eventual nominee.

In a year that Democratic voters have gone to the polls in record numbers, including many for the first time, it would be the ultimate insult to allow party insiders to decide who will carry the Democratic banner in November.

Super delegates are members of Congress,

governors, state party chairs, DNC members and other VIPs. Naturally, if the nomination turns on the wishes of machine politicians, Clinton will have the advantage. Most were part of the political apparatus that got Bill Clinton elected twice and are, therefore, considerably more inclined to support Hillary.

Of the declared super delegates, Hillary Clinton holds a 270-170 edge. That includes the vote of her husband, who gets a vote as "distinguished party leader."

Conservative George Will, noting the internal bickering among Republicans, said in a recent column: "The surest way to unify the Republican Party, however, is for Democrats to nominate Hillary Clinton. Barack Obama, the foundation of whose candidacy is his early opposition to the war in Iraq, would be a more interesting contrast to the candidate who is trying to become the oldest person ever elected to a first presidential term and who almost promises a war with Iran."

If Obama wins a majority of Democratic delegates from regular voters and party insiders ignore their wishes and install Hillary Clinton as the nominee, many frustrated voters will stay at home in November. Not me. Too many people have sacrificed their lives so that I could exercise my right to vote. I will vote, but it definitely won't be for Clinton.

George E. Curry is a keynote speaker, moderator and media coach.

Supreme Court needs to abolish lethal injection

By Marc H. Morial
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Earlier this month, the U.S. Supreme Court granted a stay of execution to an Alabama prisoner while it determines whether the procedure of lethal injection violates the Eighth Amendment, which forbids cruel and unusual punishment.

The ruling came a month after the hearing of arguments in a case filed in Kentucky, on behalf of death row inmates Ralph Baze and Thomas C. Bowling, that since September has put a de facto moratorium on all executions by lethal injection.

The case harkens back to 2006 when Clarence Edward Hill, an African-American convicted of murdering a police officer in Pensacola, Fla., challenged Florida's lethal injection procedure.

On death row from 1983 until 2006, Hill was originally sentenced to death by electrocution, but a state law changed it to lethal injection in 2000. But he wasn't having anything to do with it.

In a sense, Hill became the poster child against lethal injection, the most popular form of execution in the United States. Used by nearly all states with death penalties, the pro-

cedure requires the use of three different chemicals in sequence — 1) an anesthetic to numb the body, 2) a chemical to paralyze muscles and stop breathing, and 3) a chemical to stop the heart-beat.

Improper administration of the anesthetic could result in a very painful experience, one you wouldn't wish on your worst enemies. In a 2006, editorial, headlined, "Lethal Cruelty," *The New York Times* concluded that when poorly administered, lethal injection, considered by some to be more humane than the electric chair, "can in fact be particularly barbaric."

Earlier that year — on January 24, 2006 — Hill was just minutes away from the other side, strapped down to a gurney and hooked up to intravenous tubes awaiting his fate. He got a last-minute stay, courtesy of the Supreme Court. And while the nation's high court didn't rule on whether use of the three chemicals was unconstitutional, the justices did agree unanimously that Hill had the right to make a claim against the state's method.



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In June of 2006, the court kicked the lawsuit back to the lower courts, who unfortunately ruled against Hill, contending that he didn't file his claim early enough. An appeal went all the way back to the Supreme Court, which denied a second stay. On September 20, 2006, Hill was put to death using the method he fought so hard against.

"The idea of a 'humane execution' is a contradiction in terms," observed Jamie Fellner, senior counsel for the U.S. Program at Human Rights Watch, last month after oral arguments in the Kentucky case.

"But if states are going to put people to death, they must choose the drugs and methods that carry the least risk of pain and suffering for the condemned."

Because lethal injection appears to be a medical procedure, it is a method of execution is perceived to be humane. When it is administered properly, it is humane. But when it's not administered properly, it most certainly is not.

The National Urban League has always opposed the death penalty because it tends

to disproportionately affect Blacks, who are less able to afford adequate representation when accused of running afoul of the law. From 1976 to 2007, over one-third of executed death row inmates were Black.

In 2006, according to Amnesty International, the United States ranked sixth in the world in terms of execution count — behind China, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Sudan. That's very interesting company to keep, especially for a nation that prides itself in being the world's greatest democracy and beacon of freedom.

If our nation is going to legalize an act as inhumane as execution, we, at the very least, owe it to the condemned to make it as humane as possible.

Justice Harry Blackmun, once famously proclaimed that "I no longer shall tinker with the machinery of death."

The National Urban League agrees, especially if it entails senseless suffering. That is why we very strongly urge the justices to see it Blackmun's way later this year when a final ruling comes down. We are supposed to be a nation of civilized, concerned and humane citizens, not a nation of savages.

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system and changing it for good. As Vernon Jordan, veteran politician and a Clinton supporter, has recently admitted, "It's hard to stop a movement."

Movement is the correct term, and I haven't seen anything like it since the Kennedy-Nixon election in 1960. It was the energized youth that gave Kennedy that narrow victory. If Obama pulls this off, it will be the new forces he encouraged to get into his camp. They are inspired, energized and working places that have never been worked

before. He understands this, and the others are still trying to figure it out.

When people ask, "What has Obama ever done?" The retort will soon become: "He organized this campaign." There hasn't been anything like it in many decades. Whether he wins or not, the effort is one of vision and excellence. Leaders have the ability to notice "change" when the timing is right. Those who do not recognize it enter into the category of "out dated," which never wins.

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apartheid. Eighty-four percent of the death penalty cases out of Philadelphia are African-Americans, who make up 56 percent of the death row inmates. The way the current system operates, it is biased against minorities. Oftentimes, court appointed attorneys are overworked or inexperienced and cannot put up an adequate defense for a client. I consider this problem to be a sleeping monster."

Hoover said that most of Pennsylvania's death row prisoners were too poor to afford a lawyer for their initial trial, and were left with

whatever representation the state provided for them.

Hoover also said that even after six former inmates have been freed from death row since the death penalty was reinstated in Pennsylvania that the Commonwealth has not implemented any policies that would make sending an innocent person to death row less likely. "We're calling for the state Judiciary Committee to hold a hearing on the ABA report," Hoover said.

Larry Miller writes for the Philadelphia Tribune.