

Super delegates finding their way towards Obama

Civil rights leader Lewis switches to Obama

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Civil rights leader John Lewis dropped his support for Hillary Rodham Clinton's presidential bid Wednesday in favor of Barack Obama.

Lewis, a Democratic congressman from Atlanta, is the most prominent Black leader to defect from Clinton's campaign in the face of near-unanimous Black support for Obama in recent voting.

He also is a superdelegate who gets a vote at this summer's national convention in Denver.

In a written statement, Lewis said Obama's campaign "represents the beginning of a new movement in American political history" and that he wants "to be on the side of the people."

"After taking some time for serious reflection on this issue, I have decided that when I cast my vote as a



Presidential hopeful Sen. Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., waves as she and Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., meet during a campaign stop in Atlanta where he initially announced his support for Clinton in this Oct. 12, 2007 file photo.

superdelegate at the Democratic convention, it is my duty... to express the will of the people," the statement said.

Lewis' endorsement had

been a coveted prize among the Democratic candidates thanks to his standing as one of the most prominent civil rights leaders of the 1960s.

"John Lewis is an Ameri-

can hero and a giant of the civil rights movement, and I am deeply honored to have his support," Obama said in a statement.

Clinton, questioned about Lewis during a satellite interview with Houston television station KTRK, said: "I understand he's been under tremendous pressure. He's been my friend. He will always be my friend. At the end of the day it's not about who is supporting us, it's about what we're presenting, what our positions are, what our experiences and qualifications are and I think that voters are going to decide."

Lewis first announced his Clinton endorsement in October and has appeared on her behalf on television and at events across the country, at one point accusing Obama supporters of trying to fan the flames of race against her. Clinton has frequently cited

his support in trying to establish her credentials among minority voters, saying she saw her campaign as a continuation of his work.

But Lewis came under intense pressure to get behind Obama after his constituents supported the Illinois senator roughly 3-to-1 in Georgia's Feb. 5 primary, and about 90 percent of Black voters statewide voted for Obama, according to exit polls.

The support among Black voters nationwide to Obama's candidacy mirrors Lewis' Georgia district.

His change of heart follows a similar move by Rep. David Scott, a Black Democrat who represents a neighboring district.

It also comes a week after the Rev. Markel Hutchins, a young Atlanta minister, announced he would challenge Lewis in the Democratic congressional primary this sum-

mer. Hutchins, 30, has seized on Lewis' waffling in the presidential contest as evidence that the 68-year-old congressman is out of touch.

"Today's announcement by Representative Lewis was clearly prompted by political expediency," Hutchins said Wednesday.

"It is time for a change. It is time to send somebody to Congress who is actually willing to represent the district."

Earlier this month, Lewis' office disputed media reports that he said he would switch candidates, or was at least re-considering.

But until Wednesday, Lewis refused to answer questions clarifying his position. He said Wednesday afternoon he had called former President Clinton and Sen. Clinton but had not reached them.

Movement eyes Black AIDS crisis

*By Charlene Muhammad
Special to Sentinel-Voice*

LOS ANGELES (NNPA) - AIDS activists, civil rights leaders, celebrities and organizations have joined the Black AIDS Institute of Los Angeles to announce goals of an escalating campaign to stop the spread of AIDS across America.

"This is an emergency! Every hour of every day, somewhere in America, an African-American is dying from AIDS... two African-Americans are being diagnosed with this disease. Each of these deaths and infections is tragic for a host of reasons, but chief among them is that every infection is preventable. And in most cases, every AIDS case in the United States is treatable," said Phill Wilson, executive director of the Institute at a recent press conference.

He was joined by Stevie Wonder, owner of KJLH Radio, Rev. Al Sharpton of the National Action Network and others to announce goals of the Black AIDS Mobilization effort.

The goals include reducing the HIV/AIDS rates in Black America by 50 percent; increasing the percentage of HIV-positive Black communities who know their HIV status by 50 percent; increasing the same percentage of Blacks in appropriate care and treatment; and decreasing the HIV/AIDS stigma in Black communities.

The effort gained momentum when national Black organizations, faith-based groups, entertainment organizations and elected officials formed a united front nearly a year ago.

Wilson released the Institute's 2008 State of AIDS in Black America report, which found that AIDS continues to be a "Black problem" in America: 70 percent of new adolescent infections are Black; 67 percent of new infections in women are Black; 63 percent of newborns infected are Black; 40 percent of new male infections are Black; and as much as 50 percent of Black, gay men are infected—even higher than in Africa.

"Today is an amazing day because it is a day that we start to really get the word out to the community what's going on with our numbers, which are astounding. It's our job in whatever of this media business is to spread the

(See AIDS, Page 5)

Howard students nix anti-braids policy

*By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice*

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Grace Salvant, a 19-year-old public relations student at Howard University, needed a job. Trying to help her parents pay her college tuition, she went to reapply for her old server's job at a Ruby Tuesday restaurant in the heart of Washington, D.C., where she worked just last year.

But Salvant was shocked by what she was told upon reapplying for her old job.

She said she was told by a Black manager that Ruby Tuesday's corporate policy would require her to remove her braided hair style in order to be rehired. She said she was told it was an "image" thing.

"I looked at him and I was like, 'What?'" She said she had worn the braids when she worked there a year ago, but the manager told her it was a new policy and that she could start work if she took her braids out" said the Brooklyn, N.Y., native.

"There's no reason why they should have such a policy like that that discriminates against people who look like me," said Salvant. "We have been braiding our hair for centuries. And it just seems as if that was directed toward us as a race, as my gender... I feel like a larger majority of my race and my gender are being excluded because of the way that we

choose to represent our culture."

The college sophomore took action. She called the Ruby Tuesday corporate headquarters in Maryville, Tenn., and complained, only to hear a corporate employee defend the policy. Then she collected approximately 500 names of Howard students, faculty and staff in protest of what she had been told by the restaurant management was an anti-braids policy at Ruby Tuesday, which has more than 925 restaurants across the nation.

A spokesman for the Ruby Tuesday corporate headquarters in Maryville, Tenn., initially confirmed the

anti-braids policy in a tape recorded interview with NNPA on Thursday, Feb. 21.

"It does say that our servers can't wear multiple braids. That's true of any gender or any race," said Ruby Tuesday spokesman Richard Johnson.

Told that Miss Salvant had worn braids as a Ruby Tuesday server just last year, Johnson said, "It's possible that it has changed within the last year. That's very possible."

This was not in any way intended to be discriminatory or based on any kind of racial or ethnic decision."

But then something changed. After this reporter

told Johnson that the NNPA Wire Service, the Black Press of America, serves a membership of more than 200 Black-owned newspapers across the nation and that Salvant had already collected more than 500 names on a petition against the policy that would disparately affect Black people, he responded, "I understand what you are saying... I appreciate you sharing it with us, and I will share these concerns with the people that set this policy."

Within one hour, Johnson had called back with a reversal of the policy — blaming local restaurant managers for a misinterpretation of the (See Anti-Braids, Page 4)



THE ACCUSED

Bobby Cutts Jr., center, and his attorneys Carolyn K. Ranke, left, and Fernando Mack watch the jury leave the courtroom during the sentencing phase in Cutts' murder trial on Tuesday in Canton, Ohio. Cutts was sentenced Wednesday to life in prison with a chance of parole after 57 years for killing his pregnant lover and their unborn child, avoiding a possible death sentence. The crime has shocked the nation.