

*Barack displays leadership skills***Michelle Obama: Wright issue an 'opportunity'**

By Cash Michaels
Special to Sentinel-Voice
GREENSBORO (NNPA) — For political pundits, the explosive controversy spawned by the fiery videotaped comments of Rev. Jeremiah Wright was a near-fatal blow to the historic presidential aspirations of Sen. Barack Obama.

But to the Democratic hopeful's wife, Michelle, it was an important "opportunity," long ignored by others, to lead the nation towards a critical dialogue on race, and bridging the entrenched gaps that divide the American people.

An opportunity her husband gallantly seized, Mrs. Obama adds, to bring about the hope and change she says America "desperately" needs.

In an exclusive interview with *The Carolinian* upon her momentous first visit to North Carolina April 8 to campaign for her husband,

Michelle Obama, 44, spoke candidly about how she encouraged him to leverage the national outrage over their former pastor's incendiary remarks about race and American foreign policy — remarks Sen. Obama has repeatedly denounced — to reopen the important dialogue on racial divisions in the country.

"The conversation that Barack and I had was, 'This is the opportunity; this is the reason why you're here; this is why you're in this race, because there is a perspective, a voice that you can bring to this conversation that is needed, and that no one else, can do or say,'" Mrs. Obama said prior to her appearance before over 5,700 enthusiastic supporters at N.C. State University's Reynolds Coliseum Tuesday night.

"What I said to Barack was, 'I know you have it in your head, I know exactly



Michelle Obama spoke candidly about the national outrage over former pastor's incendiary remarks about race and U.S. foreign policy to spark dialogue.

what you want to say to the American people about this, and how complex it is.' And this is what leadership is all

about. This is the opportunity, and this is just one example of how Barack will have to lead."

Black women starting businesses

By Erin Evans
Special to Sentinel-Voice
WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Black women professionals are changing their priorities.

Many have stopped dreaming about the highly coveted corner office because owning it would be better. They have knocked down the corporate ladder. Instead, they have built an escalator to get them to the top, making entrepreneurship a priority — not just an option.

"You don't have time to think about relationships, friendships, families," said Syreeta McDaniel Houston, a business consultant. "I would call my family from the office at 10 at night."

Her childhood and family life are two of the reasons she said sparked her desire to start her own business. Her father was a contractor and her mom sold Mary Kay products. While growing up, her father could attend her school programs during the day because he controlled his daily schedule. Her mother got home every evening at 5:30 to help her with homework. This nurturing environment helped her grow into a success.

"Ultimately, my parents had my back," she said.

Now she addresses poten-

tial clients at luncheons and organizational meetings, she greets them with, "I am Syreeta Houston of McDaniel Consulting. We write business plans."

This simple catchphrase and extensive experience keeps her business thriving in 21 states. She listens to a dream, inputs her ideas and in approximately three weeks produces a framework for the launch of a new venture.

In the past 10 years, Houston and several other budding entrepreneurs have left the corporate boardroom for an office building with their name on it. According to the Center for Women's Business Research, African-American women-owned businesses increased 147 percent between 1997 and 2006. This accounts for 770,396 firms that generate over \$29 billion in sales based on U.S. Census Bureau statistics.

Originally from Philadelphia, Houston, 35, started McDaniel Consulting in Dallas in 2001 after quitting her job at Ernst & Young, LLP as a senior international tax and compensation consultant.

Initially, her family could not understand why she would leave a \$56,000 salary to start a business. But in her mind, she was stepping out on faith to leave corporate

America where she said she had "no time to breathe," to start a family and be her own boss.

She volunteered with the Small Business Development Center in Dallas for six months and realized that there were several entrepreneurs with good ideas but without a solid business plan. Her ability to communicate effectively and a love for research helped launch her business.

Then, her life changed. She dressed better, felt better about herself and formed new relationships. She married Kevin Houston in 2002, and he serves as the head of operations for McDaniel Consulting.

Houston earned her bachelor's and master's degree in business administration from Temple University. As a part of the international business program, she worked in Paris and Donetsk, Ukraine.

Marc Morial, president of the National Urban League, praised Black women as "the backbone of the Black family," in the 2008 State of Black America report. "When Black women hurt, the American family suffers," Morial said.

So, for some Black women, the decision to leave the corporate arena was to

maintain a functioning family life. In this case, schedule flexibility and a drama-free environment trump a corporate level salary.

Jacqueline Smith is a full-time entrepreneur and full-time mother. She splits her time between running Diva Day Spa and home-schooling her 10-year-old son, Jackson in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

"I'm an educator first," says Smith, who graduated from Aurora University with a bachelor's degree in elementary education. "My son is my priority."

Smith, 47, worked for Bristol-Myers Squibb, a global pharmaceutical company in Boca Raton, Fla. for 10 years before she started her day spa in 1999. Since then, she has established her own skin care line and looks forward to moving her business closer to the beach.

She said she prefers the peaceful and relaxing atmosphere of her spa to the "chatter and drama" of the corporate world.

But, it wasn't easy. Raising capital and promoting her spa were hard to do. Smith sat down with several local entrepreneurs over lunch to understand the talent, drive and money it took to get started.

Houston says in starting a (See *Entrepreneur*, Page 13)

The much-heralded speech, "A More Perfect Union," was delivered March 18 from Philadelphia in response to the media firestorm over selective portions of Pastor Wright's past sermons at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago that were played repeatedly on television and conservative talk radio.

In them, Wright was heard chastising the United States for its foreign policy in the Middle East just days after the 9/11 attacks; accusing the US government to devising the HIV/AIDS virus to target the Black community; and accusing "rich White people" of running the country at the expense of communities of color.

At one point, fiery preacher was seen saying, "God damn America."

Critics from all quarters blasted Rev. Wright (who has since retired from pastoring), calling him unpatriotic and a man who preached hate, ignoring what many countered was Wright's "prophetic voice" and duty to condemn injustice and oppression.

They also blasted Wright's friendship with Nation of Islam leader Min. Louis Farrakhan, who many Whites accuse of being anti-Semitic.

Seething critics adamantly maintained that Sen. Obama — a 20-year member of Trinity United — had to have heard some of those "hateful" remarks before, and should have left the church years ago.

Obama pointedly denied hearing or having knowledge of the publicized remarks, though he did admit to hearing others.

Because Rev. Wright was considered Obama's pastor and "spiritual adviser," had married him and Michelle, and baptized both of their daughters, pundits surmised that the presidential candidate must harbor some of the same harsh feelings about the nation, and thus, was unfit to be commander-in-chief.

Obama countered that he loved America, especially because of the opportunity it gave to him, the biracial child of a mixed marriage, and multicultural family.

On March 18, the Illinois Democrat addressed a waiting nation from Philadelphia, condemning Wright's remarks, though understanding their origin, refusing to dis-

own the man or his church because of their decades of nationally recognized work in the community addressing AIDS, homelessness and poverty.

Obama, 46, the son of a White mother and Black African father, facing a tight protracted primary battle with Democratic rival Sen. Hillary Clinton, then went further, chronicling the nation's tortured history with race and racism, exposing the pent-up anger in both the working-class Black and White communities, and challenging the nation to find productive ways to not only address those differences, but also their impact on education, economic opportunity and America's future.

"I chose to run for the presidency at this moment in history because I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together," Obama said, "unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction — towards a better future for of children and our grandchildren."

"I was incredibly proud of what he said," Mrs. Obama said about her husband of 16 years.

"Everything he said spoke to me in so many ways. Every word that he uttered was clarifying and wise, and kind, and unifying... And it's just the beginning... Barack is not naive," the Chicago, Illinois native and Harvard Law School graduate continued.

"He knows that this conversation doesn't begin and end with a wonderful speech. This is the beginning of a long dialogue that we have to have. And Barack is the leader that will have it, unlike many before who have just shied away from it because it's hard. I'm not afraid of the conversation," she added. "I'm desperate for us to have it so that we can move beyond it. So I was grateful that he did it, and proud of how he did it."

That pride was evident during Michelle Obama's remarks during campaign stops in Harrisburg, Winston-Salem and Raleigh, where she consistently talked about the (See *Opportunity*, Page 14)