

Open letter to would-be chief Barack Obama

By Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

I write this "open letter" to Barack Obama because I am concerned about one recently written by Harold Ford Jr. That letter urged Obama to try harder to connect with White blue-collar voters by engaging them in states like Kentucky and Indiana in the fall elections. And while I would not argue that he should ignore these states, I worry that the agenda he would use to attract conservative voters could weaken the force of change.

To begin with, worry about the blue-collar vote is based on the perception of their strength as a part of the Democratic base, but this year will probably not reflect the 1980s when they went over to the Republican party en masse or in 1992 when they were a large part of the Ross Perot vote.

This year, blue-collar Whites are hurting more than any other time in recent memory and more than any other part of the political demographic with: significant job losses, high prices for everything from milk to gas, the loss of their homes and disaffection with the war policies of the Bush administration. They have been let down by Republicans on both domestic and foreign policy, and although about 20 percent in recent polls have said they would vote McCain if Obama were

the choice in the Fall, the issue is what would happen to the rest.

I think this year the blue-collar constituency is likely to split. One group could go with McCain; another group may buy in to Obama's promise of change to an agenda that favors lower-income citizens; and still another group, frustrated by the choices, is likely to stay home. This means that while the split in their votes may be a threat to the Democratic base it could be neutralized by the dynamism created by the Obama campaign.

There is the distinct possibility that a great deal of the loss of blue-collar Whites could be made up by the new coalition that Obama promises to bring into the fall election. Estimates by the Associated Press are that the new voters Democrats have attracted in the primaries thus far amount to 3.5 to 4 million. If this proportion holds up in the fall elections, one would have to triple the number of new voters to about 10-12 million. This substantial number of change voters should be the focus of the campaign rather than lavishing resources on voters in the conservative



RON WALTERS

heartland of the nation that will most likely not vote for Barack Obama in any case.

The other path to increasing the change constituency is to focus on enhancing the turnout of those groups that have shown they are more likely to vote for a Democratic ticket, Blacks and Hispanics.

To be sure, some of the increase in new primary election voters is reflected in the increase in Blacks and Hispanics, but more could be done in the general election to increase these numbers, especially among the youth who are trending away from the Republican party by astounding numbers.

In 2004, 35 percent of Blacks and 66 percent of Hispanics were not registered, and 44 percent of Blacks and 72 percent of Hispanics who were eligible did not vote. The addition of new voters to the Democratic base should put into perspective much of the speculation about Hillary Clinton's strength in so-called swing states like Ohio, Michigan and Pennsylvania by considering the new states such voters might deliver.

Finally, some of Obama's perceived weak-

nesses are based on head-to-head polls during the primary season, but the tradition is that these numbers do not necessarily hold up in the fall.

For example, in 1998, Michael Dukakis was ahead of George H. W. Bush but Bush won; in 1992, Bill Clinton trailed him in the primary elections but Clinton won; and in 2000, Al Gore was ahead of George Bush but Bush was given the election.

Therefore, the moderate wing of the Democratic Party and the punditry that seems obsessed with blue-collar voters should not dictate to the Obama campaign a strategy that both feeds into Obama's weakness among blue-collar Whites and challenges the strength of a change-oriented campaign and administration if he wins the presidency.

Such a strategy is disrespectful of Blacks by suggesting that they would stand still while Obama pursues conservative interests to their detriment, in effect, exchanging the progressive substance of change for race.

I think this is a dangerous course the Obama campaign should avoid.

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African unity: Progress slow but understanding key

By Nicole C. Lee
Special to Sentinel-Voice

May 25 was Africa Day, a day on which millions of people around the world celebrated African unity.

But for more than 25,000 immigrants displaced by South Africa's worse violence since the apartheid era, African unity is a bitter dream.

The violence began as mob attacks against immigrants in the Alexandra Township, north of Johannesburg in the Gauteng Province. It has shocked Africans, as well as the rest of the Diaspora. The attacks are not only on foreigners, but, as categorized by the African National Congress, is also "an assault on the values of our democratic society."

The Congress of South African Trade Unions has condemned the violence and is working with the NGO Doctors without Borders to identify hotspots and to provide staff to accompany doctors.

We have seen the violence spread quickly throughout Gauteng into the provinces of

Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal. TransAfrica Forum's contacts in South Africa have told us of surreal and frightening scenarios. They have reported that 4 million Zimbabweans are there, on top of the Mozambicans, Nigerians and Somalians.

Governments and organizations are scrambling to determine the genesis of the violence. Many of us remember this type of politically motivated violence in South Africa before 1994.

In addition to spontaneous episodes of mob violence and coordinated criminal gang activity, we are now seeing that some attacks have been systematic and well organized. Officials have likened the violence to the third forces of the apartheid government operatives, which were found to be responsible for much of the apparently Black-on-Black violence before the first democratic elections in



NICOLE C. LEE

South Africa in 1994.

The violence represents the intersection of two major unresolved issues. First, there is the case of Zimbabwe's economic and political crises, which has resulted in the creation of millions of economic refugees, many of whom have fled to South Africa.

Secondly, despite the early promise of South Africa's majority government, it has been unable to adequately resolve the economic legacy of apartheid. Millions of South Africans are unemployed, impoverished and live without access to clean water, electricity or healthcare.

Migrants are seen as further threats to their ability to achieve an adequate standard of living.

Zimbabweans, the largest immigrant group, have born the brunt of the recent violence. Horrific attacks have seen victims burnt, hacked and stoned. Many victims have

been injured, and there are widespread reports of rape. Migrants from other African countries, as well as some South African nationals, have been caught up in the violence. Thousands have now fled their homes and sought sanctuary in police stations, churches and premises used by aid groups.

In Durban, a Nigerian-owned tavern was attacked by a mob of 150 men who, in addition to beating patrons, also ransacked the tavern and stole cash, liquor, cell phones and jewelry, pointing to the criminal element engaged in the riots, as well.

To date, at least four "community leaders" have been arrested for inciting the xenophobic attacks, and a total of 400 people have been arrested countrywide for participating in the attacks.

South Africa's leading organizations, including the African National Congress, the Congress of South African Trade Unions and its affiliates, along with the social movements and faith-based organizations should be applauded. Their quick mobilization efforts to condemn the violence and to offer shelter to the victims have saved countless numbers of lives.

It is tragic that following centuries of fighting colonial rule, neo-colonialism and, now, corporate-led globalization, some in our communities continue to see enemies instead of allies: allies in the ongoing struggle to overturn the systems and global rules of inequality that keep the majority of us in economic poverty.

Africa can and will, one day, celebrate Africa Day in the glory and tradition that makes the Continent great, but only when Africa's children throughout the Diaspora to stop the needless killing of each other and turn a keen eye to the global forces that created the conditions we fight about.

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Alford

(Continued from Page 8)

was the "back breaker." In its haste to provide big contracts to the rebuilding, FEMA and Homeland Security let out billions of dollars of sole-source contracts to these exotic named ANC's. The backlash was immense, and then they began to put up barriers to subsequent contracts against the ANC's.

The National Black Chamber of Commerce led all "war parties" in blocking further contracting for ANC's in the Gulf rebuilding. It began to hurt them, and their leadership got together and approached us for negotiation. We rebuffed them. Later, however, a few of my board members asked for permission to discuss the possibilities.

I relented. What came out of that were some trial joint ventures and teaming agreements that culminated in positive business contracts involving both sides. Thus, I began to listen to them. I even went to a couple of their outreach meetings and we began dialogue.

The rest is history. Today, we have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the ANC's. Recently, we took more than 20 business owners to Anchorage for matchmaking and strategy.

We are re-opening the door to the Gulf rebuilding for the ANC's — providing they partner with NBCC members.

So far, we have had immediate and impressive success. Multimillion dollar joint

ventures and multi-year teaming agreements are going down.

We have learned that working together makes both sides healthy, and no one really has to suffer. So here we are networking in Alaska — fishing for halibut, viewing the glaciers and watching the Sun set at 11:30 p.m. only to rise again at 4:00 a.m.

The land is magnificent and lovely while at the same time the people are genuine and have good hearts, after all. We are all God's children. We just have to learn how to communicate and reach out to our common interests.

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