

Obama bracing for racial ads

WASHINGTON (AP) — A presidential candidate who's named Hussein and wears a turban? A building that's called the White House but run by a Black guy?

Those political images and ideas already have found their way onto TV airwaves and campaign buttons, possible harbingers of racially tinged messages in a general election involving the first Black candidate to head a major party's ticket.

Though the election is more than four months away, the campaigns of Democrat Barack Obama and Republican John McCain are shaping their strategies for dealing with such appeals.

The Obama campaign vows to fight back fiercely and fast, not repeating John Kerry's mistake of waiting to respond to the 2004 "Swift Boat" ads that Democrats saw as a smear of his military record. McCain's camp is alert for attacks on its man, too.

The McCain campaign promises to condemn any race-based political appeals. But it also insists it won't stand still for false charges of racism or for allegations merely aimed at preventing criticism of Obama on legitimate issues.

"Every word will be twisted to make it about race," said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., a McCain friend and adviser. When he and others confront Obama on issues such as national security and the economy, Graham said, it will have "nothing to do with him being an African-American."

Obama adviser David Axelrod said the Democrat's campaign will be on high alert for code words or innuendo meant to play on voters' racial sentiments. "We're going to be aggressive about pushing back on anything that we feel is inappropriate or misleading," he said.

It's not enough for McCain to say he cannot control independent groups airing racially charged ads on his behalf, Axelrod said, noting that the "Swift Boat Veterans for Truth" was independent of President Bush's campaign.

"We've seen this movie before," he said. "And we're not going to be passive in the face of those kinds of tactics."

Racially charged criticism of Obama already has surfaced in several states.

Shortly before North Carolina's May 6 primary, the state Republican Party

aired a TV ad linking Democratic candidates to Obama, who was described as "too extreme" because of his ties to the retired Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr.

Obama eventually ended his relationship with Wright, his longtime pastor who had been criticized for sermons in which he cursed America and accused the government of conspiring against Blacks. The state party ignored McCain's repeated calls to kill the ad.

In South Dakota, a TV station briefly aired an ad that was edited to show Obama saying, "we are no longer a Christian nation, we are also a Muslim nation." It omitted his saying, in the same speech, that the United States is not solely a Christian nation.

The ad, which included a photo of Obama wearing a turban as part of a traditional outfit given to him in Africa, concluded with a man saying: "It's time for people of faith to stand against Barack Hussein Obama." A group called the Coalition Against Anti-Christian Rhetoric paid for the ad, which stations quickly dropped after the Obama campaign complained.

The Texas Republican

Party recently cut ties with a vendor whose political buttons at a party convention included one saying: "If Obama is president ... will we still call it The White House?" Texas GOP spokesman Hans Klingler said, "we will neither tolerate nor profit from bigotry."

Political professionals differ on how much racially tinged campaigning might emerge this summer and fall. Terry Holt, a GOP strategist who worked on President Bush's 2004 re-election campaign, said Republicans know that McCain has no tolerance for such tactics. For the McCain campaign, he said, "it's not about what Obama looks like, it's about what he's going to act like."

"I think we can have an honest and tough debate without race being a major factor," Holt said.

U.S. politics has a long history of racially charged campaigns. Opponents hit Democrat Michael Dukakis with a now-infamous TV ad showing Willie Horton, a Black inmate who raped a White woman while free on a weekend release program that Dukakis had supported.

Former Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., defeated a Black opponent after airing an ad in which a White man's hands crumpled a letter informing him that he had lost a job he

Muslim women get an apology

DETROIT (AP) — Barack Obama personally apologized last week to two Detroit-area women who were barred from sitting behind him during a campaign rally earlier this week because they wore Islamic headscarves.

The Democratic presidential candidate released a statement saying he had "reached out" to the women, Shima Abdelfadeel and Hebba Aref.

"I spoke with Ms. Abdelfadeel, and expressed my deepest apologies for the incident that occurred with volunteers at the event in Detroit," he said. "The actions of these volunteers were unacceptable and in no way reflect any policy of my campaign. I take deepest offense to and will continue to fight against discrimination against people of any religious group or background. Our campaign is about bringing people together, and I'm grateful that Ms. Abdelfadeel accepted our apology and I hope Ms. Aref and any who were offended accept my apology as well."

Aides said Obama left a message for Aref.

Aref said that Obama campaign volunteers had invited them to sit behind the podium during a rally for the Illinois senator at Joe Louis Arena. But she said they were told that women wearing hijabs, the traditional Muslim head scarves, couldn't sit behind the podium — and in front of TV cameras.

deserved to a minority.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson, an authority on political communications at the University of Pennsylvania, said overt racial references are risky. But more subtle ads might stir doubts in voters' minds that could lead, in part, to racially tinged subjects, she said.

"The appeal that suggests that Senator Obama is 'out of touch with American values' invites audiences to ask what 'American' means,"

Jamieson said. Are voters being asked to link Obama to Wright's anti-American remarks? she said. "To question his patriotism? To fill in their fears and stereotypes? Foreigner? Muslim? For some, that appeal may elicit race-based reactions."

Republican strategist Tony Fabrizio said McCain and his supporters would be ill-advised to focus on issues such as Obama's ties to

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Energy

(Continued from Page 1) spokesman Brian Rogers said.

Obama said his energy plan would include taxing profits from oil companies and using that money to help families pay their energy bills.

He also said he would "close the loophole that allows corporations like Enron to engage in unregulated speculation that ends up artificially driving up the price of oil."

Obama said he would raise the fuel standards and invest \$150 billion over the next 10 years in alternate sources of energy.

"My entire energy plan will produce three times the oil savings that John McCain's ever could — and what's more, it will actually decrease our dependence on oil while his will only grow our addiction further," he said.

McCain told voters Tuesday that energy efficiency "should begin at home" and proposed that the federal government



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama took questions and listened to comments from the audience during his visit Tuesday. Obama addressed energy policy, energy jobs in Nevada and the future of Yucca Mountain.

purchase more environmentally friendly vehicles.

"Every year, the federal government buys upwards of 60,000 cars and other vehicles, not including military or law-enforcement vehicles," McCain said at an environmental roundtable in Santa Barbara, California.

"From now on, we're going to make those civilian vehicles flex-fuel-capable,

plug-in hybrid or cars fueled by clean natural gas. If our great goal is to move American transportation toward lower carbon emissions, then it should start with the federal fleet."

McCain also proposed updating federal offices to be more efficient, a move that he said could "save taxpayers billions of dollars in energy costs."

Texas GOP cuts off vendor producing racist buttons

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The Texas Republican Party is distancing itself from a vendor who sold campaign buttons at last weekend's state convention that asked, "If Obama is president... will we still call it the White House?"

The state GOP said that it will donate the \$1,500 rent it collected from the vendor, Republicanmarket.com, to Midwestern flood victims.

State GOP spokesman Hans Klingler said the party does not vet the merchandise being sold, but officials plan to discuss doing so in the future.

The button sales at the convention in Houston were first reported in *The Dallas Morning News*.

"This vendor need not apply to another Texas GOP state convention," Klingler said.

"We will neither tolerate

nor profit from bigotry."

Barack Obama, who clinched the Democratic nomination this month, is the first Black presidential nominee of a major party.

The vendor, Jonathan Alcox, said he was trying to be funny and based the button on a political cartoon. He said he made 12 buttons and sold four, two of them to reporters.

"We're into humor, not racism," said Alcox, who described himself as an Independent who may vote for Obama in November. "Why would I do that purposely? I thought it was funny."

The state GOP will bar the vendor from booth space at future events and "encourage him to clean up his act," Klingler said.

"The Republican Party of Texas told me I can never go there again. They're my biggest event," Alcox said. "It's

pretty much put me out of business."

State GOP officials said they also have alerted the Republican National Convention so that Alcox will not be allowed to sell merchandise at the convention in St. Paul, Minn., in September.

The Texas Republican Party, whose platform is often far to the right of the national GOP, has been in hot water over diversity issues before.

In 1998, the Log Cabin Republicans, the nation's largest organization of gay Republicans, was denied a booth at the GOP state convention in Fort Worth and likened to the Ku Klux Klan by a Texas Republican Party spokesman.

"We don't allow pedophiles, transvestites or cross-dressers, either," then-GOP spokesman Robert Black said at the time.