

Obama to Urban League: White House will listen

By Hazel Trice Edney
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ORLANDO (NNPA) The line of people at the Orlando World Center Marriott weaved through the corridors and wrapped around corners as well more than a thousand awaited the opening of the ballroom, where presumptive Democratic nominee Sen. Barack Obama was about to speak.

"Yesterday, the crowd was polite to Sen. John McCain here at the National Urban League Conference. But, today, for Sen. Obama, it's more of a love fest!" reported one excited CBS Radio newsman, among the horde of reporters observing the crowd waiting for Obama.

He was right. People were waiting in line as early as 7 a.m. Saturday morning for the anticipated 2 p.m. speech. The ballroom, which seated well over 1,000 people, had been close to full for presumptive Republican nominee McCain the day before. For Obama, an overflow crowd had to be seated in an adjacent room to watch the speech on close circuit television.

"I stand here before you



Republican presidential candidate, Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., center, and his wife Cindy, greet the crowd after addressing the National Urban League Annual Conference on Friday in Orlando, Fla., McCain stressed equal access to public education in his address.

today feeling no small amount of gratitude. Because I know that my story, and so many other improbable stories, would not be possible without all that the Urban League has done to put opportunity within reach of every American, Obama said in his opening statement to the cheering and applauding crowd. "It's because of the doors you've opened, because of the battles you've fought and won, because of

people in this room and all those who came before you, that I come here today as a candidate for president of the United States of America."

It was two days of raw political campaigning by both candidates for the Black audience thirsting to hear perspectives on socio-economic issues. Marc Morial, NUL president and CEO, sat on a stool close to the podium as both candidates spoke. Morial then asked them ques-

tions based on issues included in the NUL's "Opportunity Compact," a comprehensive report on the state of Black America, which includes extensive research data and policy recommendations.

"This election is about the 47 million people who don't have healthcare — including 1 in 5 African-Americans — people for whom one accident, one illness could mean financial ruin," said Obama,

promising to "guarantee healthcare for anyone who needs it."

On the 2.5 million people facing foreclosure, Obama said he would support tax credits to help low and medium-income families, as well as establish easier ways to refinance mortgage loans.

McCain, who received repeated strong applause during his speech, appeared more comfortable with NUL than he did before the NAACP audience a month ago.

"Equal access to public education has been gained. But, what is the value of access to a failing school? Equal employment opportunity is set firmly down in law. But with jobs becoming scarcer — and 400,000 Americans thrown out of work just this year — that can amount to an equal share of diminished opportunity," McCain said.

But, McCain talked more about education reform than anything, again pitching his support for charter school vouchers, which fell on a silent audience. Most historic African-American groups oppose vouchers because they take money that could

go to public schools and give it to private schools. "Some parents may choose a better public school. Some may choose a private school. Many will choose a charter school. No entrenched bureaucracy or union should deny parents that choice and children that opportunity," he told the quiet audience.

The most enthusiastic applause during the McCain speech was for his promise to reform school budgets "to put the money and the responsibilities where they belong — in the office of the school principle."

Still, it was Obama who drew obvious awe from on-lookers.

It was amazing, everything I thought it was going to be — inspirational and really hopeful," said a beaming Latoya Hoflin, who will be "15 in two weeks."

Hoflin, from Atlanta, says since she's not old enough to vote, she will "inspire others and try to get other people to vote for him."

The Obama enthusiasm crossed the age spectrum. Dennis Rahim Watson, president and CEO of the National Black Leadership (See Urban, Page 10)

Ludacris' Obama song could turn off possible supporters

ATLANTA (AP) — Ludacris' new song, "Politics as Usual," may have cost him one of his biggest fans, Democratic presidential hopeful Barack Obama.

And for good reason: It points up the dilemma facing the nation's potential first Black president, who wants the support of the influential hip-hop community but needs to steer clear of the controversy so commonly associated with its music.

Ludacris' "Politics as Usual" alludes to an imminent victory for Obama by handing out major put-downs to his rivals. It dismisses Hillary Clinton as a vice presidential candidate — "that (expletive) is irrelevant" — and says presumed Republican nominee John McCain doesn't belong in "any chair unless he's paralyzed." Obama, usually a Ludacris fan, was quick to distance himself.

"While Ludacris is a talented individual, he should be ashamed of these lyrics," Obama campaign spokesman Bill Burton said in an email

statement. He also called the song "outrageously offensive."

Calls to Ludacris' publicist and manager were not immediately returned.

That Obama's one-time praise for Ludacris has turned to scorn really is politics as usual, said John McWhorter, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, a conservative think tank, and author of "All About the Beat: Why Hip-Hop Can't Save Black America."

"Of course, Obama and his people have to condemn the rap, because it does say some vulgar things," he said. "If you're running for president, you're supposed to be an upstanding individual."

While hip-hop fans are expected to be a factor in the November election, the song is not.

"Hip-hoppers and Black folks understand the game," said Jeff Johnson, an activist and host of an upcoming news and public affairs show on Black Entertainment Television. "They're thinking, 'An Obama who knows how

to play the game is still better for me than a McCain.'"

"There are a ton of people who clearly are looking for (Obama) to denounce this in order to continue to view him as credible," Johnson said. "He, for political purposes, has to separate himself from anything controversially Black."

During the Democratic primary, Obama was bolstered by the Black vote, and he has pledged to boost Black participation by 30 percent in November — potentially adding nearly 2 million votes in 11 Southern states, enough to tip the balance in several states that have been solidly Republican.

The hip-hop generation stands poised to help him meet his goal.

Last week, the nonpartisan group Hip-Hop Caucus and hip-hop star T.I. launched the "Respect My Vote" campaign. The group conservatively estimates they will register 75,000 voters on the ground and 150,000 on the Internet, focusing mainly (See Ludacris, Page 10)

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