

NAACP examines agendas on Black issues

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — An NAACP presidential candidates' questionnaire reveals starkly different views between Democratic Sen. Barack Obama and Republican Sen. John McCain, giving voters more in-depth perspectives on the candidates' racial and civil rights views as they go to the polls on Tuesday.

Issues that disparately affect Black people, such as affirmative action, voting rights for ex-felony offenders, voting rights for D.C. congressional representatives, racial profiling, police brutality, mandatory minimum sentences, and the death penalty are just a few of the issues that have barely — if ever — been publicly addressed by either candidate during the intense race.

"It was made clear at the time that the responses received would be reproduced and distributed to the NAACP members and communities so that we could make informed decisions when going to the polls," said Hilary O. Shelton, director of the NAACP Washington Bureau. "The questionnaire contained... issues of crucial importance to the NAACP and the communities we serve."

The 39-page document, compiled by the historically nonpartisan civil rights organization over the course of a year, allowed the candidates to give candid views in 200 words or less. For space and brevity, the NNPA News Service has excerpted quotes from the responses. The following are excerpts from the questionnaire:

—What specific actions will you take regarding equal opportunity programs?

McCAIN: "The affirmative action remedies designed forty years ago should be re-examined... Our efforts to promote equal opportunity should focus on those who are disadvantaged. In access to quality education, we should focus on poorly performing schools that are not effectively educating our students, not on the students' race. In access to government contracting, government set-aside programs should focus on disadvantaged enterprises and employees, not their race, ethnicity, or gender."

OBAMA: "I support affirmative action. When there is strong evidence of prolonged and systemic discrimination by organizations, affirmative action may be the only meaningful remedy available... We shouldn't ignore that race continues to matter: To suggest that our racial attitudes play no part in the socio-economic disparities that we often observe turns a blind eye to both our history and our experience — and relieves us of the responsibility to make things right."

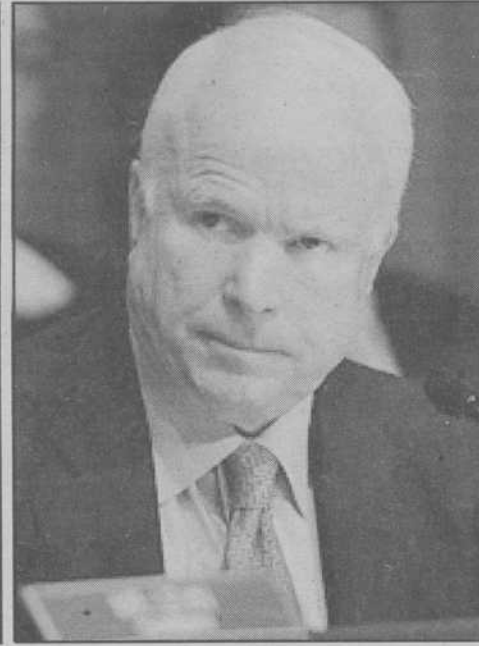
—What, if anything, would you do to help restore the voting rights of ex-felony offenders?

McCAIN: "The fourteenth amendment to the Constitution specifically recognizes that the right to vote may be taken away if a person commits a crime... The right to vote should be restored to felons only on a case by case basis after they have served their full sentences and have satisfactorily demonstrated that they have turned over a new leaf."

OBAMA: "I support restoration of voting rights for ex-offenders. I am a co-sponsor of the Count Every Vote Act, and would sign that legislation in to law as president."

—What would you do to promote the rights of the citizens of the District of Columbia?

McCAIN: "I do not support legislation to give the District a vote in Congress because I believe that such a law would be unconstitutional. The Constitution says that 'the House of Representatives shall be composed



The NAACP is evaluating Barack Obama, left, and John McCain on Black-focused issues.

of members chosen every second year by the people of the several states.' Because the District of Columbia is not a state, it is not eligible to send a full representative to Congress unless and until either the Constitution is amended to allow this, or residential districts of the District become part of Maryland."

OBAMA: "I am an original co-sponsor of the Senate bill that will provide the District of Columbia with voting representation in the House of Representatives. I consider passage of this bill to be an important step toward justice. In our great Democracy, it's a shame that residents of the District who pay taxes, fight in wars, and enjoy the same rights as other American have no voting representation in our nation's capital. I will continue to champion this issue as president?"

—What actions, if any, would you take to address the problem of racial profiling by law enforcement officials?

McCAIN: "No one should be stopped by the police because of his or her racial or ethnic identity. At the same time, law enforcement officers must be permitted to carry out their duties based on fair, professional, non-discriminatory criteria, such as acting on a specific description. I will demand proper training and attention with respect to race relations and citizen rights."

OBAMA: "As a United States senator, I co-sponsored federal legislation to ban racial profiling and require federal, state and local law enforcement agencies to take steps to eliminate the practice. As president, I will continue my decades-long fight against racial profiling and sign legislation that will ban the practice of racial profiling by federal law enforcement agencies and provide federal funding to state and local police departments if they adopt policies to prohibit the practice."

—What, if anything, would you do to address the issue of police misconduct?

McCAIN: "If there is systemic misconduct, police brutality or violations of federal laws, including civil rights laws, it is the duty of the Department of Justice to take appropriate federal law enforcement action."

OBAMA: "I will direct my attorney general to have the Justice Department work closely with state and local law enforcement to ensure the effective implementation of standards for use of force."

—Would you work to increase or decrease the number of offenses which trigger a mandatory minimum sentence?

McCAIN: "I have supported mandatory minimum sentencing for certain crimes, particularly for violent crimes and serious of-

fenses... As president, I will support evaluating whether the type and number of offenses that trigger mandatory minimum sentences are effective in combating crime and in protecting law-abiding members of society from criminal activity."

OBAMA: "There are at least 171 mandatory minimum provisions in federal criminal statutes... I will immediately review these sentences to see where we can be smarter on crime and reduce the ineffective warehousing of non-violent drug offenders."

—How would you work to ensure that as long as we have a death penalty that, at the very least, the color of one's skin or a person's financial status are not determining factors

when deciding who should receive the death penalty?"

McCAIN: "I support the death penalty for heinous crimes in which the circumstances warrant capital punishment. I have supported legislation that sought to expand the number of federal crimes punishable by death, including terrorism and narcotics trafficking by drug kingpins. The color of one's skin or a person's financial status must never be factors when deciding who should receive the death penalty."

OBAMA: "I believe there are a few crimes so heinous that they warrant the ultimate penalty. But, the question is whether that sentence can be implemented in a fair and just way. As a member of the Illinois State Senate, I led efforts to reform a broken death penalty system that sent 13 innocent people to death row because it was filled with error, questionable police tactics, racial bias and shoddy legal work... I will direct my Justice Department to undertake a comprehensive study of the administration of the federal death penalty and to make recommendations on how to address the problems that have been identified with the system, including racial bias."

A survey of Black voters by the Joint Center for Political and Economic studies last year indicated that the economy, education and jobs were named as the top issues for Black voters in the presidential election. However, in its questionnaire, the NAACP has pinpointed what its leaders often call the "bread and butter civil rights issues."

To view the questionnaire in its entirety, go to www.naacp.org.

Creating Change Every Day

As your Congresswoman, I focus on the real priorities of Southern Nevada's families and businesses by protecting home ownership, promoting energy independence and affordable healthcare, investing in our schools and classrooms, expanding college opportunities, providing more transportation options and safer roads, easing the pain at the gas pump, and stabilizing our nation's economy.



Congresswoman
Shelley Berkley

I would
appreciate
your vote.

Paid for by Berkley for Congress,
Linda L. Goldberg, Treasurer