

Shenanigans continue to impede U.S. elections

Associated Press

In the hours before Election Day, as inevitable as winter, comes an onslaught of dirty tricks — confusing e-mails, disturbing phone calls and insinuating fliers left on doorsteps during the night.

The intent, almost always, is to keep folks from voting or to confuse them, usually through intimidation or misinformation. But in this presidential race, in which a Black man lead most polls, some of the deceit has a decidedly racist bent.

Complaints surfaced in predominantly African-American neighborhoods of Philadelphia where fliers circulated, warning voters they could be arrested at the polls if they had unpaid parking tickets or if they had criminal convictions.

Over the weekend in Virginia, bogus fliers with an authentic-looking commonwealth seal said fears of high voter turnout had prompted election officials to hold two elections — one on Tuesday for Republicans and another on Wednesday for Democrats.

In New Mexico, two Hispanic women filed a lawsuit last week claiming they were harassed by a private investigator working for a Republican lawyer who came to their homes and threatened to call immigration authorities, even though they are U.S. citizens.

"He was questioning her status, saying that he needed to see her papers and documents to show that she was a U.S. citizen and was a legitimate voter," said Guadalupe Bojorquez, speaking on behalf of her mother, Dora Escobedo, a 67-year-old Albuquerque resident who speaks only Spanish. "He totally, totally scared the heck out of her."

In Pennsylvania, e-mails appeared linking Democrat Barack Obama to the Holocaust. "Jewish Americans cannot afford to make the wrong decision on Tuesday, Nov. 4," said the electronic message, paid for by an entity calling itself the Republican Federal Committee. "Many of our ancestors ignored the warning signs in the 1930s and 1940s and made a tragic mistake."

Laughlin McDonald, who leads the ACLU's Voting Rights Project, said he has never seen "an election where there was more interest and more voter turnout, and more efforts to suppress registration and turnout. And that has a real impact on minorities."

The Obama campaign and civil rights advocacy groups signed up millions of new voters for this presidential race. In Ohio alone, some 600,000 submitted new voter registration cards.

Across the country, many of these first-time voters were notably young and strong Obama supporters. Many of them were also Black and Hispanic.

Activist groups say it is this fresh crop of ballot-minded citizens that made some Republicans very nervous. And they say they had expected the dirty tricks to get dirtier in final hours before Tuesday.

"Oh, there's plenty of time for things to get ugly," said Zachary Stalberg, president of The Committee of Seventy, a Philadelphia-based government watchdog group that is nonpartisan, heading into Nov. 4.

Other reports of intimidation efforts in the hotly contested State of Pennsylvania included leaflets taped to picnic benches at Drexel University, warning students that police would be at the polls on Tuesday to arrest would-be voters with prior criminal offenses.

In his Jewish neighborhood, Stalberg said, fliers were left claiming Obama was more sympathetic to Palestinians than to Israel, and showed a photograph of him speaking in Germany.

"It shows up between the screen door and the front door in the middle of the night," Stalberg said. "Why couldn't someone knock on the door and hand that to me in the middle of the day? In a sense, it's very smartly done. The message gets through. It's done carefully enough that people might read it."

Such tactics are common, and are often impossible to trace. Robo-calls, in which automated, bogus phone messages are sent over and over, are very hard to trace to their source, say voting advocates. E-mails fall into the same category.

In Nevada, for example, Latino voters said they received calls from people describing themselves as Obama volunteers, urging them to cast their ballot over the phone.

The calls were reported to Election Protection, a nonprofit advocacy group that runs a hotline for election troubles. The organization does not know who orchestrated them.

"The Voting Rights Act makes it a crime to mislead and intimidate voters," said McDonald. "If you can find out who's doing it, those people should be prosecuted. But sometimes it's just difficult to know who's doing what. Some of it's just anonymous."

Trying to mislead voters is nothing new.

"We see this every year," said Jonah Goldman of the advocacy group Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. "It

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Conyers pressing probe into leak on Obama aunt

Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — U. S. Rep. John Conyers Jr., D-Mich., chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, has fired off a letter asking Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff to investigate a leak to reporters regarding the immigration status of then presidential candidate Barack Obama's aunt.

"I was startled to read in today's Associated Press that a 'federal law enforcement official' has leaked information about an immigration case involving a relative of Sen. Obama," CNN reported, quoting a letter to Chertoff from Conyers who wondered whether someone leaked the information to damage Obama.

Conyers' letter went on, "Even more troubling, the AP reports that it 'could not establish whether anyone at a political level in the Bush administration or in the McCain campaign had been involved,' a very disturbing (suggestion) indeed."

Conyers called the leak "deplorable" and urged Chertoff to "take immediate action to investigate and discipline those responsible."

The Department of Homeland Security had no immediate response to Conyers' letter.

The AP reported Nov. 1, three days before Election Day, that Obama's Kenyan aunt, Zeituni Onyango, is living in the United States illegally, even though an immigration judge rejected her request for asylum four years ago.

The story cited two sources, one of them a federal law enforcement official.

CNN, AP and other media have not been able to independently verify the aunt's immigration status. Immigration and Customs Enforcement spokeswoman Kelly Nantel told CNN the agency "is prohibited from commenting on any individual's status."

The Obama campaign told AP the senator "has no knowledge of her status but obviously believes that any

and all appropriate laws [should] be followed," campaign spokesman Bill Burton said. The campaign also told AP that it will return any contributions Onyango made, reportedly \$265 in \$5 and \$25 increments.

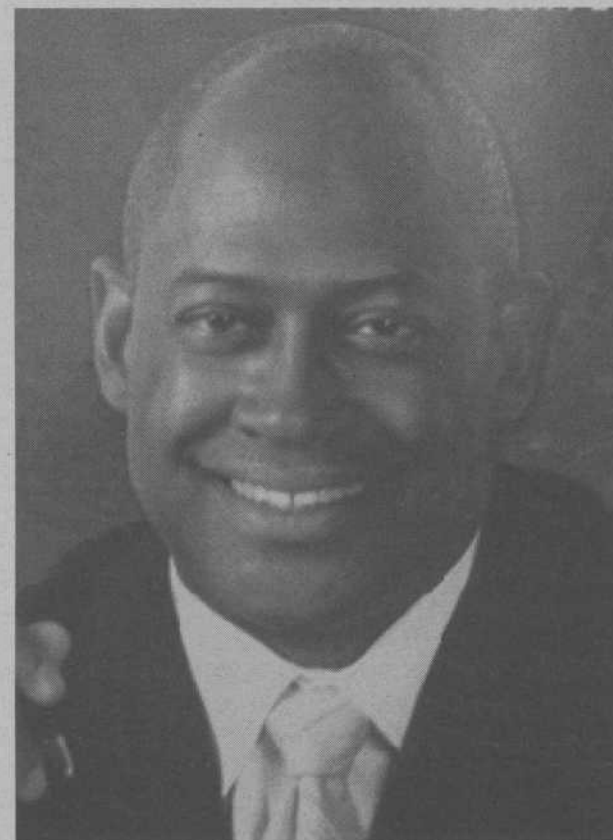
Onyango, 56, is believed to be the half-sister of Obama's Kenyan father. AP reported she lives in a complex in South Boston.

According to AP, a court refused four years ago to accept Onyango's asylum application. Her alleged refusal to leave the country would be an administrative violation, not a criminal matter.

The Obama campaign did not indicate whether Obama has been in touch with his aunt.

The Boston Housing Authority did not return calls or e-mails from media inquiries on Saturday.

It's not clear when Onyango arrived in the United States. She reportedly told the *London Times*, "I have been coming to America ever since 1975. I always come and go."



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— Morse Arberry, Jr. —

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LV Blacks win various posts

Black incumbents State Sen. Steven Horsford, D-Dist. 4, along with fellow state Assembly Democrats Harvey Munford, Dist. 6, Morse Arberry, Dist. 7, Kelvin Atkinson, Dist. 17, and William Horne, Dist. 34, all won their races on Tuesday and will be returning to Carson City for the 2009 legislative session. All of the assembly incumbents will serve two-year terms.

Clark County Commissioner Lawrence Weekly will retain the District D chair after defeating his opponent by a 5-to-1 margin. Weekly will serve until 2012.

Willa Chaney won her race for the State Board of Education, District 3, and Linda Young will represent District C on the Clark County School Board. Both Chaney and Young will serve four-year terms.