

Steele rides Obama's coattails to GOP post

By Ron Walters

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Republicans have just named an African-American, former Maryland Lt. Governor Michael Steele, as party chair.

While I congratulate Steele, I am also aware that it probably would never have happened if Barack Obama had not won the presidency. So now that he is chair the biggest question he confronts is how to turn around the strong perception that Republicans are actively opposed to Black interests. Steele himself said just after the recent election while campaigning for the office that Republican Party officials "just don't give a damn," that their version of outreach to minorities is "let's throw a cocktail party, find some Black folks and Hispanics and women, wrap our arms around them. See look at us. And then we go back to the same old, same old." He continued, "The party has simply not understood the importance of having highly visible Black Republican operatives... It's not our message as much as it is our messengers that are killing us."

I beg to differ with Steele — profoundly. The problem with the Republican party is not the absence of high profile Blacks to sell the message of the party, it is the party's president who flies over the damage of the Katrina

hurricane, leaving Black folks screaming for help and Black bodies in the water.

This is the same fellow who began his campaign at Bob Jones University that would not allow interracial dating; it was the same fellow who spoke at an NAACP convention only once in his eight years. It is the image of the party who has a presidential candidate in 2008 with only one high-level Black staffer and who headed a convention with 2,000 delegates, but only 36 Black.

It is insensitive comments by Republican officials like Senator Trent Lott who praised Strom Thurmond, saying if we had listened to him (who opposed the integration of the Democratic Party when he was in it) thing would be better. Or, take Sen. Conrad Burns of Montana, who called his house painter a "nice little Guatemalan man," or former Virginia Senator George Allan whose reference to a non-White person in his audience as a "Macaca," a kind of monkey.

Think about the habit of Republicans working hard to prevent Blacks from voting by initiating so-called "ballot security" programs where they pass laws requiring gov-



RON WALTERS

ernment issued ID for voting, or personally check the ID of people (generally Blacks) at the door of the voting station. The exploits of the Ohio African-American Secretary of State, Ken Blackwell are still fresh in the mind from the 2004 election when he did everything possible to prevent Blacks from voting in big numbers. He also ran for party chair but came in near to last place among the six candidates, proof that even Republicans were embarrassed by his attempt to be a loyal 21st century lawn jockey.

Even Republicans must understand that part of what Obama's victory meant is that there is talent of color in the higher ranks of political life that is ready to lead the country and they will increasingly have that opportunity because of two things: changing demographics and the bankruptcy of Republican public policies.

First, it is amazing how long the demographic argument has been used to show Republicans that the country is becoming more diverse and they would have to recruit or die. Republican pollster Linda DiVall said in 1998 that the party had to respond to the

"sheer math of the changing demographics in America..." and expand their appeal to minorities if they were to continue to be competitive. They gave much lip-service to this idea afterward, but it was not until Ken Mehlman became Chair in 2004 that a serious attempt was made at what they called "outreach" — showing up at Black venues, speaking about the legacy of Abraham Lincoln and admitting the party has erred recently by not reaching out.

But the real challenge of Steele is what made Mehlman's initiative fruitless. Republicans are fundamentally opposed to policies like Affirmative Action, spending on social programs, and civil rights, in short, most of the measures that have been responsible for Black progress. Now they are at it again, attempting to scuttle spending for human needs contained in the stimulus package proposed by Barack Obama and being debated in Congress. Then, they will send Michael Steele out into Black communities to wrap his arms around us and say "see, look at us," then go back to the same old, same old.

Dr. Ron Walters is the Distinguished Leadership Scholar, Director of African-American Leadership Center and Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland.

Don't buy it: Obama win didn't level playing field

By James Clingman

Special to Sentinel-Voice

"Every child has lost every excuse." Those were the words of James Clyburn of South Carolina, Majority Whip in the House of Representatives.

He spoke those words on BET of all places, in response to Barack Obama being elected president of the United States.

As soon as I read his statement, I thought, "Uh-oh, here we go." Now that we have a Black president all bets are off, and all is right with the world; we have reached our highest pinnacle. "Every child," as Clyburn said, which obviously includes every Black child, can no longer be excused for not achieving.

Let's delve into Clyburn's "no excuse" world of an Obama presidency. While we are at it, let's find some adults, maybe even some U.S. Representatives, who no longer have excuses for their behavior.

The most recent heinous act against a Black man was committed in plain sight of several witnesses and captured on camera. Young Oscar Grant, lying on his stomach, hands held behind his back, and with one cop's knee on his neck, was summarily shot and killed by a cop who had little regard for the life of a young Black man.

But since we have a Black president, I don't want to hear young men in Oakland come up with excuses for not wanting to go along with the system, despite the possibility of being on their way to school and getting shot by an overzealous police officer.

Black children no longer have the excuse of being "steered" to low-level education programs because they come from a "poor" neighborhood; they cannot offer the excuse of being targeted as low performers or "hyperactive," thus, requiring them to be put on drugs to keep them calm. Black children can no longer rely on the excuse of not having enough to eat in the morning, or having to sleep in a cold house because the heat was turned off, or not having the adult examples they need in their immediate lives, not from a distance, to guide them along their way. They now have Obama, so no more excuses.

No more excuses for the disparities that exist in our criminal justice system, our social service system, our educational system, and our political system. No more excuses for any child who sees corporate executives



JAMES CLINGMAN

and slimy politicians fatten their pockets from the public coffers, and feast at banquet tables fit for kings and queens.

No more excuses for the child who cries at night or cowers in fear of being the next Oscar Grant. Yeah right, no more excuses.

How about the so-called responsible adults who run this country? Are they now out of excuses? Do they now have to take more ownership for their lives and the lives of those for whom they work?

Can they still make excuses for not standing up and speaking against injustice, against disparity, and against the crimes we see everyday in the public and private sectors?

Has every adult run out of excuses for allowing millions of children, who no longer have excuses, to go without adequate healthcare?

Now that we have a Black president will every adult be held accountable for his or her actions? Will part of the "change" we raved about be adults acting like adults rather than like self-indulgent children who have no regard for anyone but themselves?

Like Representative Clyburn, I also went through a few things in the fifties and sixties as a result of prejudice and racism. I saw the same things he saw, and I also wondered if we would ever have a Black president. Now that we have one, my attention is not so much on the children as it is on the adults. How can we say they no longer have any excuse, especially when many of their excuses can be traced to our neglect of their needs — regardless of who resided in the White House?

Why didn't we tell them that Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. DuBois could have been president were it not for this country's racism? Why not share with them the fact that Barbara Jordan and Shirley Chisholm

could have run this country?

Why didn't we eliminate their excuses when Reginald Lewis bought Beatrice Foods for \$1 billion dollars? Or, when Oprah became a billionaire? Why didn't we tell them "no more excuses" when Ken Chenault assumed the highest level at American Express Corporation?

It is sad that some Black people, especially those in my age group, place so much emphasis on politics rather than on economics.

Yes, we have a Black president, but that fact will not eliminate all excuses among our children until it eliminates all excuses among our adults. When our children see more responsible adults, they will be more responsible. The status of the Obama family alone does not, will not, and cannot eliminate all excuses for every child. If that were the case their excuses would have been eliminated long ago by the likes of Booker T. Washington, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth.

Or by other Black "presidents" like Maggie Lena Walker and Madame C.J. Walker, Ed Gardner and John Johnson, S.B. Fuller and Joe Dudley, Ann Fudge and Suzanne DePasse, Barry Gordy and Robert Holland, Jackie Mayfield and Dr. Walter P. Lomax.

It is only now that we have a Black "U.S." president, a political leader rather than an economic leader that we say to our children, "No more excuses." When Black politicians, who have "good jobs, great healthcare, and benefits of public office, speak about the intrinsic value of a Black man rising to the top of our political hierarchy, I wonder what it said about their own value to their constituents. I wonder if that also eliminates their excuses for acquiescing to substandard economic and social conditions among Black people in this country.

James Clingman is an educator, lecturer and authors a book series on issues relating to Black economic empowerment.

Alford

(Continued from Page 8)

and they are moving out the traditional Black residents who are catching hell from skyrocketing rental rates, property taxes and predatory lending. It doesn't take long for a near South Side Chicago or South Central Los Angeles around the University of Southern California to start changing. Communities like Hagerstown, Md.; Fredericksburg, Va.; Danville, Ill. are introduced to crack cocaine trafficking and carjacking from their new neighbors. Counties like Prince George's County, Md. are absolutely overwhelmed with the new residents who have been booted

out of their previous neighborhoods.

The tax credits, breaks and incentives don't go to us and they, in fact, target us for gentrification. Our tax money being used against us is a very tragic exercise.

Yet, it happens all the time. Let's be vigilant as the new stimulus bill is passed and implemented. This time let's be certain that it is used for what it is intended to be used for: the building and participation of all of America, not just the racist and greedy.

Harry Alford is the co-founder, president/CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce, Inc.