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BLACK
C o M M e n t a t o r**
Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
www.blackcommentator.com

Issue 152 – September 29, 2005

***Minority Inclusion is Diversity Diversion at the GOP:
A View from the Black Republican Side
by Wamara Mwine
Guest Commentator***

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The state of African–American affairs in America remains in a dismal state, as noted by the visual images evolving from Hurricane Katrina. Unemployment, crime, healthcare and education continue to plague black people nationwide. The lack of new black leaders in all areas is a major factor. The Republican Party says it is doing everything to draw black leaders into their ranks. Illinois Democrat Barack Obama has given the GOP a real example of what Republicans have been unwilling or unable to do with their black candidates. Yet, the GOP has political capital like Obama, but Republicans refuse to let them rise to the national level.

Mostly this is a control thing. During Republican National Committee Chairman Ed Gillespie’s reign, the GOP promoted spokesmen like Armstrong Williams. The former syndicated columnist was paid \$241,000 to promote President Bush’s No Child Left Behind program. The money was poorly spent because Williams, who has no constituency, was unable to get any real support for the president. The other face of black Republicans was Don King. The boxing promoter was trotted out during the 2004 Republican Convention. Hardly a conservative, King, like Williams is not viewed as a role model by black Americans. Don King is also a convicted felon.

The fact remains that the GOP still avoids real dialogue with the best African–American Republicans. This list includes Paul Harris, Dylan Glenn and Nic Lott. All have participated in White House and GOP national events. For example, Lott and Harris both spoke at the 2000 Republican National Convention.

Paul Harris unmistakably has many of Obama’s qualities. A father of three, Harris is happily married. He is a conservative, Catholic and attends church regularly. In Virginia, Harris won landslide victories in 1997 and 2000, becoming the first black Republican elected to the House in more than a century. Harris then served for two years at the Department of Justice under John Ashcroft. Since returning to the private sector, the GOP has failed to utilize Harris’ polished political skills and experience for some greater cause.

Dylan Glenn is another black conservative that has been waiting in the wings. Despite support from Newt Gingrich and Colin Powell, Glenn has failed on three attempts to win a congressional seat in Georgia. Glenn

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served as a policy analyst in the White House Office of Domestic Policy during the presidency of George H.W. Bush. Glenn was also Special Assistant to President George W. Bush in the White House, during which time he was on the National Economic Council advising the President on economic and domestic policy concerns.

In addition to his strong White House experience, Glenn is founder of The Earth Conservation Corps, a White House initiative under President George H.W. Bush that provides opportunity to at-risk youth through environmental conservation work. The Earth Conservation is one of the rare programs that have successfully addressed the challenges of inner city youth, providing them a positive outlet to channel their energies.

Glenn was pulled from the White House to run the Georgia campaign of Sonny Purdue. After Purdue's victory, Glenn was not given another major role in the party. Instead he was named Purdue's Deputy Chief of Staff. From the president's adviser to deputy chief of staff for a governor, the decline in Glenn's position could not have been more dramatic. In effect, Glenn's success was rewarded with a demotion, under the watchful eye of Ed Gillespie.

Yet, the Republican National Committee website insists they are "Grooming Black Candidates." RNC Chairman Ken Mehlman suggests that Lynn Swann will run for Governor of Pennsylvania. Swann has not announced he will run yet, but has begun an unofficial campaign against Governor Ed Rendell. A New York Times article suggests that Republicans see Swann "as an underdog against Mr. Rendell." It would seem like a replay of the Illinois senate race where Obama won a landslide victory against black Republican Alan Keyes. Black candidates like Swann and even Glenn cannot win without overwhelming Republican support. But former RNC Chairmen Marc Racicot and Ed Gillespie and now Mehlman are unwilling to support these candidates, especially when they need it most on the campaign trail.

Meanwhile, Mehlman has not reached out to Glenn, Lott or Harris. In a Washington Post online discussion, White House insider Michael Fletcher said, "The fact remains that black voters largely reject the political overtures of conservatives like Bush. And that is going to affect the number of people who get into these jobs, which often require a well connected sponsor." Nic Lott lists J.C. Watts, Senator Trent Lott and Governor Haley Barbour as his references. Yet after helping Barbour win his campaign in Mississippi, Lott was awarded with a Public Affairs position in the state penitentiary. For Lott moving from a successful campaign to serving time in a prison PR job is a sad irony. He was the first African-American student body president at the University of Mississippi. An internet google search for Nic Lott's name nets 304 hits. Lott was interviewed by CNN when Trent Lott, no relation, got into trouble for glorifying Strom Thurmond. CNN can chat with Nic Lott on national television, but his own party eludes him.

Lott, Glenn and Harris should be in high level senior positions with the Bush Administration and/or the Republican National Committee. Only then will they have the opportunity to gain the national popularity and visibility that Barack Obama is enjoying. African-Americans also need these new leaders to rise up and provide their communities with new solutions to old problems.

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