

Portland
Observer
Opinion

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Religion and politics cause jitters for Gore-Lieberman among many blacks

BY EARL OFARI HUTCHINSON
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Dallas NAACP head Lee Alcorn had barely gotten his rash, bigoted words out of his mouth questioning Democratic vice-presidential candidate Joseph Lieberman's presumed allegiance to "Jewish interests" when NAACP president Kweisi Mfume promptly suspended him. A few days later California Congresswoman Maxine Waters wisely kept Lieberman's religion out of it but said she had major problems with his centrist-conservative political positions on affirmative action and school vouchers.

After Waters spoke every top gun black Democrat rushed to swear their allegiance to Gore-Lieberman and assured that blacks have no problems with the Gore-Lieberman ticket. They backed up their contention that the Democrats have not abandoned minority issues by pointing out that black delegates make up more than 20 percent of the Democratic Convention delegates and have a prominent place in managing the convention and in formulating the platform. Lieberman beat a fast path to meet with Waters and the Congressional Black Caucus to reassure them that he does not oppose affirmative action. In his convention acceptance speech

he extended the olive branch even further by playing big on themes of diversity, support of civil rights and social programs. Despite Lieberman's conciliatory words and the happy assurances of black leaders that black voters will dutifully support Gore-Lieberman, the Alcorn and Waters flap poses two big problems, one legitimate, the other disturbing, for Gore-Lieberman. The first is Lieberman's politics. This is still a legitimate concern. Lieberman's past ambiguous support of affirmative action and public education does absolutely nothing to inspire black voters to make a headlong dash to the polls for Gore. Many blacks wonder out loud whether Lieberman will do anything to champion these issues. The other problem is Lieberman's religion. This is inappropriate for anyone to raise as an issue, but the fact that some blacks raise it at all is deeply troubling. It again stirs latent and ugly anti-Jewish sentiments among some blacks. On some black radio talk shows callers railed against the NAACP for dumping Alcorn and defended his remarks. It was a horrid reminder that the breach that Nation of Islam's leader Louis Farrakhan's

contentious remarks about Jews caused between blacks and Jews a few years ago still has not completely healed. Still, Gore must worry whether the silly, thoughtless remarks by a few blacks about his religion and the concern about his stance on crucial social issues will damage Gore's chances against Bush. In a race to the wire with Bush the black vote will loom large. For the past four decades no group has been more passionate and loyal in their support of the Democrats than blacks. They have routinely given the Democrats 85 to 90 percent of their vote. According to a recent survey by the Joint Center For Political and Economic Studies, a Washington D.C. public policy think tank, in 1996 the black vote was crucial to Clinton's reelection victory in ten Southern and Midwestern states. More than half of those who voted for Clinton in Louisiana, Georgia and a third of those who voted for him in Maryland were black. These same states will be hotly contested by Gore and Bush. Also, the possibility that Green Party presidential candidate Ralph Nader can swipe 3 to 7 percent of the vote

almost all of which would come from disenchanted Democrats make the black vote even more indispensable to Gore. There are some early warning signs that Gore's core black support may be softening. Recent polls show that more blacks are buying the Republican's diversity pitch and are willing to give them a closer look. The number of black voters who say they like what they hear and see in Bush has inched up not only in Texas and Florida, but also California. While 80 percent of blacks still identify themselves as Democrats, among 18- to 25 year olds that number has plunged to 60 percent. This hardly means that younger blacks will rush to Bush but it does pose the possibility, maybe danger, that the Democrats could lose some of their votes. If Bush can even slightly loosen the vise like grip Democrats have on black votes, by winning as little as 5 to 7 percent more of their vote, this could doom Gore to defeat. Democrat strategists remind black voters that during his college days Lieberman was a civil rights fighter.

(Please see 'Lieberman-Gore' page 6)

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor

In light of the upcoming World Conference on Assisted Dying Sept. 1-3, in Boston, I wanted to bring attention to what I feel is a greatly important cause. My name is Erica Hanlin and I am a 20-year-old college student from Illinois. I would like to say thank you for supporting a cause, which I have been adamant about for quite awhile now. In 1992, my paternal grandfather, whom I was very close to, committed suicide after a battle with emphysema and cancer. My grandfather had always been a spunky, and that is an understatement, man with an acid tongue and razor sharp wit. It made me so sad to visit him after he started becoming ill and each time I saw him seemed to get weaker and weaker. The weeks went by and soon, my uncle, with whom he made his residence, started to do everything for him, including feed him, when he actually could eat, change his bed linens, bathe him and even change his disposable adult undergarment. I could tell, since my grandfather had always been very independent, that relying on someone else made him very uncomfortable. He was on oxygen almost 24 hour a day and during his last couple weeks of life, was completely bedridden. Losing his dignity was not an option and around midnight on a night in August 1992, my grandfather put a gun to his head and pulled the trigger. He made a choice that I know any one of his sons would have made in order not to see their father suffer. I saw how much he suffered and I know that if there were any way I could have ended it I would. I also saw similar things happen with my maternal grandmother, who basically starved to death over a period of a year, getting progressively thinner from her usually robust figure. Her throat muscles would shut down after a few bite of food and eventually she could not eat. She had signed a living will some years earlier and therefore, could receive no feeding tube, resuscitation or no other means of artificially prolonging her life. Therefore, her suffering was immense, until she finally succumbed in November 1998. Though I am only 20 years old, I have seen many of my family members suffer as resulted of terminal illnesses and I do not believe that they should be allowed to suffer. I believe that they have the right to die with dignity and if that means "mercy killing," then so be it. They should not have to suffer through one more day of agonizing pain and emotional embarrassment because they are, after all, people... human beings that live and breathe and have emotions. Again, I would like to say thank you for all of your dedication to this cause and I know I speak for many of those who have seen the suffering of family members or friends with terminal illnesses when I say God bless you all. Sincerely, Erica Hanlin

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