

OPINION

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Black Community Must Be Heard

Critical issues left out of debate

BY DR. LENORA FULANI

The more you look at it, the more you see an absence of dialogue about the choice between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. The majority of the black political establishment in my state of New York has closed ranks behind Hillary and used that to tamp down public debate on which candidacy - Obama's or Hillary's - makes the most sense for black voters to support.

Let me be very clear here. I have not endorsed Obama's presidential campaign. Moreover, I am an independent and therefore not a voter

we have the opportunity to elect a black president and to "turn the page" - is thrashed out from the barbershop to the barbecue.

Rev. Al Sharpton has noted that he intends to endorse in the fall. But he is far from neutral, even now. He suggested that Obama's candidacy is merely "symbolic" and raised questions about why Obama hasn't gotten "more traction."

The answer is that the Clintons, in conjunction with black Democrats and the media are creating an environment where there can be no real debate, much less traction.

It's time for the black community to speak out.

We can't allow the Clinton-allied black Democrats to "suck up all the



'We can't allow the Clinton-allied black Democrats to 'suck up all the oxygen.'

Racial Diversity in Schools Matters

But tools to make it happen are taken away

BY M. LINDA JARAMILLO

Many years ago, I was privileged to serve on the Board of Education of a local suburban school district in Oregon. Prior to the early 70s, the surrounding community was primarily comprised of Caucasian families. As demographics began to change and hundreds of Hispanic families moved in, the face of the schools became a reflection of a new diversity. The struggle to adapt began.

Anytime a community faces change and transition, tensions and growing pains are commonplace. Anytime the status quo is disrupted, there will be some level of grief and lamenting the loss of the "good ole days."

It is not unusual to be anxious and afraid when we are forced to engage with different cultures and traditions. So the change in the cultural environment in the com-

munities and schools surrounding this small town was met with much trepidation.

Interestingly, during those changing times the community elected two Hispanics to the local Board of Education, who then represented 40 percent of the five-member Board. I was one of them.

Even in times when anxiety about losing the status quo was at its height, the makeup of the school district's

of every family, not just some.

The board made a difference in such serious matters as school boundaries that created opportunities for students of different racial backgrounds to go to school together. This small Oregon school district boldly established values that were later substantiated by research that continues to demonstrate that all children benefit from learning with and from children whose backgrounds are different from their own.

However, last month, the high-

down voluntary school integration programs in Louisville and Seattle, and rejected school racial integration itself as a compelling interest, even as it affirmed the need for diversity. The majority agreed that diverse and inclusive schools are important to the future of our country and that communities have a clear stake in overcoming the isolation and marginalization of children.

Four Justices lament that this decision will make it harder for school districts to design programs that bring children together across racial lines.

"Many parents want their children to attend schools with children of different races. Indeed, the very school districts that once spurned integration now strive for it. The long history of their efforts reveals the complexities and difficulties they have faced. And in light of those challenges, they have asked us not to take from their hands the instruments they have used to rid their schools of racial segregation, instruments that they believe are needed to overcome the problems of cities divided by race and poverty," the dissenting opinion said.

It is a mixed message. The court affirms that diversity matters but they have taken away the tools necessary to make it happen.

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'The highest court in this nation made a decision that will have a serious impact on school districts that value diversity.'

policymaking body symbolized the new diversity. The difference it made was not so much because of us personally, but because this diverse board was able to make conscious and challenging decisions that considered the cultural values

est court in this nation made a decision that will have a serious impact on school districts that value diversity and are trying to live into it. I fear the decision will result in the re-segregation of schools.

The U.S. Supreme Court struck

in New York's Democratic presidential primary on Feb 5. But I am a political leader and I am concerned that the Clinton steamroller has shut down public discussion of critical issues affecting the black community.

Obama must more directly confront Hillary about the real record of Clintonism in the 1990s, a philosophy that means feeding the corporate sector through liberalized free trade, while failing to address the needs of the American people, whose wages and living standards have stagnated or declined, while Wall Street is making record profits.

Globalization is a fact of 21st century life. But the political question is how the interests of the American people will fare in that environment. Clintonism is famous for "putting people first" in rhetoric, but putting "supercapitalism" first in reality. This issue - among others - must be pursued, particularly in terms of how the interests of black America are affected.

In South Carolina, an early primary state with a large black voting population, the Obama/Clinton debate has been very intense. The question - Is it "Hillary's time" or do

oxygen." We need to challenge those black leaders who are participating in this by demanding that there be a real public dialogue on the choices.

In 1992, I stood up on a chair at Harlem Hospital to confront Bill Clinton about his refusal to support open debates. He got very pissed off and said "Dr. Fulani, the world doesn't revolve around you." I never thought it did. Nor did I think the world would resolve its problems "around" him - and I was right.

Clintonism was eight years of aggressive pro-corporatism, while "triangulating" to get elected. Is it any wonder that George Bush came next? His so-called "compassionate conservatism" was barely distinguishable from Clintonism.

Let's have a forum at the Apollo where Senator Clinton and Senator Obama discuss the issue of how to open up and expand political dialogue in the black community. Let's make sure the people, not the politicians, decide the 2008 presidential election.

Lenora Fulani is a developmental psychologist and a long-time political activist.

Dems in Congress Are No Bargain

Replace the business as usual crowd

BY JIM HIGHTOWER

To the Democratic leaders of Congress, I can only say: Heck of a job!

In less than six months,

the top Democrats have squandered the outpouring of public support gained from last year's congressional elections. On the war, on ethics, and on challenging corporate power, American voters expressed faith that Democrats would change Congress and begin to serve the public interest.

But - poof! - that faith is gone. The latest polls show that only 27 percent of the people approve of the way Congress is doing its job.

Why the precipitous decline? Because the "new" Democrats are still burdened with too many don't-rock-the-boat, money-soaked, corporate-backed old Democrats who sit in key leadership posts. They are so entrenched that they don't feel the public's anger about Iraq, so they have no sense of urgency about confronting this out-of-control president.

Even on congressional ethics reform, which should be a slam-

dunk for Democrats, some of the old bulls have balked. They don't want an independent ethics commission - they don't want to limit

their own possibilities of cashing in to become lobbyists, and they don't want to stop using lobbyists as their campaign fundraisers.

Then, on their first chance to confront corporate power, some old-guard Democrats have waseled. Rather than an honest, bold energy bill to stop the corporate causes of climate change, the Democrats' House bill would prevent the Environmental Protection Agency from regulating greenhouse gas emissions from cars and trucks, would prevent states from doing so, and would set fuel economy standards weaker even than Mr. Bush has proposed!

What this means is that our job of congressional clean up is not complete. Voters made a good start last year, but we must continue next year, recruiting and electing more true reformers to replace the business-as-usual crowd that's clogging up both parties.

Jim Hightower is a national radio commentator, writer, public speaker and author of *Thieves In High Places: They've Stolen Our Country And It's Time To Take It*



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