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Iowa GOP Win: Santorum's Race

AGAINST THE GRAIN

C. D. Ellison

It's a pickle the former underperforming Pennsylvania Senator has been in before. Perhaps afraid of repeating past electoral mistakes (flashbacking in cold sweats to his 18 point loss in 2006 to current Sen. Bob Casey), Rick Santorum appears to fall back on race as a way to gain tactical advantage in the Republican presidential primaries.

Some experts call Santorum's come-from-behind photo finish, statistical tie with frontrunner Mitt Romney in the Iowa Caucuses proof that retail politicking works. While Romney, Newt Gingrich, Rick Perry and others were looking for the right social media trend and relying on debate performances, Santorum went native in Iowa, shaking hands, kissing babies and slapping backs. Other experts call it pure luck.

But some are calling it a cheap attempt at racial coding that worked. In a place where only 2 percent of the population is African American, and the majority of caucus goers are rural white seniors, aged 50 and up, Black people become an easy target.

Santorum hasn't been able to shake that perception since right before the caucus. "I don't want to make Black people's lives better by giving them somebody else's money. I want to give them the opportunity to go out and earn the money," was Santorum in the flesh, free-styling about Medicaid and other social entitlements before a small sea of white faces.

To Santorum supporters, and rank and file Republicans, it's as if he didn't use the word "Black." Passionate debates flared up

throughout Facebook and the Twitterverse, with loyal conservatives (both Black and white) swearing the senator didn't say it. Others blamed it on an invisible reporter asking the question. Still, when watching the CBS video that went viral across the Web, it's clear as Hawkeye State snow on a bitterly cold day what Santorum

President Marc Morial, who blasts Santorum for picking on people of color when nearly 85 percent of food stamp recipients are white. "By falsely suggesting that people of color are a disproportionate drain on resources provided mainly by whites, Santorum deliberately fans the flames of racial divisiveness," says Morial.

Santorum's been here before. Back in July of 2011 when he announced his run for the Presidency under a hot Somerset County sun, he was digging back

inserts recent small talk with Juan Williams as validation. Williams is the Black journalist famously disgraced from National Public Radio, but now happily skipping about on FOX News as their most visible face of color.

"Juan Williams said to me about a week after President Obama decided to double down. I saw him in the green room. And I said why are you doing this? Here's what he said. He said, 'Let me tell you what President Obama's team is telling me.' He said, 'Americans love entitlements, and once we get them hooked, they will never let it go.'"

Some suggest that Santorum knows what he's doing, but observe that critics shouldn't be so fast to knock him as "racist." It's all politics, they say, and the senator is doing what it takes to win the primary.

"Look — Rick is from a state where the Black population surpasses the national one," says one source speaking anonymously on background. "He worked closely with Black clergy and community activists as a senator and found federal money for programs when they couldn't. You can't walk around Pennsylvania and not bump into a Black person."

"But," the source wryly adds, "Rick has this habit — just like most politicians — of sometimes tailoring his message for a particular kind of base. And he's always

Charles D. Ellison Special to the NNPA from the Philadelphia Tribune

'I don't want to make Black people's lives better by giving them somebody else's money'

said: "Black."

It was an awkward moment. Even the senator admitted as much in a follow-up interview on CBS News in which the host dogged him with questions on what he meant. Santorum reached for the mental lapse defense, swatting at his own comment as if a mosquito were buzzing in his ear. He claims he didn't know the context — while not denying he said it.

"If you look at what I've been saying, I've been pretty clear about my concern for dependency in this country and concern for people not being more dependent on our government, whatever their race or ethnicity is," Santorum said in the interview.

But, that's a big part of the problem, argues Urban League

into old racial coding crates, lamenting to cheers and applause from an ocean of white Pennsylvanians how "... America was a great country before 1965."

It was the same question back then as it was this week: Why pick 1965? Was the wine good that year? Some observers, particularly many civil rights historians and activists, chomped on the senator's bit about that, accusing him of racial pandering to an anti-Black conservative electorate seething with resentment at any sign of Black progress. It just so happened 1965 was the year President Lyndon Johnson signed Executive Order 11246, otherwise known to most as "Affirmative Action."

Later on in that same speech, he rails on entitlements and clumsily

African Americans Lose, White Others Gain

The unemployment rate is falling for the third month in a row, and in December about 200,000 private sector jobs were created. The monthly unemployment report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated that unemployment has declined by six tenths of a percentage point since August. Already, some economists are saying we can expect another decline next month.

I am surprised, however, at the very tepid language that the Employment Situation report uses to describe the increase in African American unemployment. A rise of .3 percent among African Americans, the second rise in as many months, is described as having "changed little". It has changed enough so that while some are celebrating gains, African Americans are losing. Indeed, the African American unemployment rate increased from 15.5 to 15.8 percent.

Black women, it turns out, are losing more than most. While the unemployment rate for adult African American women, at 13.9 percent, is still lower than the male rate of 15.7 percent, African American men gained jobs this year, while African American women lost them. Why? Nearly one in four (23 percent) African American women works for government, and federal, state, and local governments are releasing



BENNETT COLLEGE

Julianne Malveaux

workers, not hiring them. And while some governments will attempt to get the economy moving by creating construction and redevelopment opportunities for men, teachers, nurses and social workers, mostly women, are walking on eggshells in fear of job losses. Even when we know that smaller classroom size gives a better yield in terms of educational results, school districts are being forced to shoe-horn another student or two into already-crowded classrooms because of cost issues.

The data that comes from the Employment Situation report is, probably much lower than the reality of African American unemployment. When we include those marginally attached to the labor force (stopped looking, etc.), as well as those part time workers that want full time work, the unemployment rate for the total

population is not 8.5 percent, but 15.2 percent. And the estimate of the African American unemployment rate would be not 15.8 percent, but a whopping 28.3 percent. More facts — though the number of officially unemployed people is dropping, it is still high enough with 13.1 million actively looking for word and not finding it. And the average person has been out of work for 40.8 weeks, six weeks longer than a year ago. The headlines blaze optimism, the reality is different.

Someone has to explain why these policies aren't working for African Americans

Add to this a recent report that says that the wealth gap between Congress and their constituents is growing. In 1984, the average member of Congress had wealth of \$280,000, excluding home equity. In the twenty years since 1984, Congressional wealth grew by two and a half times, to \$725,000. Again, this doesn't include home equity. In contrast, the median wealth of an American family actually dropped slightly to around \$20,500, again, not includ-

ing home equity. It is very likely that when home equity is added, the gap is even larger.

This wealth gap perhaps explains why Congressional representatives are more interested in tax cuts than in creating jobs. It explains, perhaps, why Republicans so resisted President Obama's plan to extend the Social Security tax cut and also to extend unemployment rate insurance. Congress is operating in their own self-interest, they aren't thinking about their jobless and economically challenged constituents.

If these members of Congress got calls from bill collectors, lived with less money than month, had to deny their children a new pair of shoes or an after-school trip because of dollars, or actually had to visit a grocery store on a budget, they might have not so hesitated before they eventually capitulated to President Obama's determination. Still the growing wealth gap perhaps explains why so few are alarmed at some of the unemployment rate data.

To be sure, it is exciting to see unemployment rates drop, even slightly. It suggests that some of the Obama policies are working. But someone has to explain why these policies aren't working for African Americans, especially for African American women.

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