

New Hires at the RNC Ready to Court the African American Vote

Strategy focuses on outreach at HBCUs, stressing economic empowerment and criminal justice reform

By Stacy M. Brown
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Contributor

Due to unprecedented poor polling numbers in the African American community, Republicans have ramped up their effort to court Black voters.

The party has hired four new Black staff members in a move that they hope will not only help GOP Presidential nominee Donald Trump in the general election this November, but that will also bolster the party's long-term efforts to gain support among Af-

rican Americans, a voting bloc that for decades has mostly voted for Democrats. ed officials and community activists; Shannon Reeves, a professor of political science at Alabama A & M University and former national director of state and local development for the RNC; Elroy Sailor, the founder and CEO of the J.C. Watts Companies; and Georgia State University senior Leah LeVell, whose father Bruce LeVell is the chairman of the National Diversity Coalition for Trump.

Two of the new hires, Bell and Sailor, spoke at length with the NNPA News Wire, expressing optimism that they can help turnaround the re-



Ashley D. Bell speaks with The Associated Press Aug. 9 in Washington. Bell, who was one of the 18 black delegates at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, has been hired as an RNC senior strategist and national director of African-American engagement.

their ideas for criminal justice reform.

"HBCUs are a very big

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focus of ours and part of our job is to make sure we engage HBCUs," said Bell. "We don't have a lot of time, but HBCUs can help get the economy to where it needs to be and we recognize that."

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cord low polling numbers that show Trump currently receiving just one percent of the Black vote.

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form is a critical issue for the Black community. "We have to make sure that America can turn the page from the current mass incarceration system," added Bell. "If we talk about communities being devastated by a failed criminal justice system where brothers and sisters are being disenfranchised and not being able to find a job, we talk about fixing the criminal justice system."

The solution, Bell said, is the creation of more

entrepreneurs in the Black community and improving the capital gains tax which would allow these entrepreneurs to perform activities like buying houses to fix up and resell for profit.

Bell noted that Congress has put forward a number of compelling ideas, like economic empowerment zones and transforming education to create a marketplace where schools have to compete for students.

"I think the economic ideas and education opportunities [put forth by the GOP] are very specific to the Black community," said Bell. "It's been eight years since a Republican was in the [White House]...we have to make sure that the Black vote is competitively fought for."

Sailor said it's important to remember that no party has exclusivity on having 100 percent of the best models for America. "I've been a Republican for over 25 years and I have seen the end results of some very good policies and new models

that have proven successful in terms of creating opportunities and solving old problems in our community," he said. "For example, former Congressman J.C. Watts authored the American Community Renewal and New Markets Act, which was signed into law by President Clinton. This legislation helped to empower faith-based organizations, and spur development in our communities."

Among the new team's assignments, Bell will serve as Senior Strategist and National Director of African American Political Engagement and focus on winning elections for 2016. Reeves will serve as Senior Advisor to the RNC's Political Department and will focus on the X's and O's of politics – the data, and voter identification. Sailor has the job of Senior Advisor to the Chairman and will focus on infrastructure, institutional growth and sustainability.

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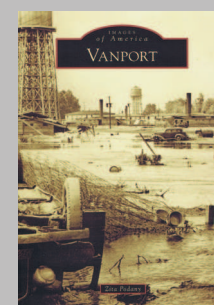
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