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"If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who propose to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want the ocean's majestic waves without the awesome roar of its water."

- Frederick Douglass

1310 Harden Street P.O.Box 11128 Columbia, SC 29211 803.799.5252
Fax: 803.799.7709 Website: www.sclblacknews.com Email: scbnews@aol.com

Isaac Washington, President/Publisher

Obama's Message of Hope, Unity & Change

By Michael Eric Owens

On January 3, 2008 the State of Iowa and its citizenry participated in the greatest political victory for a Black politician since Southern Reconstruction in the late 19th century. Iowa was the stage on which Barack Obama performed his greatest feat so far in his bid for the US Presidency. Throughout his campaign run, the Senator from the great state of Illinois has become accustomed to hearing the choruses of naysayers who first doubted his viability for a senate seat in 2004, and now question whether this country is ready to embrace a Black president. But with Obama capturing 38% of the Democratic vote in a state where Whites make up 93.9% of the population and Blacks just over 2%, one would expect that the cynicism might give way to optimism. According to CNN analyst Roland Martin, never before in Iowa's history had an election been won by a Black person. Up until Obama's impressive victory, Jesse Jackson's 1984 presidential run had been seen as a triumph for Black America. Yet in that race, Jackson received only 2% of Iowa's Democratic votes. How much more should we applaud



Obama's accomplishment, especially considering that his margin of victory was a convincing 8%?

Barack Obama articulates a message of hope, unity and change that resonates in the hearts of people all across America. The message of hope has a universal appeal. Regardless of our differences in background, age, gender and ethnicity, we can all hope for better neighborhoods, schools, jobs, healthcare, and a better world for our children. Obama in his victory speech reassured his supporters and all of America that "we are choosing hope over fear. We're choosing unity over division, and sending a powerful message that change is coming to America." As we canvass the erosion of our communities and the hopelessness

that rests upon the faces of our people, Oh! How nice it would be to hope again.

Barack Obama's message is not a new one. The message of hope, unity and change is rooted in the Black struggle. It was heard in the voices of John Roy Lynch, Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells, A. Philip Randolph, Dr. King and so many others. Obama is now the bearer of this message. Today, let it reverberate from Iowa to the "prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire; to the mighty mountains of New York; to the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania; to the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado; to the curvaceous peaks of California" – and on to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, DC. Without hope there can be no unity, and without unity there can be no change. The message is bigger than one man or one movement, yet one man has caused us to remember, and to believe again.

Michael Eric Owens is a University of Wisconsin-Parkside Graduate (Political Science & History) He is currently - Graduate Student at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (MLIS). Email him at owensme@uwm.edu

Improve education law

By Debi Bush, President, South Carolina School Boards Association, Greenville County School Board

As we approach the six-year mark since passage of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, nearly everyone recognizes it is a badly flawed law. What is more deeply troubling is that Congress and the administration have failed to make urgently needed improvements. Allowing reauthorization to languish for another two or three years would be a disservice to our students and local communities.

Working to implement the law since its inception, school boards across the country have shown Congress the many obstacles and unintended consequences rendered by the law.

Its "one size fits all" approach rigidly tied to high stakes testing is inadequate and does not provide a true picture of student and school performance.

This has led to schools being unfairly labeled as failures even though they may be making important progress in helping all students achieve. Uncorrected, this misidentification of schools will only grow worse in the years ahead. This is especially true for South Carolina whose schools must achieve a much higher standard than schools in other states. A steadily rising performance bar within a flawed system will wrongfully trap more schools in a progression of increasingly severe sanctions, creating a vicious cycle that threatens to undermine public support for our schools.

School boards have recommended improvements such as common sense flexibility that defers to the judgment of local schools and educators – those closest to the

issue. We need changes that more fairly and accurately assess student and school performance. And we need the law's requirements and associated costs to be adequately funded by the federal government.

Our schools, students and educators should not be told to "wait it out" until after the 2008 presidential election when Congress can find the time to fix an unsound and underfunded law.

Waiting for a new administration and Congress to take action would result in the nation's schools suffering under a broken system for another two or three school years. No one, least of all our students, will benefit from a continuation of the status quo. It is time for our leaders in Washington to deliver for our children by improving the law now.

An Election Commitment to Care for Kids

By Afterschool Ambassador Dr. Traci Young Cooper

We usually think of political elections as a season when candidates propose and make wide-reaching commitments about how they will improve society – decreasing taxes, ending the war, improving the environment, providing better health care, being more responsive to constituents' needs, and so on and so on....

But in the primary and general election seasons, what if we could collectively, as a community, state and nation, assist candidates in developing election commitments that could really make a difference in the lives of everyday citizens and our future generation.

During this highly anticipated election season, I encourage all candidates to establish a platform on committing to care for America's and South Carolina's kids beyond the regular school day bell. In particular, I think candidates need to get serious and visionary about making sure all our kids have access to quality afterschool and extended day programs. These programs perform triple duty: they keep children safe during the sometimes perilous afternoon hours, inspire them to learn with an array of engaging and educational activities, and help working parents by relieving them of worries about what their kids are up to after the school bell rings.

Over the last two decades, we've seen a revolution in afterschool programming across the nation, as afterschool programs have taken root and begun to flourish. While specific programs vary from community to community, almost all involve academic support that includes help with homework and a variety of enrichment activities that



both support and expand on the lessons of the regular school day.

But afterschool is about much more than improving test scores. For example, our city's 21st Century Community Learning Center Afterschool Programs have continually demonstrated what it means to make a difference in the life of a child. Partners like Junior Achievement, The Palmetto School of Protocol and Etiquette, Millie Lewis Modeling and Talent Agency, and the Taekwondo Center, provide students across the city with opportunities to excel in areas of character education, personal development, and self-esteem. These partners take students on field trips, teach them essential skills such as financial literacy, martial arts, and the importance of etiquette and manners.

Such experiences can have a profound effect on children. The most recent in a long line of research studies on the impact of afterschool lays any doubt about that to rest. The "Promising Afterschool Programs" study, released this past October by scholars Deborah Lowe Vandell and Kim M. Pierce of the University of California-Irvine and Elizabeth R. Reisner of Policy Studies Associates, examined 35 afterschool programs serving nearly 3,000 low-income students across the nation. The study focused on "high quality" afterschool programs – those typified by supportive re-

lationships between staff and child participants and among participants, as well as rich and varied academic support, recreation, arts opportunities, and other enrichment activities.

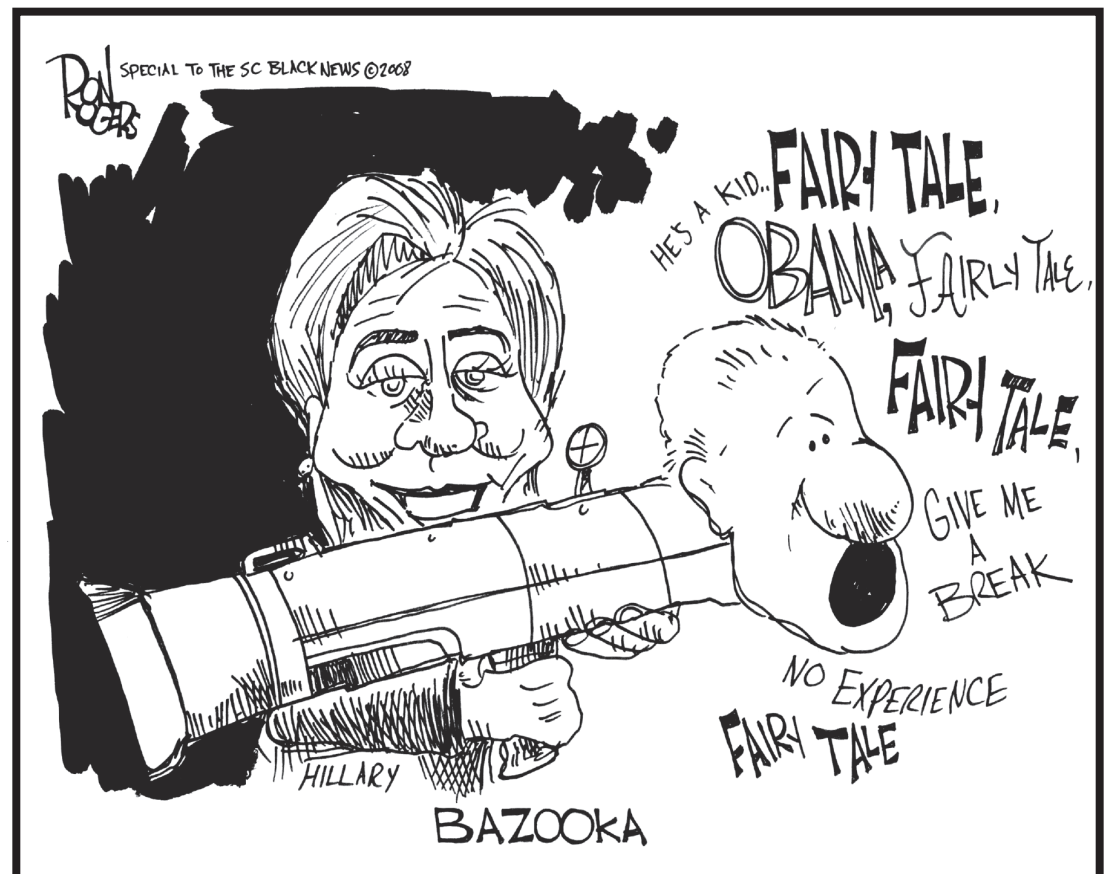
The researchers' conclusion will come as no surprise to parents, educators and anyone who pays attention: "regular participation in high-quality afterschool programs is linked to significant gains in standardized test scores and work habits as well as reductions in behavior problems among disadvantaged students." In short, high quality afterschool programs produce results.

Knowing that, it's hard to see why we haven't increased public and private support for afterschool, to give more children and families access to these programs and to give afterschool providers the resources they need to deliver the high-quality programming children need and deserve.

Afterschool and Extended Day Programs should be an election year "hot-button" issue. Make no mistake about it, providing these opportunities and making this commitment should not just be a concern of politicians. Parents, local school districts, county, city and state governments, as well as businesses and philanthropists all have an important role to play.

As we rapidly approach November 2008, let's hold all candidates accountable for making a clear commitment to care for our kids. If promises to take care for our children aren't the stuff of election campaigns, I don't know what is.

Dr. Traci Young Cooper is the Director of Extended Day Programs in Richland School District One.



Letters to the Editor

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