



©2005 Internet News Agency, LLC; Matt A. Towery, Chairman and CEO;
Charles "Chuck" Clay, President; Pierre D. Howard, Vice-Chairman

Number 716, January 14, 2008

Can Obama Win White Votes in Dixie?

Barack Obama is the first African American with a serious chance of winning the presidency and that's mainly because he's the first national black politician that has a large following among white voters, who -- including Hispanics, Asians and other non-black ethnic groups -- comprise some 87% of the electorate. But what about in the South? With a history of slavery, segregation and a pervasive hostility to blacks, the South might be assumed to be inhospitable territory for Obama, other than in the Democratic Primaries where black and liberal white voters predominate. In the General Election, the greater mass of white voters -- some with varying degrees of racial prejudice, most of them conservative in their politics -- are all but certain to be less inclined to support a black liberal from Illinois.

But that simplistic forecast overlooks several factors. One is that in recent years, a number of African-American politicians of moderate politics and non-confrontational demeanor have done very well with Southern white voters. In Georgia, for example, two statewide elected officials, Attorney General **Thurbert Baker** and Labor Commissioner **Michael Thurmond**, are African-American. So is Atlanta Mayor **Shirley Franklin**, who --

unlike most of her black predecessors -- is popular with the city's white business establishment. In New Orleans, Mayor **Ray Nagin**, a black millionaire businessman (cable TV) got into office initially because of his white support (which he lost after Hurricane Katrina). In Dallas, former Mayor **Ron Kirk** was not only popular with the business community in this 26% black city, but ran a respectable -- if losing (43%) -- battle for the US Senate in 2002. His race may have contributed to his loss, but any Democrat, black or white, has an uphill battle running statewide in Texas. And in 2006, in Tennessee, then-Congressman **Harold Ford Jr.** (D) ran a strong race (48%) for US Senator. Again, any Democrat, black or white, would have had a hard time; Ford ran better than most Democrats seeking a statewide federal office in the conservative Volunteer State.

The best example of a black moderate Democrat riding to victory on a wave of black and white support came in Virginia in 1990, when **Doug Wilder** (D) became the first African American in the nation to be elected governor of a state. (Wilder is now mayor of Richmond.) While Wilder's term in office did not usher in a new era in Southern politics, it did make clear that -- given the right



circumstances -- a black candidate can win statewide in Virginia and perhaps in other Southern states.

This of course is not to suggest black candidates have it easy in the South. On the contrary, everything else being equal, being black is undoubtedly a significant disadvantage in a Southern election.

But everything else is rarely equal. Even white Southerners are uneasy about the Bush Administration's record in Iraq, and if the economy weakens substantially, many lower-income whites will rush back to the party of their ancestors: The Democrats. Even in Dixie, working class voters know who turns on the federal spigots when times are hard.

Add the GOP's failings to Obama's charisma, unmatched since **John F. Kennedy**, and his inclusive rhetoric -- far more appealing to Southern whites than that of either **John Edwards** or **Hillary Clinton** -- and you have a strong possibility that Obama, even with a Kenyan father, could make history in the Old Confederacy as well as in the rest of the nation. Obama is not likely to sweep Dixie, but it isn't far-fetched to see him carrying several of the outer-South states -- Virginia (where popular Gov. **Tim Kaine** (D) has endorsed him), Florida, North Carolina and Arkansas.

Another factor which is often overlooked is that every year older Southern whites, often with ingrained anti-black prejudices, are dying off and being replaced by younger whites who have known nothing but an integrated, if imperfect, society.

A black commentator noted recently on television that Obama, like his influential supporter Oprah, is a black person "who gives white people the benefit of the doubt, and white people respond positively to that."

Another way of putting it is that many white voters want to be relieved of the guilt for their past, or event present, racial prejudice, but they don't want to pay too high a price for that relief. **Jesse Jackson**, **Al Sharpton** and some black academics don't believe there should be forgiveness without confession; they want whites to acknowledge their racism and even make restitution for it, in the form of results-oriented affirmative action in hiring and college admissions or, in some cases, reparations for slavery. Whites don't want to pay these prices. Obama, like a number of black elected officials across the South, gives them an easier way out.

Obama's victory in Iowa and his close second in New Hampshire, both overwhelmingly white states, attest to his appeal across racial lines. Don't assume Dixie's white voters will be immune to that appeal.

Mississippi: Shows, Musgrove Challenge Wicker

After the Mississippi filing deadline passed on January 11, two major Democratic politicians had signed up for the special election to fill the last four years of retired US Sen. **Trent Lott** (R). Former Gov. **Ronnie Musgrove** (D) and former US Rep. **Ronnie Shows** (D) both filed to oppose US Sen. **Roger Wicker** (R), who was appointed for one-year of Lott's unexpired term and is already running for the balance of the term. Under special election rules, all candidates run in the same election; if no candidate receives a majority, the top two -- regardless of party -- meet in a runoff.

A Wicker-Musgrove contest would have an interesting dynamic in that the two politicians were once desk-mates in the Mississippi legislature and are considered good friends. In a recent survey by Research 2000 taken December 10-12 for the left-leaning DailyKos



website, Wicker had 47%, Musgrove 39%. Another survey, by Greenberg, Quinlan, Rosner Research (D), showed Musgrove defeating Wicker 48% to 34%. As of September 30, Wicker had \$569,000 cash-on-hand in his campaign fund.

State Attorney General **Jim Hood** (D) has brought a lawsuit to change the date of the election from November 4 to a date within 100 days of Lott's December 18 resignation -- by mid-March at the latest, possibly March 11. Some observers believe the later day would give Wicker a chance to establish himself as the incumbent in the voters' minds, while the earlier date would favor the Democrats.

Mississippi: Who Will Succeed Wicker?

When the January 11 filing deadline passed, ten candidates had filed to try to fill the vacancy of seven-term US Rep. **Roger Wicker** (R), whose appointment to the US Senate left an open seat in Mississippi's 1st District (Tupelo, etc.).

Republicans

Greg Davis, 41, mayor of Southhaven, the fastest growing municipality in the state, was first out of the starting gate, announcing on November 28, before Wicker's Senate appointment, that he was preparing to run in the event a vacancy occurred. On December 31, he filed with the Federal Election Commission (FEC) and began organizing a campaign for both the unexpired term and the full two-year term. Davis has been mayor for eleven years and before that, was a member of the state house of representatives for six years. He has an engineering degree from Mississippi State. He is one of the top contenders, with the experience, background and outgoing personality that make for a good campaigner.

He would draw especially well in the northwestern part of the district.

Glenn McCullough, 52, a former mayor of Tupelo, made his kickoff announcement in four stops throughout the district on January 2. He is a past chairman of the board of the Tennessee Valley Authority, which the district's electricity provider. He also served as director of the Appalachian Regional Commission. McCullough was elected mayor of Tupelo, the district's largest city, in 1997 with 61% of the vote. Like Davis, he is well-qualified for the job, is personable and is well-liked. McCullough would be popular in the eastern part of the district.

Randy Russell, an Oxford ophthalmologist and a former member of the state board of health, filed for the race on the day of the deadline, January 11. Russell has long been active in Republican Party affairs. He was a strong supporter of former Mississippi governor **Kirk Fordice** (R).

Democrats

Travis Childers, 49, who has served as chancery clerk for Prentiss County (Booneville) for five terms, announced his candidacy on January 2. Childers is the owner of Travis Childers Real Estate in Booneville and also owns, with his family, a nursing home and related facilities. One source describes Childers as "the dark horse in the race," noting that he is "a savvy politician who is extraordinarily well-connected" with chancery clerks and other court house officials throughout the district. "He's a popular public figure," continues this observer, who notes that Childers could benefit from anti-Tupelo sentiment in parts of the district.



State Rep. **Steve Holland**, 52, filed for the seat on the last day of filing, January 11. He has served in the state house of representatives for 28 years, where he has earned a reputation for being a very effective lawmaker, and gets re-elected by overwhelming majorities. Holland, from Plantersville, chairs the Public Health and Human Services Committee and co-chairs the Select Committee on Accessible and Affordable Medical Malpractice Insurance. He is a farmer and a funeral home owner. He is well-known across the district, in part for being flamboyant, which some folks regard as a plus, others as a minus.

Brian Neely, a Tupelo lawyer, announced his candidacy on January 2. Neely is a former county attorney for Lee County (Tupelo). He is a former Marine Corps captain.

Ken Hurt, who got 34% of the vote against Wicker as the Democrats' 2006 nominee, filed on January 11. He hails from Verona and is a political consultant.

Marshall Coleman, who owns a restaurant in Calhoun City, also filed January 11.

Others

John Wages Jr., a professor at Itawamba Community College, plans to run as the Green Party nominee in the November election.

Wally Pang, an independent, runs a restaurant in Batesville; he will also be on the November ballot.

The primary is on March 11 and the General Election is on November 4. Gov. **Haley Barbour** (R) has not yet called a special election for the remainder of Wicker's term, but says he will do so within the next 60 days. It should be around the same time as the regular primary, but will be a non-partisan election, with a runoff between the top two,

regardless of party. The two-election scenario may prove confusing to candidates and to voters.

President Bush carried the district with 62% in 2004; the district is 71% white, 26% black, so a Republican victory is likely, though not a foregone conclusion. Geography could play a role in the primaries or the election; many voters outside of Tupelo, the largest and most prosperous town in the district, resent the city and may consciously choose a candidate who hails from elsewhere in the district. "People get tired of Tupelo looking down its nose at them," says one source. **Leans Republican.**

Mississippi: Who Will Succeed Pickering?

Eight Republicans and two Democrats have filed to run for Congress in Mississippi's 3rd District (Meridian, etc.), where US Rep. **Chip Pickering** (R) has announced he will retire at the end of his current term. The two parties' primaries will be on March 11.

On the GOP side, those who filed are **James Broadwater**, a Southern Baptist minister; **Hardy Caraway** of Quitman; **Gregg Harper**, chairman of the Rankin County Republican Party; **Gregory Hatcher**, who works in his family's consulting firm; businessman **David Landrum**; **Bill Marcy**, who has a background in law enforcement; state Sen. **Charlie Ross**, an unsuccessful candidate (43%) for lieutenant governor in the 2007 Republican Primary, who has been endorsed by the Club for Growth; and **John Rounsaville**, the state director of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Office and a former aide to Pickering.

The two Democrats running are **Randy Eads** of Starkville and **Joel Gill**, a cattle broker.



Mississippi: House Speaker Re-elected

House Speaker **Billy McCoy** (D), 65, was re-elected to his key post last week by the bare minimum, defeating his challenger, state Rep. **Jeff Smith** (D), by 62 to 60. McCoy, who has served in the lower chamber's top position for the past four years, has been a thorn in Mississippi Gov. **Haley Barbour**'s (R) side during the governor's first term. For example, McCoy supported a proposal to reduce the sales tax on groceries and replace the revenue by increasing the tax on tobacco, a high-profile measure that Barbour opposed

Smith, 58, once an ally of McCoy but now friendly to Barbour, waged a strong campaign, and though he lost, the failure of his supporters to gravitate toward McCoy once it became known that the speaker would win re-election suggests that the evenly divided house will be up for grabs when key legislation comes up. The close result, says one insider (R), "was a warning" to McCoy, not a strong reaffirmation of his influence.

Barbour officially stayed neutral in the race, in part out of concern that lawmakers would resent his involvement. Nevertheless, all 46 of the Republicans in the House supported Smith. McCoy was backed by most of the Democrats, including virtually all of the 37 African-American representatives and by most of the white Democrats.

If Barbour was Smith's silent partner, some GOP sympathizers were suggesting that one of McCoy's key backers was mega-millionaire trial lawyer **Dickie Scruggs**, currently under indictment on federal bribery charges. However, although Scruggs has contributed funds to McCoy's political action committee, he was not directly involved in the McCoy-Smith battle. Noting Scruggs's legal problems,

one source said, "I don't think he's concerned with anything but himself right now." And veteran Jackson columnist **Bill Minor** notes that most of Scruggs's efforts in 2007 were directed toward defeating incumbent Insurance Commissioner **George Dale**, who was defeated in the Democratic Primary by **Gary Anderson**, an African-American, who then lost to Republican **Mike Chaney** in the General.

How much of a set-back McCoy's re-election was to Barbour is not clear. One insider (R) says that had Smith won, "The governor would have had a better shot of getting his agenda through the legislature." However, this GOP source also notes that "During the past four years, the governor had a strong presence in the state senate and a lot went through, despite opposition in the House." Minor, however, says McCoy's re-election was "pivotal" as to whether "Barbour would absolutely dominate the Mississippi legislature" during his second term. "McCoy," notes Minor, "was the main obstacle to Barbour." McCoy, a Democrat out of Northeast Mississippi, has a "philosophy out of the old **Roosevelt** Era," says Minor.

Moreover, the job of speaker of the house is a powerful one in Mississippi; the occupant appoints committee chairs, assigns members to committees and assigns bills to committees. The major legislative battle during the coming months is likely to be over the state budget, with slowing state tax revenues and the dwindling of federal hurricane relief funds contributing to spending constraints. Thus, Barbour and McCoy may well have to reach some sort of agreement on some contentious fiscal issues.

"Partisanship has come to Mississippi like it never has in its history, certainly in my 60 years of covering the state," concludes Minor.



Grits

? **Dixie to Net Eight Congressional Seats after 2010?** According to 2007 population estimates by the US Census Bureau and projections by Polidata, the South will make a net gain of eight congressional seats in the post-2020 redistricting. The region will gain nine seats -- four in Texas, two in Florida and one each in North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia -- but lose one seat in Louisiana. Most of the losses are likely to be in the Northeast and the Midwest. The gains would continue recent trends which are concentrating more congressional power in the Southern states.

? **Virginia: Marshall Enters Senate Race.** Socially conservative Del. **Robert G. Marshall** (R) has announced that he will enter the GOP contest in Virginia for the US Senate nomination to succeed Sen. **John Warner** (R), who is retiring. Marshall will be challenging former governor **Jim Gilmore** (R) in a battle for the nomination, to be decided by a state convention May 29-31. Marshall, from Prince William County in vote-heavy Northern Virginia, is a strong foe of abortion and same-sex marriage. But he is also an environmentalist and, according to the *Washington Post*, wants to "end the U.S. occupation of Iraq." Gilmore is the early favorite.

? **Virginia: Moran Explores 2009 Gubernatorial Bid; Allen Opts Out.** Del. **Brian Moran** (D), brother of US Rep. **Jim Moran** (D), has formed an exploratory committee for next year's governor's race in Virginia. Moran, 48, will make a final decision in March, after the legislature adjourns. If he runs -- and he is expected to -- he will join state Sen. **Creigh Deeds** (D) in the Democratic

Primary. Another potential Democratic contender is former congressman **L. F. Payne**. Meanwhile, former US Sen. **George Allen** (R), who narrowly (49%) lost his 2006 re-election bid, announced that he will not run for governor. Allen, who served as governor from 1994 to 1998, has been speaking across the state, fueling speculation that he plans to reenter the political arena, if not next year, then perhaps in 2012, when he could have a rematch with freshman US Sen. **Jim Webb** (D). The likely Republican candidates for governor next year are Lt. Gov. **Bill Bolling** and state Attorney General **Robert McDonnell**. Gov. **Tim Kaine** (D) is limited by state law to one-term.

? **Kentucky: Boswell Challenges Lewis.** Six-term US Rep. **Ron Lewis** (R) has drawn a foe for the 2008 election. Last week, state Sen. **David Boswell** (D) announced that he will seek his party's nomination to run for the 2nd District congressional seat (Bowling Green, etc.) in the May 20 primary. **Boswell**, 58, has run successfully statewide in the past, getting elected agriculture commissioner in 1983. He ran for lieutenant governor in 1987, but lost the Democratic Primary. He has served in the state senate for four and one-half terms. Lewis defeated a strong challenge from state Rep. **Mike Weaver** (D) in 2006 by 55% to 45%. According to the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, Daviess County Judge-Executive **Reid Haire** (D) is undecided about whether he will also seek the seat; the filing deadline is January 29. Bush carried the district with 65% in 2004.

? **Perceptive Punditry.** "John Edwards reminds me of **George Wallace** without the racism," quipped African American *Washington Post* columnist **Colbert King** in a recent television appearance.