

The BLACK C o m m e n t a t o r

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Black Turnout Looking Mild for November Elections African American Leadership By Dr. Ron Walters, PhD BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

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From all that I can tell, Barack Obama isn't running in the fall and that fact is likely to have a decisive impact on the elections for governor in both Virginia and New Jersey and the House of Representatives. Blacks are 15% of the population in New Jersey and 20% in Virginia, so their vote could make a difference in these close races. Nevertheless, the Obama factor is critical because the 95% level at which blacks voted for him last year is the highest in American history brought the turnout numbers close to their representation in the population. Yet, the emotional drama, laden with hope and the possibility of real change with which most blacks went to the polls was an historical event that is unlikely to be replicated in the next general election, not to speak of the off-year elections coming up. Generally, the black vote can be 30-50% in an off-year election of what it was in the presidential election and that is the danger.

The posture of the black vote is especially critical in Virginia where Creigh Deeds, the Democratic candidate has not run a particularly effectively election and is not as charismatic as his conservative challenger, Republican Robert McDonnell. President Obama has campaigned in Virginia for Deeds, but the White House was recently peeved because Deeds has not labeled himself an "Obama Democrat" in a state where Obama won an historic victory last year. With Deeds lagging, at this writing, by an average of 12% in recent polls, he badly needs a strong black turnout.

Deeds, however, describes himself as a "Creigh Deeds Democrat" and has failed to lock up at least two prominent black heavy-weights in the State, former Governor Doug Wilder and Sheila Johnson, wealthy wife of Bob Johnson of BET fame. Sheila Johnson has made television ads for Republican McDonnell, attempting to split the black vote.

Even if Deeds were to win Wilder over, it unlikely that his influence would have much effect with the election so close.

In the most recent Public Policy poll, although blacks say they support Creigh Deeds (68-20) when asked whether they are "excited" about the race, the percent of blacks responding shows: "Very excited" -- 41%, "Somewhat" -- 31% and "Not very" -- 26%. So, Creigh Deeds has not lit a fire in the black community which would be necessary for a big turnout with most blacks not very excited by or about his campaign.

A somewhat similar picture presents itself in New Jersey with the incumbent Governor John Corzine running for re-election. Corzine is running neck-and-neck with Republican challenger Chris Christie, just behind her in a recent poll by 2%, after running behind by double-digits most of this year. Obama has campaigned strongly for Corzine and if he pulls ahead, it could be said that the Obama factor made a difference. But contrary to Deeds, Corzine is also working the black community hard as Rev. Reginald Jackson leader of the Black Minister's Council of New Jersey has recently endorsed him.

The black vote could also be a factor in House whether the House holds on to its Democratic majority in States like Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina and Ohio. More than in the South however, Ohio could be a bell-weather of Obama's ability to hold keep his Northern and Mid-western states in the fall elections. In this economically challenged stated, Obama has climbed back up over 50% in his favorable rating according to recent polls -- something the major media has kept secret.

With the Youth turnout also expected to drop in the fall elections, the Democratic Party's dependence upon black turnout is greater than usual. But here is the rub: blacks are suffering from the fall-out of the economy at a disproportionate rate than the rest of the nation and need for the impact of the economic programs that have been put place to work for them. If that doesn't happen, black voter turnout could be even less than projected.

These elections could be a window into the 2010 re-election race for Barack Obama, for if by then blacks have not benefited from Obama' programs, their turnout could fall back to at least the normal level of 85% -- which means a 10% drop from 2008. That could cost Obama in a close election. So there is much here to learn from in these elections that don't look like they matter very much.

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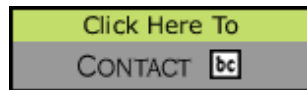
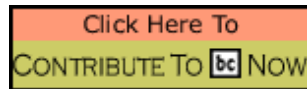


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