

POLITICS

Bush agrees to speak at Urban League event

President says black organization seeks constructive role.

Knight Ridder Newspapers

Ashwaubenon, Wis. — President Bush accepted Wednesday an invitation to speak at the National Urban League convention in Detroit, nearly a week after he spurned a similar offer to address the NAACP convention in Philadelphia.

White House communications director Dan Bartlett said Bush will speak at the black organization's meeting on July 23 because it has demonstrated a desire for constructive dialogue.

Bush turned down requests to attend NAACP conventions because of what he called harsh statements by the group's leadership. Bush and other White House officials accused the NAACP leadership of putting partisan politics ahead of trying to improve race relations and the frayed relationship between the organization and the Republican Party.

"The Urban League is an organization he has a relationship with and he looks forward to sharing his ideas for the American people," Bartlett said. "He obviously takes seriously reaching out to African-Americans. He understands not everybody attending will agree with what he says."

In an interview with The Philadelphia Inquirer and two other Pennsylvania newspapers last week, Bush described his relationship with NAACP leadership as "basically nonexistent."

"You've heard the rhetoric and the names they've called me," Bush said.

NAACP Chairman Julian Bond told lawmakers and business leaders in Indiana last month that Bush and other Republicans appeal to a racist "dark underside of American culture." At the 2001 NAACP convention in New Orleans, Bond said Bush "has selected nominees from the Taliban wing of American politics."

It will be the third time Bush has spoken to the National Urban League.

A Major Chance to Star

Senate candidate picked for big speech

The Associated Press

Springfield, Ill. — Eager to showcase new faces at the party's national convention, Democrats have picked just about the newest face around to deliver the keynote address: Illinois Senate candidate Barack Obama.

Obama could become only the fifth black senator in U.S. history. Tapping him to deliver the keynote address suggests the party sees a bright future for the 42-year-old law professor and state senator.

"What an extraordinary expression of confidence by the national party in his ability to command that stage," said David Wilhelm, the former head of the Democratic National Committee.

Past Democratic keynote speakers include New York Gov. Mario Cuomo and New Jersey Sen. Bill Bradley. More recently, the speech has been delivered by promising younger officials, such as Rep. Harold Ford of Tennessee in 2000 and Indiana Gov. Evan Bayh in 1996.

Obama, whose father was black, has made a splash on the national scene since his March victory in the Illinois



BARACK OBAMA, the Democratic candidate for a Senate seat in Illinois, has been selected to deliver the party's keynote address at the convention in Boston.

Senate primary, partly because he was able to win the support of many white voters as well as an overwhelming number of blacks.

"At a time when so much of our politics seems divided, the fact that, at least within the Democratic Party, we were able to pull together a broad-based coalition is encouraging to Democrats," he said Wednesday.

Obama often says he is part of the black community but not limited by it.

His father was from Kenya. He met Obama's mother, who was white, when both were students at the University of Hawaii. When Obama was 2, his father left the family and returned to Kenya, where he eventually became a senior economist in the Ministry of Finance.

Obama was raised, mostly

in Kansas, by his late mother and grandparents. He graduated from Columbia University in New York and received his law degree from Harvard Law School.

He became the first black president of the prestigious Harvard Law Review and later worked as a civil-rights lawyer and as a community organizer in New York and Chicago.

Obama teaches law at the University of Chicago and has served in the state Senate since 1997.

Although his address is billed as the "keynote," other speeches, such as one delivered by former President Clinton, will be more high-profile. Obama speaks Tuesday, July 27, a night when the broadcast networks are not planning to air convention coverage.

Senator not upset about silence

Hillary Rodham Clinton insists she doesn't care if she speaks at convention.

New York Times News Service

Washington — Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton said Wednesday that she was not upset that Democratic Party leaders had not given her a speaking role at the Democratic National Convention in Boston later this month.

During an appearance on a radio show in Binghamton, Sen. Clinton laughed when asked if she was disappointed about not being included in the lineup of convention speakers.

"No," she said, "I've had many opportunities in the past."

At the same time, however, several of her supporters spent the day negotiating with convention organizers for a solution to the standoff, party operatives said.

James Carville, a longtime adviser to former President Bill Clinton, predicted that top Democrats would ultimately accommodate Sen. Clinton rather than allow the controversy to dominate the news in the days leading up to the convention.

"You want your convention to be about why John Kerry should be president, not why Hillary Clinton is not speaking," he said. "This will get fixed."

There has been widespread speculation about Sen. Clinton's standing in the party since John Kerry announced last week that his running mate would be John Edwards, a relatively young and magnetic senator from North Carolina.

Many Democrats say the decision means Edwards could present an alternative to Sen. Clinton in 2008, if President Bush is re-elected this year.

Some Democrats wondered whether this potential rivalry was behind the decision to keep Sen. Clinton off the list of convention speakers.

The senator seemed to try to tamp down such speculation on Wednesday, saying that the party's decisions over who will have a prominent speaking role at the convention are "made based on a whole raft of issues."

Sen. Clinton, who has been raising money and campaigning for the Democratic presidential ticket, also said that the "real emphasis" at the convention ought to be on Edwards and Kerry.

The decision to keep the junior senator from New York off the list caused a stir within Democratic circles, with many wondering why top Democrats failed to invite one of the party's most popular figures to speak.

Early in the day, for example, Judith Hope, the former chairwoman of the New York Democratic Party, said she would urge other female Democrats to boycott the convention unless Sen. Clinton was allowed to speak.

Hope, who is now the chairwoman of the Eleanor Roosevelt Legacy Committee, described herself as dismayed over the news in an e-mail message sent to reporters, observing that Sen.

Clinton is "one of the most admired and articulate Democratic women in the country."

But later in the day, Hope backed away from her threat, saying that the senator's office had intervened and asked her not to go through with her plans to organize a boycott.

"Sen. Clinton's office has asked me to cease and desist," she said in an interview. "I'll honor her wishes, and that's the last I'll have to say on the subject."

But Hope did send an e-mail message to at least 1,000 supporters urging them to protest the decision.

"If you are, like me, distressed by this news," she said, "I urge you to contact the Kerry-Edwards campaign and the Democratic National Committee today and tell them that, without question, Hillary Clinton has earned a place on the podium and that this omission needs to be corrected immediately."

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