

A political education for the 'Labor Educator'



William H. Young

On March 4, Sen. Hillary Clinton once again showed why she would be such a terrific candidate in November. With the nation's news media once again preparing her political obituary, she bounced back with smashing victories in Ohio, Texas and Rhode Island, losing only in Vermont. NALC and the coalition of unions that has endorsed Clinton for president can be proud of the excellent get-out-the-vote campaign we undertook in those states. The news media has less to be proud of. After wrongly declaring the race over, it also got the story wrong on labor's role in the voting. Here's what I mean:

Watching the results come in on CNN, I was amazed when a famous political pundit declared "Big Labor" to be the big loser in Ohio. Why? Because Clinton won the union vote in that state by 55 to 45 percent. Say what?

Apparently this mis-informed maven was focused only on the 11th-hour endorsement of Sen. Obama by the UFCW and the SEIU, and their million-dollar ad campaign, so he could only conclude that union leaders are out of touch with their members, who ignored the endorsements. It apparently slipped his notice that more than a dozen AFL-CIO unions endorsed Sen. Clinton months ago! Those unions—including NALC—and their members made the difference on March 4. Thanks to all the Carrier Corps volunteers and released NALC activists who performed superbly.

OK, so an overpaid cable bloviator got the story wrong. What else is new? But how do you explain a well-known labor activist-writer getting it wrong, too?

On the day after the primaries, Harry Kelber posted an article on "The Labor Educator" website that questioned whether Sen. Clinton deserved endorsement by the AFL-CIO unions. How could the presidents of these unions explain the endorsements, he demanded to know, given Clinton's tenure on the board of Arkansas-based Wal-Mart in the 1980s, when she lived and worked in Little Rock, and President Bill Clinton's support for NAFTA in the 1990s?

Leaving aside the cheap shot about serving on the board of Wal-Mart years ago, when it was a regional retailer that still had a buy-American policy, and ignoring the fact that Hillary was fighting her guts out for national health insurance when NAFTA was debated in 1993, Kelber is just flat-out wrong that she has never done anything for labor. She has one of the strongest pro-labor voting records in the Senate and has been elected twice by voters in the most unionized state in America, with the backing of virtually every New York labor organization.

For NALC, Hillary Clinton has been an unwavering friend and ally. She was an early and relentless supporter of postal reform. She not only co-sponsored Sen. Harkin's bill to ban the outsourcing of our jobs, she has her own plan to slap sharp limits on government outsourcing after years of contractor fraud and abuse under the Bush administration. She not only supports the Employee Free Choice Act, she routinely touts it on the campaign trail as a way to rebuild the middle class. She helped lead the fight against President Bush's plan to privatize Social Security. Having battled the powerful special interests that have opposed national health insurance since the Truman administration, she has crafted a pragmatic and realistic health care plan to finally achieve universal coverage and cost control—a plan that will save letter carriers and other insured workers real money by eliminating the invisible surcharge for the uninsured that raises our health care premiums by as much as 20 percent.

Given this record, I am not surprised that so many AFL-CIO unions endorsed Sen. Clinton. I can't speak for them, but I can tell Brother Kelber exactly why NALC endorsed Hillary Clinton. It's simple: our members voted to endorse her. Every member was given a chance to vote through a postal ballot and she was the clear choice, by a 2-1 margin, over several other labor-friendly candidates. I hope that educates the "Labor Educator." ☒