

Black Farmers Association president stumps for Obama in Bamberg

By MINNIE MILLER, T&D Correspondent | Tuesday, January 01, 2008

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BAMBERG -- A small group of area residents attended a meeting Friday at the Bamberg Civic Center to learn more about Democratic presidential hopeful Sen. Barack Obama's plan to help support rural communities in South Carolina .

The main speaker was Dr. John Boyd , president of the National Black Farmers Association. Representatives from Obama's campaign offices in Orangeburg, Columbia and Washington , D.C. were also on hand.

Elizabeth Wilkins from Obama's Orangeburg office at 1168 Magnolia Street office opened the meeting with a brief summary of the Black Farmers Bill. In February, Obama joined his colleague, Sen. Charles "Chuck" Grassley of Iowa , in introducing S. 515, the Pigford Claims Remedy Act of 2007. The bill provided a mechanism for the determination on the merits of the claims of claimants who met the class criteria in a civil action relating to racial discrimination by the Department of Agriculture but who were denied that determination.

The bill re-established the right of those plaintiffs who filed within the court-ordered late filing period to file a claim and receive a determination on the merits of their cases, according to Obama.

"Obama was not afraid to stand up for black farmers when other members of Congress shied away from other issues like discrimination that occurred at the hands of the USDA," Wilkins said. "He's a man that not only wants us to preserve our legacy but also wants us to grow - wants rural America to see a renaissance."

Wilkinson introduced Boyd as a man who has committed his life to advocacy on behalf of African-American farmers and

minorities. In a statement released Dec. 14, Boyd commented on the Senate's passage of the Farm Bill (H.R. 2419).

"The Farm Bill includes a provision that will allow over 74,000 black farmers and their families to have their cases heard based on merits," Boyd said. "We appreciate Sen. Obama's leadership on the issue and sponsoring the legislation in the Farm Bill."

Boyd said he sees in Obama the vision, leadership ability and the will for change the country needs.

"We're at a time now when we need change, Boyd said. "We have a war that's pretty much broke the country, \$3 gas prices, people not working, and you can call it what you want, but my definition is a recession," Boyd said.

For decades, African-American farmers have been struggling with the United States Department of Agriculture trying to get operating loans, farm ownership loans, farm equipment loans, Boyd said.

"It's an issue the media overlooks," Boyd said, "putting it on page A17 instead of on page A1."

Obama has already stepped up and done some positive things for the black farmers by sponsoring the legislation and sticking with it, Boyd said. He emphasized the need for volunteers to get aboard the campaign and spread the word and (Obama's) message.

"The best advertising in the world is word of mouth, especially among African-Americans," Boyd said. "It's our job to get out there and be Barack Obama foot soldiers."

The National Black Farmers Association was founded in 1995. Today the NBF has more than 94,000 members.

For more information on the NBF, go to www.blackfarmers.org or www.johnwboydjr.com or www.johnwboydjr.com.

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