

*Please see Congressman West's below editorial on playing the race card in 2012 politics:

Mr. President, please don't play the race card in 2012

Congressman Allen B. West

I was born in the inner city of Atlanta in 1961, when segregation was still rife, at a time when I would have been barred from visiting the very beaches that make up part of the congressional district I so proudly represent.

Just two years after my birth, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. momentarily described his dream that one day his children would "live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but the content of their character."

How proud he would have been on that November Tuesday in 2008 when Barack Obama was elected the 44th President of the United States. Clearly, Dr. King's dream had come true. White voters across America had judged our President by the content of his character, not the color of his skin, and elected a man of color, whose very lineage with a black African father and white American mother, was a literal manifestation of the figurative melting pot of these United States.

The inauguration of our first black President, the highest office in the land, and perhaps the world's most powerful office, clearly demonstrated to the world that race need not be a hindrance to success and achievement in America. The fact that Barack Obama won the largest share of white support of any Democrat in a two-man race since 1976 indicated the lion's share of these voters made their decision based on his character, his vision of hope and change, and his ability to relate with everyday Americans.

Still, let us not ignore that white Democrats aren't the only voters who are capable of making a decision based on character rather than color.

In the 2010 election cycle, 42 black Republicans were vying for seats in the House of Representatives, and 14 of them made it to the general election. Two of those candidates, myself as well as Tim Scott from South Carolina, carried that success all the way to the House of Representatives. I represent a Congressional District where more than 90 percent of my constituents are not black. A powerful movement of respect for black conservatism is brewing in this country, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. would be proud of it.

With all of this progress, why is it that we continue to hear charges of racism emanating from the left, and most disturbingly, from the White House itself? It seems anytime there is criticism of the President or any of his black members of his administration, such as Attorney General Eric Holder, that criticism is decried as racist.

Mr. Holder recently said of his critics, "This is a way to get at the president because of the way I can be identified with him, both due to the nature of our relationship and, you know, the fact that we're both African-American." In other words, he insinuated Republicans -- along with Conservatives and Tea Party members -- are incapable of judging anyone solely by their character, something I take very personally.

Mr. Holder and others need to know, the criticism of the President is not of his person, but of his policies, which have clearly failed our nation--and most tragically of all in this supposedly post-racial period --have failed the black community.

As of December 2011, black unemployment remained in double digits, nearly double the national average for men at 16.4 percent, and 14.1 percent for women.

According to a Washington Post poll in September 2011, the proportion of black Americans with a "strongly positive" view of President Obama has slipped from 83 percent to 58 percent. It would obviously be absurd to say the black community's changing view of President Obama is racially biased, so how can one make the same claim about white members opposing his policies?

As we proceed into this general election cycle, it would be a disgrace if Mr. Holder's comment is

the first salvo in the upcoming campaign to deflect honest assessment of the President's performance in office. This campaign must be about ideas, policy and the direction of this country, and the President must not hide behind a curtain of so-called racial bias.

All Americans, black or white – and every shade in between – must be allowed to voice their opinions, level their criticisms and engage in candid discussion without fear of being labeled "racist" simply because of the color of their skin. This is precisely what Dr. Martin Luther King spoke of so eloquently, and what we celebrate today.

My message to President Obama is this: "Mr. President, your very presence in office demonstrates Dr. King's dream has indeed come true. But how devastated would Dr. King be to know the Americans who are still fomenting racism at the highest levels are the very people for whom he fought for and died?"