

Full Transcript

Rev. Jesse Jackson on CNN's *The Situation Room*

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WOLF BLITZER, CNN ANCHOR: We want to get right back to another story we're following. Breaking news, the Reverend Jesse Jackson saying some very, very disparaging words about Senator Barack Obama, even though he supports him for president of the United States. CNN's Don Lemon has been working this story, together with a lot of us. First of all, Don, I know you're watching this story. Senator -- Reverend Jackson is about to join us on the phone. But just remind us, before you start talking to Reverend Jackson, what exactly he said on an open mike that's causing so much distress right now.

DON LEMON, CNN ANCHOR: Well what he said to me earlier, and we're going to talk to him in just a little bit, we just got him on the phone, Wolf. He said that he made some crude what he called crude and hurtful comments that he would much rather have made to the senator in private. He did not know the microphone was open. He said it was a hot mike, didn't realize it.

And what he said was that he wanted to -- he thinks that the lectures that Barack Obama has been giving lately to black churches and to black people, he thinks it needs to be a broader context. It's much broader than what the senator is saying.

But what is much better is probably that we get the words from the Reverend Jesse Jackson right now. Reverend Jesse Jackson joining us from Chicago. Thank you very much, sir.

VOICE OF REV. JESSE JACKSON, RAINBOW/PUSH COALITION: Well, Don, how are you?

LEMON: I'm doing well. How are you is the question -- but first, I want to ask what you said, and why did you say it?

JACKSON: Well, you know, let me say first, this is a sound bite within a broader conversation about urban policy and racial disparities. And I -- feel very distressed because I'm supportive of this campaign and with what the senator has done and is doing.

I was in a conversation with a fellow guest at Fox on Sunday. He asked about Barack's speeches lately at the black churches. I said it can come off as speaking down to black people. The moral message must be a much broader message. What we need really is racial justice and urban policy and jobs and healthcare. There is a range of issues on the menu.

And frankly, I think that is his basic urban policy position. No one else has put one together except him in the situation.

And then I said something I felt regret for -- it was crude. It was very private, and very much a sound bite -- and a live mike. And so I feel -- I find no comfort in it, I find no joy in it. So I immediately called the senator's campaign to send my statement of apology to repair the harm or hurt that this may have caused his campaign, because I support it unequivocally.

LEMON: OK, Reverend.

And Barack Obama's campaign, of course, is saying that they don't have a comment now. And you know how quickly this spreads. We got -- I got the word through another source and then called you. And Wolf Blitzer also tried to get you on the phone.

And Wolf has some questions for you as well -- Wolf?

BLITZER: Reverend Jackson, why did you say these things? Because it's so crude, we can't even repeat it on the air right now, what you said on this open mike.

What was going through your mind?

JACKSON: Well, when I was asked about it, there was already some kind of (INAUDIBLE) reaction. The appeal in black America is record levels of unemployment, home foreclosure crisis, records of murders, and all kind of reprehensible actions for black America. A million blacks are in jail even as we talk today and 900,000 young black men. So we have some real serious issues, and not just moral issues --

BLITZER: Well then let me interrupt, Reverend Jackson.

JACKSON: -- Structural inequality.

BLITZER: Reverend Jackson, are you suggesting that Senator Obama isn't concerned about these issues? Is that what you are saying?

JACKSON: Not -- by any means (ph). He has dealt with it more effectively than anyone else has. Each time he gives one of these message at a black church, it appears to be targeted and the media takes it and runs with it as a solution to a structural crisis -- you know -- his moral behavior.

To me it's like putting a size 10 foot in a size eight shoe. You need some structure, not just some challenges on -- which he understands so well, and that's why I regret so much this statement, which could be exploited or could be used to exploit our relationship and the campaign.

LEMON: Reverend -- and I want to jump in here and ask you question because there has been some talk in the media, and also on the blogs, about the Reverend -- about Barack Obama playing to the middle, and not necessarily addressing issues that are important to the black community as sternly and as matter-of-factly as he should. And in some way, and I don't know if this is your opinion, that he may be shying away from this because he's concerned that it might hurt him in his run for the presidency.

JACKSON: The basic issues he raises about an urban policy and jobs, no one else has addressed, has broad application. The crisis we've faced today, besides, you know, behaving better and doing the right thing, is jobs and investors leaving and drugs and guns are coming. The murder rate is up, taxes up, services down, first class jail, second class schools.

That requires some real heavy lifting that has to take place. When you are speaking to a black church, or to labor hall, or to a university, I'm appealing really for a much broader discussion. And I would say again, probably because of regard for him and the campaign, and I would hate it to be lifted out of context really on a live mike statement.

BLITZER: And -- Reverend Jackson, we're out of time, but a very quick -- if you could right now, speak directly to Senator Obama from your heart, what would you say to him?

JACKSON: That any hurt or harm I caused his campaign, I apologize, because I have such high regard for him. And this our (ph) redemptive moment. I'm a part of it. And I cherish his role -- the role he's played in making the nation better and making the world rejoice.

BLITZER: Reverend Jackson, thank you for joining us for a few moments. We'll continue to watch this story.

Don Lemon, thanks to you as well.

This is a story that clearly is going to cause some controversy out there.

LEMON: Thank you, Wolf.

BLITZER: Thank you.

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