

Controversy dogs Bond

New NAACP chairman makes questionable first move

Special to Sentinel-Voice
WASHINGTON — Compassion. That's what new NAACP national board chairman Julian Bond said led him to appoint a convicted embezzler to key posts in the civil rights organization as his first act. Others say the move is a political payoff.

Thus the dilemma. Some in the NAACP are wondering whether Bond, a veteran rights advocate who marched with Martin Luther King Jr., can quell internal bickering that has muted the efficiency and muddled the agenda of the nation's oldest and largest civil rights group.

"We will have a disbarred, convicted individual sitting in judgment of others," said Joseph Madison, an NAACP board member from Washington who ran unsuccessfully for the chairmanship. "I think Julian has to make some adjustments. Some corporate contributors could look to us with a jaundiced eye, given Ghee's track record."

James Ghee, a national board member and attorney from Virginia, who managed Bond's campaign, was

convicted of embezzlement and disbarred for his crimes.

He was sentenced to six months in jail in 1996 after pleading guilty to 11 misdemeanor counts of embezzlement. He rejected an order from the NAACP executive committee to resign from the board.

Then, after taking office two weeks ago, Bond named Ghee co-chairman of three NAACP boards and gave him a seat on the 17-member executive committee. Some board members are having a fit.

"A lot of us are very, very unhappy with the way things are starting under Mr. Bond," said Jeanetta Williams, an NAACP national board member from Utah. "They say the first impression is the most lasting. If this is the first impression of his leadership, putting a convicted ex-lawyer in an influential position, I think we have problems."

Bond, who must pep up the NAACP rank-and-file — about 450,000 nationally — thinks he might not get a fair shake from some.

"I am worried about our tendency to cannibalize ourselves here and to focus

internally, when our enemies are on the outside," he said. "But we have to get beyond this, and if I can, get the focus back to issues."

On Wednesday, Ghee attributed the controversy over his appointment to "sour grapes."

Bond said he understands some members' feelings but that Ghee should be given another opportunity to prove his worth.

"I believe in redemption. I believe in giving people second chances," he said.

Returning the NAACP's focus to civil rights advocacy would be a welcome change for the organization which has made news in recent years for sex harassment scandals, internal squabbles, ethical problems among its leaders and fiscal troubles.

The campaign between Bond and Madison to replace Myrlie Evers-Williams as unpaid head of the NAACP's 64-member policy-setting board seemed a good first step to return the group to civil rights advocacy. Absent was much of the rancor that has marked recent NAACP elections.

Trial of ex-Clintonite postponed indefinitely

Special to Sentinel-Voice
WASHINGTON — Citing the outcome of appeals relating to the case of former Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy on charges of accepting illegal gratuities from companies he regulated and then lying about it, a U.S. District judge has postponed the trial indefinitely.

Espy, who left President Clinton's Cabinet in late 1994, has pleaded innocent to the charges.

In an order signed last month but not made public until Tuesday, U. S. District Court Judge Ricardo Urbina said Espy's trial must await the outcome of two appeals related to his case. The trial had been set to begin March 30.

"The outcome of these (appeals) will likely have an influence on the content of the prosecution and defense of this case," Urbina said in a two-page order.

One appeal involves the judge's previous decision to dismiss four counts of the original 39-count indictment against Espy.

Three of those charges were brought under meat inspection laws that were written to prevent rank-and-file Agriculture Department inspectors from accepting gifts from processors.



MIKE ESPY

Arguing that the law should apply equally to the agriculture secretary, Independent counsel Donald C. Smaltz is seeking to get those charges reinstated.

Smaltz's probe has led to more than \$10.5 million in fines and costs against companies involved in the Espy gifts, including \$6 million assessed against Arkansas-based Tyson Foods Inc. for some \$12,000 in gratuities.

In addition, seven people, five corporations and one law firm have been convicted.

In response and backing a delay in the trial, Espy's attorneys said the trial shouldn't go forward with that question unresolved.

"It would be patently unfair to put Mr. Espy to the task of facing a second trial on charges that are virtually identical to the charges in the first trial," wrote Espy lawyer Reid Weingarten.

In addition, Sun-Diamond Growers of California is appealing its September 1996 convictions for illegally giving Espy \$6,000 in gifts and improperly contributing \$4,000 to the failed Mississippi congressional campaign of his brother, Henry Espy.

That appeal, Urbina noted, goes to the heart of whether the gratuities were a crime, "an issue central to the proof" against Espy.

Racist serial killer pleads guilty to 1978 murder

Special to Sentinel-Voice
CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. — A white serial killer, convicted in multiple murders and a suspect in almost a dozen others, pleaded guilty Wednesday to the 1978 murder of a black man in Chattanooga.

Joseph Paul Franklin trekked across the nation targeting blacks, Jews and interracial couples.

The 47-year-old now has been convicted of killing seven

people, is suspected in 10 other murders, but was acquitted of shooting Vernon Jordan, the civil rights leader and Washington attorney embroiled in the Clinton sex scandal involving a former White House intern.

On Wednesday, the man who admitted shooting Hustler magazine publisher Larry Flynt in 1978, but was never prosecuted, admitted that he shot William Tatum outside a

Chattanooga restaurant because Tatum was with a white woman.

Under a plea bargain, Franklin was sentenced to two concurrent life terms - one for the murder, another for an unrelated 1977 armed robbery in Chattanooga.

He faces execution in Missouri for a murder committed there.

Franklin's first known attack was the 1977 bombing

of a synagogue in Chattanooga. From then until September 1980, he is believed to have killed 17 people: three interracial couples, seven black men and boys, three female hitchhikers and a Jewish man.

Franklin, who insisted on jury trials in his previous cases, wanted to confess in this one, Assistant District Attorney General Joseph Rehyansky said.

The convicted murderer

who declined to make a statement in court contacted prosecutors last week about a possible plea.

"He has undergone some sort of bizarre religious conversion," Rehyansky said after the hearing. "At some point in the last years he decided pleading guilty was the right thing to do. I don't

know why."

During interviews with prosecutors, Franklin rambles, sometimes showing remorse and other times expressing no regret.

Rehyansky called Franklin a "homicidal moron."

"I felt like I needed therapy after speaking with him," Rehyansky said.

Restaurant chain again accused of bias

Special to Sentinel-Voice
MIAMI — Several state corrections officers have filed a discrimination complaint against Denny's, saying they were turned away twice from one of the chain's restaurants.

The officers from the Everglades Correctional Institution said they were told by a manager that the restaurant had run out of food.

"All he did was lock the door, ask us to leave and say,

"You guys don't look right together," Clifford Fortner, one of the officers, said in The Miami Herald Wednesday.

The nine officers — six black and three white — were told they could call the toll-free number for headquarters in Spartanburg, S.C., Fortner said. They did.

A spokeswoman for Flagstar Companies, Denny's corporate parent, said the company reported the incident

to a civil rights monitor assigned to the company since settlement of a 1994 Denny's discrimination case. The monitor is investigating.

Atkins said that the manager, whom she wouldn't identify, had been suspended with pay over the incident.

The officers said that two weeks ago, the same manager told them that the restaurant's oven was not working.

"We looked around, no one

was there and we said they had no reason to lie to us," said Fortner, 33.

In 1994, Denny's settled a \$46 million class-action lawsuit brought by black Secret Service agents and California students who claimed discrimination in separate incidents.

The restaurant chain agreed to retrain employees, feature minorities in its ads and hire a lawyer to monitor compliance.

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