

CBC members' efforts yield results in black farmers vs. USDA

Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON — Black farmer groups and activists consider the recent passage of U.S. House of Representatives legislation waiving the two-year statute of limitations on discrimination complaints by farmers as a major breakthrough.

The waiver was part of the \$55.9 billion agriculture appropriations bill which now goes to the Senate for conferencing.

Attorney General Janet Reno issued an opinion last April on the statute "barring" many of the backlogged USDA claims. "Congress has sent a clear, unambiguous message to both the courts and the Department of Justice that real constitutional rights don't have a statute of limitations," said Sam Taylor, part of the farmers' professional legislative team.

The statute of limitations has been a major obstacle in the path of Black farmers seeking

redress from the government.

Four hundred farmers have filed a \$2.5 billion class-action lawsuit, *Pigford et. al. vs. Glickman*, citing years of racial discrimination resulting in foreclosures and loss of Black-owned land.

The suit is languishing in federal court and U.S. District Court Judge Paul Friedman has urged the government to reach a mediated settlement.

Gary Grant, president of the Black Farmer & Agriculturists Association, said, "We're pleased that this first step is over and are expecting the legislation to go through the Senate by the end of August." Grant explained that the waiver of the statute of limitations meant more than 2,500 Black farmers could now join the lawsuit.

The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), especially U.S. Representatives John Conyers and Maxine Waters — along with Rep.'s. Eva Clayton, Bennie Thompson and Cynthia

McKinney — led the negotiations, while Rep. Jose Serrano offered the amendment. "They each have much to be proud of. This issue taxed and exhausted every legislative skill the Caucus had and still they found a way to be victorious, after 18 months of fighting," said Taylor.

Others considered instrumental in negotiating the waiver were: House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who met with Black farmers last month pledging support, and Clinton chief of staff Erskine Bowles, who worked with Gingrich and other congressional leaders.

Black farmers also have a new ally as America's largest civil rights organization has waded into the issue of Black land loss. NAACP President and CEO Kweisi Mfume recently called on the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to take a much more aggressive role in addressing the problem. "This is an increasing dilemma for African-American farmers and the

NAACP has been concerned for some time now about long-term consequences," he said.

The NAACP has just established an Office of Rural Development Outreach and the USDA has assigned a staff person to work at the organization's National Headquarters in Baltimore, Md.

The new office will work to help prepare NAACP branches to become advocates for small and minority farmers. "I don't necessarily expect that this will be a panacea. The process will be a long and tedious one; however, it is certainly the first step in the right direction," said Mfume.

There will be a workshop on "African-American Farmers and Black Land Loss" at the NAACP Convention being held in mid-July in Atlanta, Ga. There will also be a workshop on Reparations for Black slavery focusing on passage of H.R. 40, the reparations study bill sponsored by Congressman John Conyers.

Mfume challenges delegates to be responsible consumers

Economic empowerment cited as major challenge for blacks in the next millenium

Special to Sentinel-Voice

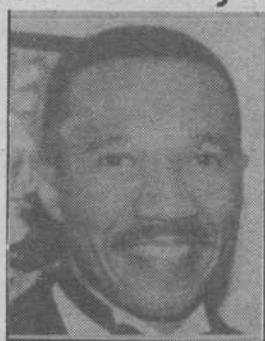
ATLANTA — Telling members to "Boycott those who boycott you," NAACP President & CEO Kweisi Mfume challenged African-American consumers to be disciplined in exercising their buying power. Mfume's remarks were made at Monday's plenary session of the 89th Annual Convention in Atlanta.

Action and advocacy were the keywords in Mfume's speech to the more than 6,000

delegates, observers and visitors to the convention. He noted that the NAACP must "look at what we do best and see where we can move forward."

"We are not a perfect organization ... this is not a perfect country ... but God still calls us to a perfect mission," said Mfume. "If we are not prepared to make the commitment, no one else will do it for us."

Included in the organization's mission are six



KWEISI MFUME

crucial points: civil rights, educational excellence, economic empowerment, voter

education, registration and turnout, and youth health outreach. Mfume encouraged members to keep their eyes focused on these six points instead of becoming distracted. "We must never get hung up on reading our headlines when there is so much work to be done."

Regarding economic empowerment, a primary

mission of the organization, Mfume noted the NAACP's recent report on the hotel industry. "We scored the hotel industry to send a real message to corporate America. From this day forward, we are prepared to stand up and say 'we expect opportunity or you can expect no more dollars from the African-American community.' As Adam Clayton

Powell used to say, 'Don't spend where you can't work or get a promotion.'"

Last year, Mfume declared that the NAACP was back and ready for action. This year, his speech was infused with proof points of action over the last 12 months and challenges for the year ahead.

A major challenge issued (See Consumers, Page 7)

NAACP's top man blasts Supreme Court

Special to Sentinel-Voice

ATLANTA — Supreme Court justices "should be ashamed of themselves," NAACP President Kweisi Mfume said Monday, pointing to anti-affirmative action decisions and a lack of minority law clerks at the high court.

"The Supreme Court finds themselves as hypocrites when they talk of diversity," Mfume said in an address to 3,000 NAACP members. "They make decisions on affirmative action, what people can and can't do in this society. But they just pontificate."

Mfume said that only seven of the 397 law clerks who work for Supreme Court justices are of black ancestry and that no American Indian has ever served in such a position.

"You have to hunt to find any" minority members working for the court, Mfume said.

In May, Chief Justice William Rehnquist turned down a request by minority lawyers to discuss the scarcity of minority law clerks at the Supreme Court, saying he did not think such a meeting "would serve any useful purpose."

The National Bar Association, which represents 17,000 black attorneys, had extended the invitation to Rehnquist on behalf of a coalition of minority bar association leaders.

The controversy was sparked by a published report that of the clerks hired by all nine current justices, 1 percent were Hispanic, 2 percent were black and 4.5 percent were Asian-American.

Supreme Court spokeswoman Toni House said the court would have no comment on Mfume's remarks.

A former congressman from Maryland who now runs the day-to-day operations for the

nation's largest civil rights group, Mfume said that until the justices do a better job of integrating their own workplace, they shouldn't issue decisions that roll back affirmative action and thereby create less racially diverse work settings.

The only justice singled out by name was Antonin Scalia. Mfume said the conservative jurist who has consistently voted against affirmative action provisions has never hired a black person during his years on the bench.

"We know now why you make the decisions that you make," Mfume said to enthusiastic applause.

In his address, Mfume also urged black Americans to become more active in voter drives for the November elections.

"We need to do as we have been since 1914 and throw those rascals out," he said.

After Mfume's talk, the group held several workshops on topics ranging from minority participation in the telecommunications industry to preserving affirmative action.

William Kennard, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, told his audience a growing "digital divide" has created a gap between those who have access to technology and those who don't.

Kennard, the first black to head the FCC, said white children are three times more likely to have access to a computer than their minority counterparts.

Ted Turner, a Time Warner vice-chairman, said it would be "a waste of time" for investors without massive capital to try to buy into established communication links like cable television because the costs are too high.

But Turner said opportunities for small investors exist in emerging technologies "that haven't been claimed yet."

OPEN LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

Dear Present and Future Members of the NAACP, Las Vegas Branch.

As candidates for executive offices and executive board seats in the November, 1998 NAACP Election, we would like to introduce ourselves to you. We are running as a slate of 30 candidates committed to a positive agenda and a respectful working relationship. Further ours is an intergenerational slate. We are recent college graduates in our twenties; we are also retirees. We are blessed with an octogenarian in our group. We have lived here since the 1940s and we arrived here as recently as last year. Our education, experience, age and residency diversity are our strengths and it provides a tangible demonstration of our commitment for what will be our inclusionary approach to working together on problems.

Ours is a simple philosophy comprised of ten words and twenty letters, "If it is to be, it is up to me." In a collective sense, this simply means "if you are not a part of the solution, then you are a part of the problem." We are committed to being a part of the solution.

We require your support to demonstrate our commitment. This letter represents a plea for your support. In order for this support to manifest itself in a positive outcome requires that you possess a current membership in the NAACP, Las Vegas Branch and turn out to vote in the November election. Please call 598-2951 for membership information and how you can help us to stop the "foolishness" that continues to be reported in the media.

Also, we are pleased to announce that a number of community leaders have agreed to join us by chairing or co-chairing what we know will be effective and action packed committees.

- Membership: Ann Cherry
- Education: Rosemary Sport
- Economic Development: Sherman Ruthledge
- Political Action: Jerry Lindsay

Other committee chairs will be announced in the near future

Thank you,

NEW SLATE EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

- | | | | |
|--|------------------|--|----------------|
| President | Louie Overstreet | 3 rd . Vice President | Uri Clinton |
| 1 st . Vice President | Kawim Kawee | Treasurer | Hannah Brown |
| 2 nd . Vice President | Tracey Lewis | Secretary | Catherine Hoye |

NEW EXECUTIVE BOARD SLATE

- | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Alisha Bell | Terri Harris | Sam Smith |
| Marion Bennett | David Hoggard | Mozella Scott |
| Rosie Boulware | Marzette Lewis | Esther Taylor |
| Lena Brass | Tony McCormick | Helen Toland |
| Dorothie Clark | Francis Odum | Emanuel Wasson |
| Norm Curry | Harvey Phelps | Clyde Wells |
| Ida Gaines | Dell Ray Rhodes | Larry Wickcliffe |
| Jerry Harper | James Rogers | Jimmie Yerger |

You are invited to a community reception on Saturday, August 22th. from 4 - 7 pm at West Las Vegas Arts Center, 947 W. Lake Mead Blvd. Refreshments will be served.