

More diversity called for at court

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Supreme Court would be found guilty of discrimination if it were a private company, the president of the NAACP said recently, as he and others representing minorities and women's groups urged greater diversity in the justices' hiring of law clerks.

"We don't come here asking for quotas; we want equal opportunity," said NAACP President Kweisi Mfume, who was joined at a news conference by members of Hispanic, American Indian, Asian and women's legal groups.

"People of good will understand this hypocrisy must end on the Supreme Court," Mfume said as the court began its new term. "If the court were a private company, it would have been found guilty long ago of racial discrimination."

Lawrence Baca, president of the Native American Bar



KWEISI MFUME

Association, said although the Supreme Court has never had a Native American clerk, his people are disproportionately affected by high court decisions involving tribal lands.

"You tell us how high the bar is and we will find you a native American law student who will top that bar," Baca said.

The call for more diversity among law clerks comes at a time when the class of clerks has more black and brown faces than any other in recent



JESSE JACKSON

memory. Among the new class of 35 law clerks working for the highest court's nine justices are five minority clerks — two blacks and three Asian-Americans.

Last year's class included one — a Hispanic.

But Rep. Jesse Jackson, Jr., D-Ill., said the justices could easily slip again into all-white hiring patterns.

"We should not annually rely on good faith efforts of individual justices," Jackson said.

Prior to this year's class, of the 428 clerks hired over time by the nine current justices, less than 2 percent have been black, 1 percent was Hispanic and less than 5 percent Asian-American.

Those statistics led to a noisy protest last year on the court's front steps during which 19 people were arrested.

Chief Justice William Rehnquist is again being asked to meet with coalition members to discuss the situation. Last year, Rehnquist rebuffed a similar meeting request.

Supreme Court clerks wield influence in discussions with justices on pending cases and crafting early drafts of opinions. And since many court rulings affect racially charged issues such as affirmative action and immigration rights, civil rights advocates say greater input from minorities is needed for fairness.

Conviction of ex-Espy aide stands

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Supreme Court recently stood by the lying conviction and prison sentence of Ronald H. Blackley, one-time chief of staff for former Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy.

The justices, without comment, rejected an appeal in which Blackley challenged Independent Counsel Donald Smaltz's authority to prosecute him.

Blackley was convicted last year of failing to disclose \$22,000 he received from Mississippi associates dealing with the Agriculture Department and later trying to cover it up.

A federal jury concluded that Blackley lied on his

government financial disclosure forms and then to a series of federal investigators.

He was sentenced to two years and three months in prison, an unusually stiff punishment.

Smaltz accused Espy of accepting \$35,000 in sports tickets, travel and lodging from Tyson Foods Inc., Sun-Diamond Growers of California and other companies regulated by the Agriculture Department. He was acquitted of all illegal-gratuity charges last year.

Blackley served as Espy's chief of staff until a few months before Espy resigned in late 1994.

Ruling in a case involving Sun-Diamond Growers' prosecution, the Supreme Court ruled last April that federal officials commit a crime by accepting gifts only if prosecutors prove the gifts are linked to an official act.

In the appeal acted on today, Blackley argued that Smaltz extended his investigation of Espy too broadly, and by doing so violated the federal law that created his office and the constitutionally mandated separation of powers among the political branches.

Smaltz urged the justices to reject the appeal, contending Blackley's conduct clearly was "related

to" the independent counsel's original mandate — investigating allegations of wrongdoing by Espy.

Suit targets testing of welfare recipients

DETROIT (AP)—The American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit last week to stop Michigan from requiring drug tests for welfare recipients. The state's Family Independence Agency recently began testing.

"We call it the Family Independence Agency for a reason," Gov. John Engler's spokesman John Truscott said last week. "If someone's abusing drugs, their chance of improving their lot in life is really diminished, not to mention the problems it creates for their children."

The ACLU argues that across-the-board drug testing of applicants is discrimination and treats the state's poorest families as criminals.

"Forcing parents to choose between providing for their children and giving up their privacy rights is a giant step backward for public policy in Michigan," said Kary Moss, executive director of the ACLU of Michigan.

The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court on behalf of two women and a family-advocacy group. It seeks class-action status. A handful of states require limited drug testing for some welfare recipients, but none have made it part of the application process for family benefits, said Gwen Rubenstein of the New York-based Legal Action Center, a nonprofit policy group.

Michigan's drug testing will start as a pilot program in four counties. In 2003, the state plans to expand it statewide for applicants and add random checks for those already receiving cash assistance.

Those who test positive for drugs and refuse treatment could gradually lose their cash assistance. Those who refuse to be tested will be denied cash assistance. The test results apply only to the state's largest state cash assistance program, the Family Independence Program.

Medicaid, disability, emergency and other state assistance programs are not affected, and program rules say police won't be notified of positive tests for drugs.

Colleges to host scholarship forums

John T. Stephens III
Sentinel-Voice

The Nevada Board of Regents will be sponsoring ten public forums across the state to gather public opinion about the Millennium Scholarship Program. The scholarship talks will be held on the local university and community college campuses.

"We (state of Nevada) have the lowest continuity rate of students going on to college after high school," said Suzanne Ernst, deputy to the chancellor of the University and Community College System of Nevada. "Lowest population with degrees."

The Millennium Scholarship Program was pushed through the 1999 Legislature by Governor Kenny Guinn to use part of the tobacco settlement monies to offer scholarships for at least "B" average students

who want to go to college in Nevada. The University and Community College System of Nevada provides higher academic education for 82,000 students across the state.

Parents, students, and the general public are invited to attend these forums and discuss the proposed requirements and conditions of the Millennium Scholarships.

The following are listings for places and time: Oct. 12 from 6:30-8 p.m., at the Nicholas Horn Performing Arts Center on the Cheyenne Campus of CCSN, located at 3200 E. Cheyenne; Oct. 13 from 6:30-8 p.m., on the Charleston Campus of CCSN, located at 6375 W. Charleston Blvd; Oct. 14 from 6:30-8 p.m., on the Henderson Campus of CCSN, located at 700 College Dr.; and, also on Oct. 14, from 6-8 p.m., at UNLV's Moyer Student Union, located at 4505 S. Maryland Pkwy.

LEGAL PROBLEMS?

Personal Injury • Bankruptcy • Family Law
Over 18 Years of Experience
Licensed in Nevada and California

call
WILLIAM E. RANDALL
attorney
(702) 233-4768 at law

2551 So. Fort Apache Rd. • Suite 103 • Las Vegas, Nevada 89117