

NAACP feels marginalized

WASHINGTON (AP) - NAACP leaders, already unhappy about the White House's conservative agenda, are upset by President Bush's failure to meet with them to discuss civil rights.

In a July 31 letter, Kweisi Mfume, president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, asked Bush for a closed-door audience to air a variety of concerns.

"As you witnessed firsthand a year ago at our national convention, our members are very politically active and astute," Mfume wrote. "Despite whatever philosophical differences may exist, the absence of a dialogue can only make them worse."

A week later, White House scheduling director Bradley Blakeman sent a reply saying Mfume's request had been received, but giving no indication of when a meeting would take place.

White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said Mfume's letter was being handled like

any other request for time with Bush.

"The request is under review," Fleischer said. "The president reaches out to all kinds of American constituencies and will continue to do so."

But NAACP officials, noting that the reply did not come from Bush himself, his chief of staff or his top aides, felt snubbed.

"We're waiting. We're eager and willing to sit down and talk," said board chairman Julian Bond. "And even though the White House is the people's house, you can't just go knock on the door."

Bush attended a fundraiser this week at a Denver hotel that was being picketed by the NAACP.

At the NAACP's convention last month, Bond accused the president of being a puppet of the political right. Bush ignored Bond's remarks, but Fleischer said Bond had gone too far.

Bush did not attend the convention but sent a videotaped message highlighting (See NAACP, Page 3)

Sharpton

(Continued from Page 1) workers' rights and the bombing of Vieques, where at least 9,000 adults and children live.

These are the same issues, he said, which "have not been adequately addressed" by some of the Democratic Party leadership.

Sharpton said he is serious about a possible run for president of the United States in part because the party has failed to properly speak to the disenfranchisement of Black people in the 2000 election and treating Black voters "like African-American maids who cook the meals for everyone else to enjoy while we hide in the kitchen while they eat what we prepare. That type of politics cannot go forward in 2004."

Sharpton's point is significant in the context of national political statistics. There are zero Black U.S. Senators of 100 and only 38 Black members in the 435-member House of Representatives.

No Black candidate has ever successfully run for president.

The Harlem-based activ-

ist minister, released from a federal prison in New York this past Friday after serving a 90-day sentence, says he is forming an exploratory committee by November to make a decision possibly by early next year.

Sharpton said he was motivated after he felt "betrayed" by Democratic leaders who he said failed to speak up when millions of people were disenfranchised during last year's presidential election, most of whom were Black.

"It was appalling to me that members of the leadership of both parties would not deal with the rights that had been violated of voters in Duval County and other places," he said of the Florida county that is heavily populated with Black voters.

Sharpton, as president of his National Action Network, filed a lawsuit, claiming voting rights violations in the Florida election.

"There are those in the Democratic Party that have driven the party further and further to the right in the name of a winning strategy," he said, stating leading White Democrats, most of whom are males, remained silent on

the disenfranchisement issue. Democratic Vice President Al Gore received the Black vote 9-1 in the Nov. 7 election that was ultimately decided for George W. Bush by the Supreme Court.

Only members of the Congressional Black Caucus vehemently contended those disenfranchised were mainly Black people.

Their claim was later confirmed by the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, which reported ballots cast by African-Americans in Florida were nine times more likely to be disqualified than those cast by Whites.

Sharpton is singing a familiar tune. In 1988 when Sharpton's mentor, Rainbow/PUSH Coalition founder the Rev. Jesse Jackson, took his second run for the Democratic nomination for president, his famous "Our time has come!" refrain was on behalf of Black and grassroots people whom he said had been left out of the party.

This view was shared by a group of CBC members, led by Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-Miss.) in a press conference last spring.

They expressed disdain that the Democratic Party has

low Black participation in decision-making rolls and in contracting.

This is also the same argument that was made by former Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson when he ran for the party chairmanship, but bowed out to Terry McAuliffe in February. McAuliffe could not be reached for comment.

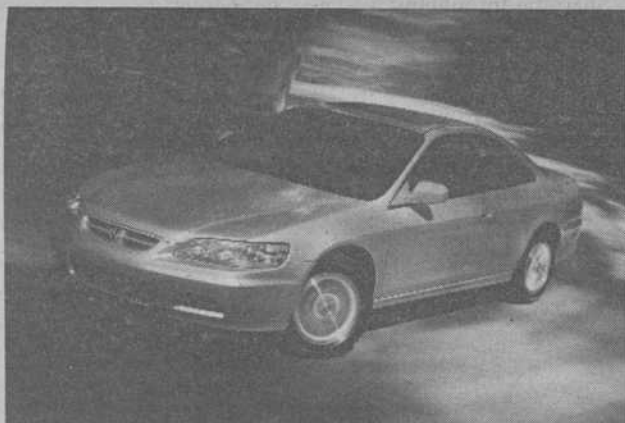
In response to an NNPA question, Sharpton said he has not discussed his plans with Jackson, who spent much of last year fund-raising and registering voters for the 2000 election.

Sharpton said he would refuse to deal with "personalities over policies" and dismissed those who accuse him of trying to "take Jesse Jackson's place."

The exploratory committee is headed by Harvard professor and author Cornel West, who also attended the press conference.

West said the committee would look seriously at the possible race in the context of finding a way to "take seriously the legacy" of people such as Dr. King and others "who were willing to bring moral and po-

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