

Sharpton

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Southern Nevada's African-American community. NAN's new state director in Nevada is Gene Collins, former branch president of the recently suspended local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. NAN announced its selection of Collins late last month.

Referring to the organization whose board of directors, on April 20, voted to remove him as president of its Las Vegas Branch, Collins called Sharpton "a civil rights leader who'll do the sorts of things the NAACP didn't do."

Collins has confronted Kirk Kerkorian's MGM/Mirage, Inc. and other gaming properties about what he calls their lack of "corporate diversity," particularly in areas like employment and acquisition of contracts. He says he holds MGM/Mirage "responsible for us losing our branch," saying it wants to silence him. He also claimed his removal by the NAACP was improper and sued the organization in District Court.

Attempting last week to discuss diversity issues with Kerkorian, Collins reported being told he was out of town, and that "local people would handle it." He then alluded to "the amount of money spent by blacks here," and wondered aloud about what might happen if they reconsidered their patronage of the

MGM "until things improve."

Sharpton has seen the affluence along "The Las Vegas Strip" as well as the poverty of "The Westside," and, according to Collins, has been appalled by the contrast. "He did say when you leave the strip and come to this community, it's devastating what you see," said Collins. "He asked us to jot down some things that are of great importance to us here in Las Vegas."

On a NAN-Las Vegas flier promoting the rally, the group lists the issues to be addressed. "Jobs and contracts for blacks in Las Vegas," "Economic Development (West Las Vegas)," "Police Racial Profiling," it reads, ending with "Education and Training."

Washington reinforced Collins' point. The group's agenda is not Sharpton-driven, but was prepared from a local point of view. "These are not issues that he's invented," he said. "They're issues that exist here and have been heard, but have not been acted upon."

Collins says Sharpton is "very excited about coming to Las Vegas," and was asked about hosting Mrs. Mandela's visit as well.

"She was here in February to thank us for raising the issue of gaming," he said. "She told us that affected the situation in South Africa."

"She's in southern California



The Rev. Al Sharpton speaks before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights meeting in Miami Beach, Fla., Wednesday. Sharpton criticized the government and police in South Florida, saying he sees a pattern of racial bias causing blacks to be treated as second class citizens.

now," Collins said on Monday, adding that he expects Mrs. Mandela to deliver some public remarks after meeting with Sharpton. "She's coming back and intends to meet him either Saturday or Sunday," he said, and continued, "we certainly expect her to make some kind of formal comment."

Plans call for a reception welcoming Rev. Sharpton to the city to be held on Saturday in the Dallas Ballroom at the Texas Station Hotel and Casino starting at 8:30 p.m. and lasting until 10:30. The reception, also a fundraiser, will be followed immediately by a closed-session briefing between Sharpton, Collins and Washington.

with local pastors, beginning at 1:30 p.m., then from 3:30 until 5 p.m. he will participate in a meeting on racial profiling. American Civil Liberties Union Nevada Executive Director Gary Peck, and State Senator Joe Neal (D-Dist 4) and Assemblyman Wendell Williams (D-Dist. 6), all prominent voices against racial profiling, are expected to attend.

Following the rally at Doolittle, Sharpton's itinerary calls for an hour-long exit meeting with Collins and Washington. He is scheduled to depart from Las Vegas about an hour later.

One of the strengths of Sharpton's method, according to Washington, is "direct contact," which he says will provide Sharpton the benefit of viewpoints other than just Collins'. He called this first visit to the grassroots NAN organization in Nevada an opportunity for Sharpton to "meet the community," saying he wants "to really kick-off the Las Vegas Branch, and let everybody know that this is something he's really going to be behind."

"Based on Rev. Sharpton's track record in other communities, this community is going to be in for a total treat, in terms of being included and involved," he said.

"We want everyone to come out and welcome him at the reception," urged Washington, where donations, he said, will be \$20.

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