

# Sharpton hurting after suspicious fire

By J. Zamgba Browne

NEW YORK (NNPA)—“I thank God that no one was hurt,” said the Rev. Al Sharpton in a phone interview with the Amsterdam News only hours after a fire ravaged his National Action Network headquarters in Harlem.

Sharpton returned from Washington last Wednesday, a day after announcing his candidacy for president of the United States. The facility, at 1941 Madison Ave. and popularly known as the House of Justice, was severely damaged following an early morning blaze that is still under investigation.

“I’m traumatized,” he said, explaining that the entire auditorium had been gutted, but he vowed that it would be rebuilt and that the incident would neither frustrate his presidential aspirations nor the various services provided by the National Action Network.

Fire officials could not

estimate the extent of damage, but said the fire had started in the rear of the second floor of the three-story facility. Reporters were barred from entering.

This marks the second time Sharpton’s office has been destroyed by fire. About eight years ago, his office on 125<sup>th</sup> Street also burned, coincidentally as he ran for U.S. Senate.

An emotional Sharpton held back tears as he reminisced about some of the activities that have taken place in the auditorium of the House of Justice since it opened in 1996. He recalled that Abner Louima, following his release from the hospital, was the first victim of police brutality to visit the House of Justice to thank Sharpton for standing up for him.

“The body of another victim, Amadou Diallo was laid in state here before being flown to his native Guinea, West Africa,” he added. In 1999, Diallo was shot 41

times by four White police officers that mistook his wallet for a gun.

Sharpton also mentioned a long list of dignitaries who had visited the House of Justice, including Sen. Hillary Clinton, Rep. Charles Rangel, state Attorney General Eliot Spitzer, Sen. Chuck Schumer, former Mayor Ed Koch, David Dinkins and former state Comptroller H. Carl McCall.

Sharpton returned to his office at about Wednesday afternoon and went directly into the building, followed by fire officials and several aides to see the damage firsthand. He emerged after about 10 minutes, carrying a photograph of the late Adam Clayton Powell Jr.

“This is all I could salvage,” he told reporters gathered in front of the building.

Fire officials said that the fire looked suspicious about two hours after the two-alarm blaze was reported. But some 45 minutes later, they

changed the story, saying that the incident was still being investigated.

No deaths were reported, but fire officials said that a man believed to be in his late 30s was plucked from the third floor of the burning building via a tall ladder.

Reacting to the blaze, Harlemites were suspicious at best.

“Rev. Sharpton should know better that New York is still a Jim Crow town and he has no business trying to run for president,” said 75-year-old Mildred Williams.

Fred Davis warned that Sharpton should start to watch his back now that he has decided to play in the big league. “It’s a dangerous game and he should know how to play it,” he said.

Juanita Simpson, a retired public school teacher who described herself as a long-time admirer of Sharpton, said no one could convince her that Wednesday’s blaze (See Sharpton, Page 14)

## White House could defend quota stance

Washington DC (AP) - The Bush administration will probably go before the Supreme Court to explain its stance in a politically and racially charged affirmative action case, a senior official said Monday.

The administration is expected to ask the high court this month for permission to participate in the April 1 oral arguments over race-conscious admissions policies at the University of Michigan and its law school, the official said on condition of anonymity.

In legal papers filed with the court last month, the administration argued that the Michigan policies were unconstitutional but skirted the larger question of whether race could ever be a factor in public university admissions or other government decisions.

Many conservatives, including senior members of President Bush’s administration, wanted the White House to take a more categorical line against the use of racial preferences. That position, however, would probably alienate Hispanic and black voters the Republican Party wants to attract.

The administration was not a party to the case and did not have to take any position, although it would have been unusual for the White House to remain on the sidelines of such a major issue involving government policies or spending.

The administration’s friend of the court brief praised the goal of racial diversity on campus but pointed to race-neutral ways to achieve it, such as policies in Texas and other states that guarantee college admission to top students from every public high school.

The oral argument could place a government lawyer on the hot seat. The court’s liberal-leaning wing will probably ask tough questions about whether plans like Texas’ can work in the long run, and how to achieve diversity in graduate schools, lawyers said. Court conservatives may tweak the administration for shying away from the toughest question the case presents.

Having traced a cautious path in its friend of the court filing, the administration would take little political heat if it stayed out of the oral arguments, some lawyers said.

“Why raise your visibility on this? This significantly ups the political ante,” said Emory University law professor David Garrow.

Other lawyers said Supreme Court custom dictates that the government could not skip the courtroom phase of the case.

## Anderson

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always looked for an open window of opportunity. You have to take advantage of those windows. Whatever obstacles face you, don’t let them stop you. Be willing to work hard to get all the tools you need so you can take advantage of the opportunities that present themselves.”

While the astronauts get a lot of the recognition, the experiments being conducted on the Columbia mission would have also benefited African-Americans, he said. The scientists on board were growing prostate cancer cell in a bioreactor on the shuttle in order to study the disease, which disproportionately affects Black men.

“Hopefully, from some of the research we’re doing up here, we can really help out in those areas,” Anderson told Smiley. “So far, I have to tell you, we’ve been really pleased with what we’re seeing. We’re exceeding almost all of our expectations, and we’re getting some really good science.”

Col. Anderson had one other space flight under his belt, a 1998 journey to the space station aboard space shuttle Endeavor. On that flight the shuttle crew docked with the Russian Space Station Mir and delivered more than 9,000 pounds of supplies and equipment, as well as exchanged U.S. astronauts.

With more than 211 hours in space, Anderson was among the most experienced of the crew members. He, Commander Rick D. Hus-

band and Mission Specialist Kalpana Chawla were the only members of the crew with more than one space flight. It had been nearly five years since Col. Anderson flew in space. Since then he said he’s been more than ready to go back.

“I’m ready to go right now. Sign me up and I’ll go any time,” he said in the 2000 Web chat. “The first thing I thought about when I got to space was the fact that all of these years of hard work and training had paid off. My dream had finally come true,” he wrote in that web cast. “I think dreams are very important. You should find out what your dream is and pursue it. When we went from the gravity of earth to the zero gravity of space, I knew my dream had come true. When you look back at Earth and see how beautiful it is, you realize how special it is. I felt very honored and blessed to be allowed and being able to travel into space and see this.”

Anderson was born on Christmas Day, 1959 in Plattsburgh, N.Y. He graduated from Cheney High School in Cheney, Washington, in 1977 and received his Bachelor of Science degree in physics and astronomy from the University of Washington in 1981. In 1990 he earned his Master of Science degree in physics from Creighton University.

He was selected by NASA in December 1994 and completed a year-long training course at the Johnson Space Center in 1996. An avid jazz

and science fiction fan, Anderson and the crew of the Endeavor were awakened one morning by the sounds of Stanley Clarke’s “Hideaway,” one his favorite songs, the NASA Web site says, on the 1998 mission to Mir.

Along with a wife and two children, who were in Florida to greet the returning shuttle when it exploded, Anderson leaves behind a proud family, CNN reported. His sister, Joanne, who did not give her last name to the cable network, said that her brother

dreamed of being an astronaut from the time he was small.

“It was a future reality to him. We knew when he set his sights on that, that that’s what he would do,” she told CNN. “The United States of America has many, many problems—racism is one of them,” she added, “but only in America could he have achieved what he did achieve.”

Marcus E. Walton writes for The Sacramento Observer.

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