

Sharpton scores twice the backing of black hopefuls

By Hazel Trice Edney

WASHINGTON (NNPA)—Presidential candidate Al Sharpton has twice as much support among African-Americans as his closest Democratic rival, ties North Carolina Sen. John Edwards for fourth-place among all registered Democratic voters and is ahead of former Illinois Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun, Vermont Gov. Howard Dean, Florida Sen. Bob Graham and Ohio Rep. Dennis Kucinich, a new Time-CNN poll shows.

Among all Democratic voters, Connecticut Sen. Joseph Lieberman is the front-runner with 16 percent, followed by Missouri Rep. Dick Gephardt with 13 percent, Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry at 8 percent, Sharpton and Edwards tied with 7 percent, Moseley-Braun at 4 percent, Dean and Graham each tied at 3 percent and Kucinich with 2 percent.

In the CNN-Time poll conducted Feb. 19-20, other candidates were favored by 7 percent of Democratic voters and 30 percent remain undecided. There were 1,299 voting-aged Democrats interviewed and the margin of error was 2.7 percent.

Among Blacks, Sharpton led the field with 20 percent, ahead of Gephardt and Lieberman, who were tied with 9 percent. The other Black candidates in the race, Moseley-Braun, received support from 6 percent of African-Americans, followed by Edwards with 5 percent, Kerry at 4 percent, Graham with 4 percent, Dean at 3 percent and Kucinich in last place with 1 percent. Other candidates received 7 percent of the Black vote and 32 percent were undecided. There was a margin of error of 6.5 percent.

Sharpton says the poll proves that he has broad support.

"It's not just Black," he said, referring to his supporters. "I think we are finding out that a lot of people respond to those who have been there, who have been effective and have done things and have represented things that are near and dear to them. I think that people misunderstand that public service is not based on titles. It's based on those who serve," says Sharpton, president of the Harlem-based National Action Network and the only Democratic candidate who



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has never held elective office.

Donna Brazile, who was campaign manager for Al Gore's presidential campaign in 2000, sees the poll results differently.

"The numbers only indicate that [Sharpton] is better known. Two months ago, that same poll had [Black support] going to Lieberman," says Brazile. "So, I think as the African-American community becomes more familiar with the other candidates, they will compete. Sharpton will not get all the votes. Sharpton will get a good chunk of the votes, but I don't believe he will get all of the votes."

That may be true of some candidates but not others. Gephardt, as House minority leader, was a familiar figure to African-Americans. And Lieberman, as Al Gore's running mate against George W. Bush, was on a ticket that received even more Black votes than Bill Clinton.

Still, pollster Ron Lester, who worked for the Moseley-Braun campaign in 1992, thinks early political support is not that important.

"I'm not surprised at all. Sharpton has the highest level of name recognition and early polls pretty much measure name recognition," Lester says. "Whether or not it ultimately translates into voter support remains to be seen. And the elections don't start until about 11 months from now."

Sharpton says the reverse is true—when Whites get to know him better, his numbers will rise.

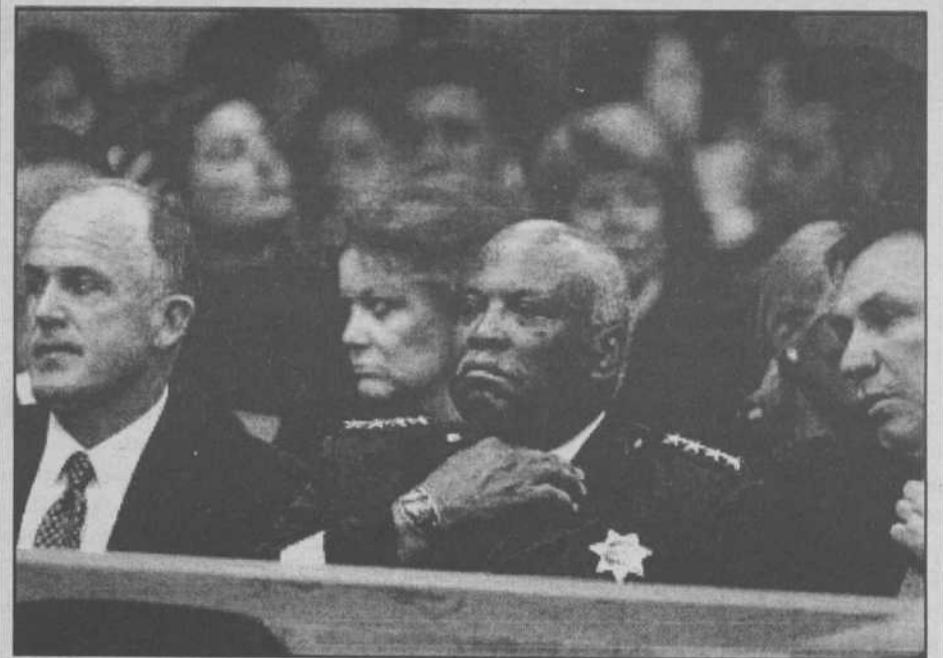
"People ask me if I think Moseley-Braun is trying to spoil my Black vote. I'm more concerned about whether Joe Lieberman will spoil my Jewish vote," he says. "I'm tied with John Edwards, who they claimed was the rising star. So that means there are some Whites and some Latinos who are supporting me."

Sharpton says his biggest obstacles will be raising money and overcoming the negative portrayal of him by

the mainstream media. He is unable to shake himself of the 1987 Tawana Brawley case in which he accused a White prosecutor and police officers of raping the Black teenager. A grand jury later decided Brawley was lying and that Sharpton had besmirched the reputation of the officer.

Some political observers want more emphasis placed on issues, not the personalities.

"It's unfortunate in some ways that their policy stances are sort of subordinated to this personalizing of the campaigns," says Katherine Tate, chair of the political science department at University of California-Irvine. "Depending on how he responds to negative media coverage is going to be a factor in his ability to win over the media and get over the bad history that the media keeps getting into. I'd like Sharpton at some point to get an opportunity to pitch to voters in a fair and open way like Lieberman and Gephardt are being treated as serious candidates."



San Francisco assistant police Chief Alex Fagan, left, Police Chief Earl Sanders, center, and Police Officers Union head Chris Connie, right sit together during an arraignment proceeding at the Hall of Justice in San Francisco on Tuesday. Sanders and Fagan are among seven top ranking officers being indicted for trying to cover up a street brawl involving three off-duty police officers.

Indicted Frisco police chief takes medical leave, won't step aside

Black commander indicted on brawl cover-up

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) - The city's police chief has gone on medical leave, days after he and six commanders were indicted on charges of hindering an investigation into a brawl involving off-duty officers, the mayor's office said Tuesday.

Police Chief Earl Sanders, 65, suffers from high blood pressure, a condition aggravated by the stress of the indictments, said his lawyer, John Burris.

The six top commanders have stepped aside and are expected to be suspended as they fight felony charges of conspiring to cover up the street brawl.

The department's day-to-day affairs are being overseen by Heather Fong, who was elevated to acting assistant chief. She re-

placed Alex Fagan Sr., one of the indicted commanders.

The scandal erupted Friday with news of the indictments of Sanders and the others for allegedly hindering an investigation into a brawl involving three officers — including a troubled rookie whose father is Sanders' top aide.

The fight outside a bar began after the three officers allegedly demanded two men hand over a doggie bag of steak fajitas Nov. 20.

The three were accused of assault and battery and were suspended without pay Monday.

All 10 officers were set for arraignment Tuesday afternoon.

Law Firm of Timothy C. Williams

ATTORNEY AT LAW



TIMOTHY C. WILLIAMS

Timothy Williams is a member of the Nevada & Illinois State Bar, practicing primarily in personal injury cases.

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892-0000
844 E. Sahara Avenue
Las Vegas, Nevada

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