

DNC denies plans to lay off black workers

WASHINGTON (AP) - Officials with the Democratic National Committee denied plans Thursday to lay off 10 black staffers, a day after black Democratic leaders expressed outrage at reports that the staff changes were imminent.

Donna Brazile, chair-

woman of the DNC's Voting Rights Institute and the leading critic of the layoffs, said DNC Chairman Terry McAuliffe assured her on Thursday that he would never approve such a staff reduction.

"I'm glad that they are backing away from this," said

Brazile, who was Al Gore's presidential campaign manager. "I'm glad that they are reversing course because this would have been the wrong decision. The Democratic Party would have ended up with egg on its face."

DNC communications strategist Jim Mulhall said

Thursday that although the leaders were told 10 staffers were going to be laid off, the information was incorrect. He said the number of layoffs still has not been determined, but it would be less than 10.

"The DNC has a strong commitment to diversity, to making sure that the DNC

reflects America and the Democratic Party," he said. "As we adjust staffing levels to deal with the new political realities of facing George Bush and his immense resources, we will make sure the DNC is in the strongest position to wage an effective campaign next year."

Mulhall also had said Wednesday that the committee had hired at least nine new minority staffers in the past month. On Thursday he said the number was incorrect - eight staffers had been hired and five were black.

Mulhall said more hires would be made in the coming months.

The DNC is trying to save money and streamline operations in preparation for next year's presidential election. Mulhall said the staff has been reduced by a third since last year. The DNC faces a tough battle in the next year and a half. Nine candidates are in a fierce competition to take on President Bush, who has high approval ratings and is raising much more money than any of his potential challengers.

Staffers

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consulting Black people before making these decisions," Walters says. "The bottom line here is that it's obvious to me that for all of the titles that Donna and [others] have, that somebody should be consulting them before they do this stuff."

Moore, who served as White House political director in the Clinton administration from 1997 to 2000, says that during her tenure as chief operating officer at the DNC from early 2001 until August 2002, people of color made up at least half of the staff.

According to DNC officials, Blacks made up approximately 30 percent of the 170-member staff in 2001. But, with a series of layoffs, the staff is now down to 94 people, 26 of whom are Black (22 percent).

An additional reduction of 10 would have taken the number of Blacks down to only 16 or 13 percent of the staff.

Meanwhile, Blacks continue to give 80 percent to 90 percent of its vote to Democrats. Melanie Campbell, president and chief executive officer of the National Coalition for Black Civic Participation, a non-partisan get-out-the-vote

group, observes:

"This further exacerbates the perception that the Democratic Party takes the African-American vote for granted. It does not help that situation at all. I understand the need to manage an organization and make operational decisions. But that also has to be done in such a way that you do not damage what's supposed to be a part of your strong base."

She isn't the only one that holds that opinion.

"It'll have more of an impact among Black party activist and grassroots people who work in the campaigns," says Robert C. Smith, professor of political science at San Francisco State University.

"I think at some point as the cycle unfolds that people will remember it. It will leave a bad taste in people's mouths even after they say it was not the way it appeared to be."

With new Republicans effort to reach Black voters, alienating African-Americans could be the Democrats' worst nightmare, some observers say.

Says Walters, "What the Democratic Party has feared is dissatisfaction breaking out. That's why this is inexplicable to me."

Funding

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"We encourage the Republican leadership to also remember the 387 other sites in the National Park System as they develop the 2004 budget of the Department of Interior," Kiernan said. "Congress should work in a bipartisan fashion to preserve our national heritage for all Americans."

Currently, there are only 12 national park sites specifically created to protect and interpret the role of African-Americans in American history and, according to the NPCA, all need increased funding.

Morial

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has been to exacerbate to an astonishing degree the racial character of who gets arrested, convicted and imprisoned for drugs in America.

Nationally, African-Americans account for 13 percent of the nation's drug users, their proportion of the general population. But they make up 35 percent of drug arrests and 53 percent of drug convictions.

Moreover, such massive incarceration has been fiscally foolish. It's a highly expensive but ineffective deterrent in the important war against drugs and violent crime in America.

A better approach, now supported by experts across a wide philosophical spectrum, is to focus education, prevention, and intensive treatment.

There's no doubt that the Rockefeller drug laws are unjust: and there is widespread, nonpartisan agreement that they should be substantially changed. Such government officials as Governor George E. Pataki, a Republican, and Sheldon Silver, the Democratic Speaker of the State Assembly, and a host of other politicians have publicly supported revising them.

Yet, the laws remain as they have been.

Thus, it's welcome to see Russell Simons, co-owner and founder of Def Jam Records, Sean "P.Diddy" Combs, and others involved in the hip-hop music industry at the head of a campaign that uses the appeal of hip-hop to mobilize ordinary citizens, particularly adolescents and young adults, to press for reform of the laws.

This is a vitally important effort for several reasons.

One is that the two latter groups are most "at risk" of, on the one hand, succumbing to the street-level lure of the illicit drug trade, and thus, becoming a statistic of the Rockefeller drug laws; or, in the neighborhoods in which many of them live, becoming an innocent-bystander victim of the variety of crimes associated with the drug trade.

Equally important, however, is the fact that, regardless of their musical tastes, these young people, and society as a whole, can reap enormous benefits from their becoming politically aware and motivated, benefits that can go well beyond the immediate, just campaign of righting what has been terrible wrong.

Overstreet

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as Andrea Agassi. This dude with little or any fanfare has and continues to donate millions of dollars to improving the quality of life of at-risk students in West Las Vegas.

Whereas, with celebrity multi-millionaires of color, you can not get more than one or two of them to attend community events and you can forget about them contributing anything to community betterment projects.

Curry

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Rupert Murdoch, a major Republican donor, pushes his conservative views through his Fox News Channel. Its motto is "We report, you decide." It should be "We report and we decide." All those campaign donations seem to be paying off. Murdoch is about to gain controlling interest in DirectTV, the digital satellite service. As "Washington Post" columnist Tom Shales notes, "Although it would be economically unwise, Murdoch could conceivably drop CNN, chief competitor to Murdoch's Fox News Channel, from the DirectTV bill of fare."

The sale of Black Entertainment Television (BET) to Viacom was a clear illustration of what can happen when ownership changes hand. Last year, BET decided to eliminate most of the public affairs programs that had kept it from being a Black clone of MTV - "BET Tonight with Ed Gordon," "Lead Story" and "Teen Summit."

Viacom is not the only major media conglomerate

interested in buying Black media properties.

AOL Time Warner owns 49 percent of "Essence" magazine and all of the Web site, Africana.com. The "Chicago Tribune" has the majority interest in

Blackvoices.com.

As has been the case with the hair care industry and Black funeral homes, we can expect to see further efforts by major corporations to partner with or outright buy Black newspapers and radio sta-

tions. The reason is simple: That's where the U.S. population is growing.

Too bad we aren't rapidly growing as owners.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service.



WHAT'S UP DOCS!

Judy Flynn, regional aide to Sen. John Ensign, R-Nev., stands with Dr. Anthony Pollard and Diane Hughes, principals of Rainbow Medical Centers. Pollard and Hughes received a Senatorial Certificate of Congratulations from Ensign during their recent 15-year celebration.