

Dems: Blacks must lead quest justice

By Hazel Trice Edney

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Democratic National Committee Chairman Terry McAuliffe is urging African-Americans to take the lead in fighting for social justice as candidates from both parties compete for their support in next year's presidential election.

"In this upcoming political season, we need African-Americans to lead the call to restore opportunity and equality in government to all people, regardless of race, ethnicity or gender," McAuliffe says in prepared remarks scheduled to be delivered Thursday at the annual convention of the National Newspaper Publishers Association in Baltimore. "African-Americans have always stood firm on the principle of opportunity and equality for all Americans."

McAuliffe recently witnessed Blacks taking the lead on an issue that was considered unjust. He and the DNC were strongly criticized for proposing to fire 10 staff members, all of them Black. The layoffs were called off after Black political insiders challenged the proposed cuts.

In his address to the NNPA, which represents more than 200 Black publishers, McAuliffe acknowledged that Democrats had made a mistake.

"The press reports of last week on staffing changes were the result of miscommunication - for that I take full responsibility," McAuliffe says. "I am chairman of this great party today due in part to the support of many African-Americans and I am extremely proud of the role that African-Americans have played and continue to play in the Democratic Party, and look forward to continuing to expand that role."

Two prominent African-Americans publicly expressed objections to the staff cuts. Donna Brazile, chair of the DNC's Voting Rights Institute and Minyon Moore, former DNC chief operating office, pressed party officials to reverse their decision.

While McAuliffe accepts responsibility for the layoff debacle, he warns that layoffs may still be necessary because of budget limitations. Given the public uproar, however, it is unlikely that only Blacks will receive pink slips.

With African-Americans voting Democratic in national elections 80 to 90 percent of the time, Democrats realize the value of their most loyal voting bloc.

"We absolutely will not beat Bush and his Right wing Congressional colleagues without the help of the African-American community," McAuliffe says. "The Democratic Party needs the active support of African-Americans across the board and across the country."

The McAuliffe speech was not unlike other pre-election pitches to inspire Black voters. But those pitches are likely to fall on deaf ears if the party continues bungle efforts to respect the Black vote.

News of the botched firings came just as top Democrats in Congress were also criticized by Congressional Black Caucus chairman Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) for selecting so few African-Americans for committee staff positions.

In March, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee had no African-Americans among its first five staff hires. In April, the Democratic side of the House of Representatives' Select Committee on Homeland Security likewise hired only White staffers in its first five positions.

Meanwhile, leading Democrats are also calling for more Black input into policy-making

Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) is teaming up with the CBC for an African-American Leadership Summit for June 26 on Capitol Hill. The summit, in the planning stages for several months, is aimed at establishing a policy dialogue between local and state Black leaders and national Democratic lawmakers.

CBC spokesman Doug Thornell says the summit will provide an opportunity to reaffirm the party's commitment to the Black community.

Judge upholds Boston desegregation plan

Parents in the lawsuit sought to overturn policy of racial balance

BOSTON (AP) - A federal judge upheld a suburban school system's voluntary desegregation policy, throwing out a closely watched lawsuit that had been brought by parents who claim the policy discriminated against their children.

The parents of six students - black, white, Latino and biracial - had sued to overturn a policy designed to bring racial balance to the schools in Lynn, about 10 miles north-east of Boston.

The case was believed to be the first challenge to a voluntary desegregation plan to go to trial. Twenty-one other Massachusetts cities and towns and several others across the country have voluntarily desegregated their school systems and were

watching the case.

"This is a great victory for public school students and for civil rights," Attorney General Thomas Reilly said. "Lynn's integrated elementary schools have allowed Lynn's youngest students to develop a deep appreciation and respect for people of different races, promoting tolerance among Lynn students."

U.S. District Judge Nancy Gertner ruled Friday that the Lynn system's policy was "narrowly tailored" and serves a "compelling state interest." Under Lynn's policy, school officials may not consider race and ethnicity when parents want their child to attend their neighborhood school. But when parents ask that their

child be assigned to an out-of-neighborhood school, race or ethnicity may be a factor if school officials feel the assignment would further segregate either the student's neighborhood school or the requested school.

Chester Darling, whose Citizens for the Preservation of Constitutional Rights represents the families, called the ruling "an absolute travesty" that "perpetuates racial division."

"The judge feels obliged to compel these children to sit next to one another and balance the racial composition," he said. "This is a transgression and an injury to the 14th amendment, the equal protection of the law, plus the liberty and trust of parents in controlling the up-

bringing of their children."

Unlike the Boston public school system, which was ordered by the court to desegregate, Lynn voluntarily initiated its plan 14 years ago to maintain racial balance in its schools. Its school enrollment of more than 15,000 students is 42 percent white and 58 percent minority.

Gertner wrote that the plan serves "two critical public goals - to enable parents to choose integrated schools over segregated ones and to minimize racial imbalance across the school system."

She added that the plan improves the quality of education of all the system's children because "a racially diverse learning environment is essential for citizens-to-be."

Desegregation order on Dallas schools removed

DALLAS (AP) - A judge ended decades of federally mandated desegregation in the Dallas school district last week, saying the school system's racial divide has been healed.

In a 40-page ruling, Judge Barefoot Sanders wrote that "the segregation prohibited by the United States Constitution, the United States Supreme Court and federal statutes no longer exists in the" city district.

The ruling comes three months after hearings to decide whether the district was complying with the goals of a

1971 desegregation order, including ending unequal academic performance and unfair hiring practices.

The order was prompted by a 1970 lawsuit by Sam Tasby, a black man who sued the district because his son was unable to attend an all-white school near his home and was bused to an all-black school farther away.

Sanders concluded in 1994 that the school system had erased the effects of desegregation, but decided to monitor the district - the nation's 12th largest with some 160,000 students - for

three more years. In 1998, he said the district had not fully complied with a set of guidelines.

The district's racial and ethnic makeup has changed markedly since the original lawsuit. White students, who once made up about 59 percent of the population, are now roughly 7 percent; the percentage of Hispanic students has grown from 7 percent to 59 percent; and the percentage of blacks has decreased slightly, from 33 percent to 32 percent.

In Thursday's ruling, the judge credited the leadership

of Superintendent Mike Moses, who took the job at the end of 2000 after a year as deputy chancellor of Texas Tech.

"I don't think this is especially a time to gloat," Moses said. "It is incumbent upon us to operate a school district that is fair and equitable for all students." Tasby acknowledged school officials have accomplished much. "We have come a long ways," he told Dallas television station KXAS. "We're in a totally different arena compared to where we were back in the '70s."

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