

Group's queries draw contrast between Bush, Kerry

By Hazel Trice Edney
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WASHINGTON (NNPA) — As President Bush was feuding publicly with the NAACP over his decision not to address the group's annual convention for the fourth consecutive year, his aides quietly returned a completed NAACP questionnaire that the White House had been sitting on for nearly a year.

"Despite the current leadership's intolerant views and rhetoric, President Bush will continue to reach out to members of the NAACP and African-Americans across the country," says Bush campaign spokeswoman Susan Whitson. "President Bush has been an inclusive leader who has consistently reached out to African-Americans regardless of their political persuasion. He has many friends who belong to the NAACP and respects their proud history of championing civil rights. Differences of opinion and opposing views are, of course, part of the national political debate."

Bush responded to more than 40 questions in essay form, but he avoided direct answers by declining to check boxes when given a choice to either "support" or "oppose" an issue.

"We responded to the questions in narrative format so as to best explain the administration's record and policies in each of the subjects," Cynthia Magnuson, an aide in the Bush campaign policy office, said in a note attached to the questionnaire.

The Bush questionnaire, submitted to all presidential candidates last August, was e-mailed back to the NAACP on July 9, just before the Philadelphia annual convention. Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), the Democratic presidential candidate, returned his answers in January.

Whitson attributed the delay to the numerous questionnaires sent to the Bush campaign. "We receive thousands of questionnaires to respond to," she says.

In most instances, Kerry gave answers that starkly contrast with those of Bush.

Among the differences:

- On affirmative action, Bush refuses to use the phrase, saying he supports "affirmative access, which aggressively reaches out to minorities, (but) is inclusive of all races...I do not support racial quotas, preferences, or set-asides."

Kerry states, "We deserve a president who doesn't call

fairness a special preference. I believe in an America where we take common sense steps to ensure that our schools and workplaces reflect the full face of America."

- On felon voting rights, Kerry says he supports legislation to restore voting rights to convicted felons as the first step to reintegrating prisoners that have paid their debt to society. On the other hand, Bush says he supports using millions of dollars to help former prisoners reintegrate, but the felony voting rights

decision should be left up to the states.

- On federal judgeships, Bush says he has "nominated highly qualified judges from diverse backgrounds to the federal bench, including many minorities and women who will follow the law and not legislate from the bench." Kerry says, "We need judges who are committed to moving equal rights and protections forward in the 21st Century. People who understand that the battle against racial discrimination continues."

- On racial profiling, Bush says he has called for the end of racial profiling and established guidelines to prohibit federal law enforcement officers from making traffic stops and other decisions based on race. Kerry says more must be done. "The problem is not just racial profiling in the criminal justice system. It's racial profiling in life. It's the denial of so many opportunities to Americans who are Brown or Black."

The death penalty, man-

datory minimum sentences, disparities in powder and crack cocaine laws, predatory lending, reparations, hate crimes and funding for HIV/AIDS are among the string of questions addressed in the questionnaire.

According to Vernon Jordan, debate broker for the Kerry campaign, those issues will not be left out of public exchanges over the next four months as Republicans and Democrats wrestle for the Black vote, 90 percent of which went to Al Gore in

2000.

The Bush campaign was highly criticized for not attending the NAACP conference, Kerry did address the convention and upbraided Bush for not attending. Among the final grades of the 107th Congress, Kerry was among only eight of 100 senators who earned a perfect score of 100 percent on the NAACP legislative report card.

The other senator from Massachusetts, Edward M. Kennedy, scored 97 percent.



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