

Bond refuses to cease criticism of Bush

NAACP chairman skewers the president on a wide range of issues — Social Security to religion

By George Curry

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WASHINGTON (NNPA) — NAACP Board Chair Julian Bond celebrated Presidents Day weekend by criticizing President George W. Bush on issues as varied as Social Security reform to what he calls Bush's violation of several of the Ten Commandments.

"We are meeting on Presidents Weekend, so I want to say a few words about presidents — one to whom we bid farewell [NAACP Immediate Past-President Kweisi Mfume] and another who has never said 'hello,'" Bond said at the annual meeting of the NAACP in New York. "...Unfortunately, as one president left, another stayed."

Bond offered a withering critique of Bush's policies, a clear indication that the nation's oldest civil rights group will not temper its criticism of the former Texas governor simply because it is the target of an Internal Revenue investigation. The IRS has questioned whether the NAACP violated its tax-exempt status by engaging in partisan politics.

The NAACP has refused to cooperate with what it calls an unwarranted investigation, and Bond showed no signs over the weekend of being intimidated by the inquiry.

"At the NAACP, we have never opposed or supported political parties," Bond said, emphasizing the word parties. "Instead, we have always opposed political policies that are wrong..."

Debunking the notion that Bush received a mandate in the November presidential election, Bond noted that Bush won with the narrowest margin of victory for a sitting president since Woodrow Wilson in 1916.

"So we have a country divided roughly 50/50 but a government held entirely by one side," Bond said. "Most of us would rather have had the election turn on issues of war and peace than on issues of race and sex. I thought we had 10 Commandments. What happened to the ones against lying, stealing, and killing."

Repeating what has become a familiar theme in his public speeches, Bond added, "Bill Clinton may have lied in the war between the sexes. George W. Bush lied about the war. When Clinton lied, no one died."

In the past, Bond has ac-

cus the Bush administration of engaging in racial politics. He reiterated that criticism last Saturday, saying: "The November election served as a reminder of the extent to which the body politic feeds off of race." That is reflected, Bond said, in the Bush administration's approach to reforming Social Security.

"Now they are trying to tell us that privatizing Social Security would be beneficial to Black people. This is because, they say, Blacks don't live as long as Whites," Bond said. "It isn't Social Security that's a bad deal for Blacks — dying too early is the real bad deal! They'd rather play the race card than actually address Black's shorter life expectancy."

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, White women in the U.S. live to be 80, followed by Black women at 74.8 years, White men, 74.5 years and Black males at 67.6 years.

Of the 15 leading causes of death, Blacks had higher rates of deaths than Whites in 11 areas, according to the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. Although Blacks and Whites have improved their health over the years, the gap between Whites and Blacks has increased in recent years, according to federal statistics.

Bush and some of his supporters have tried to garner support for the president's Social Security proposal by arguing that because Blacks die earlier than Whites, they should support a program that purportedly allows them to cash in sooner.

"Using shorter life expectancy as an excuse for privatizing Social Security isn't just offensive; it is also misleading," Bond asserted.

"The Black-White disparity in life expectancies practically disappears at retirement age. If they really cared about Black life expectancy, they'd fix health care, which is really broken. They'd fix the Black-White unemployment gap — joblessness for Blacks is always twice the rate for Whites. They'd fix the prison gap — more Black men are in prison than in college. They'd find ways to end the numerous threats to long life and to extend our lives. Instead, they want to turn Social Security into broker security. This argument isn't about Main Street; it's about Wall Street."

Bond noted that Social Security is the sole source of income for 40 percent of elderly African-Americans.

"Their so-called reform is a solution without a problem," Bond said. "It is part of an all-out attack on the underpinnings of the progressive spirit in America."

At a news conference, Bond told reporters that a search firm was looking at 200 candidates to succeed Mfume, who resigned in December.

According to news accounts, he told reporters: "I want someone with the fundraising ability of Bill Gates, with the oratorical ability of Martin Luther King and the managerial ability of someone who's managed big, big things successfully and done well."

Bond said the organization expects to announce Mfume's successor by July.

The NAACP also reported a \$4.7 million shortfall for 2004. It spent \$28.9 million,

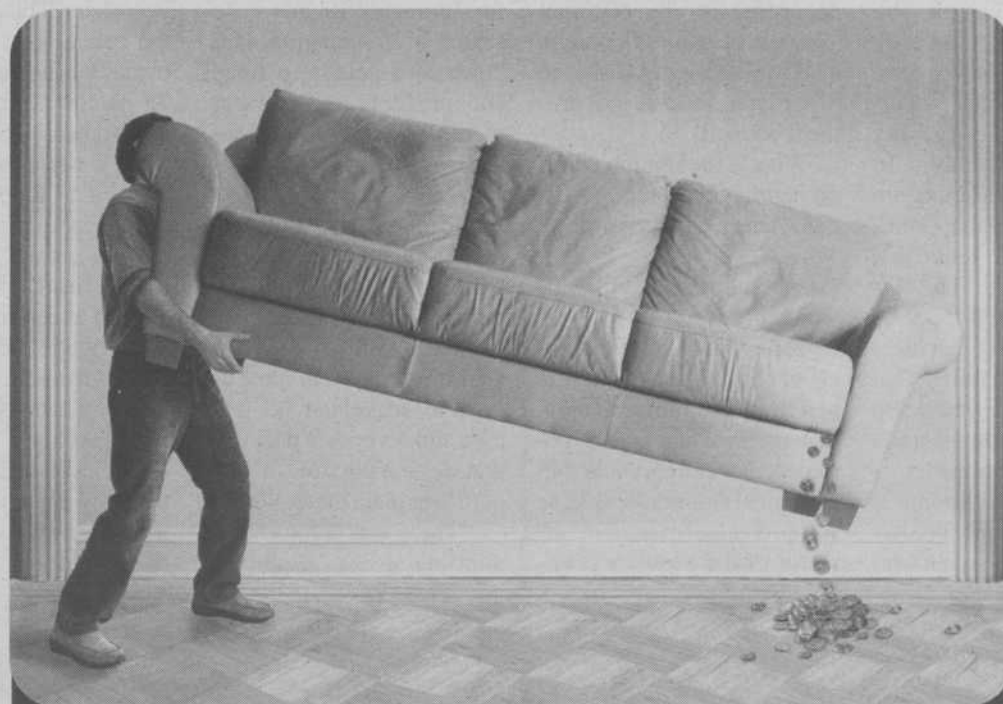
although income was \$24.2 million. The difference was made up from reserve funds, which now total about \$13 million, according to NAACP Treasurer Francisco Borges. Approximately half of the remaining reserves were set aside for an endowment and scholarships, NAACP officials said.

In his speech, Bond was critical of Bush's proposed budget.

"...Having starved the government with tax cuts for

the rich, they now propose a budget which will punish the poor."

After listing one half-dozen cuts in the Bush budget that would adversely impact the poor, Bond turned the president's language against him, ridiculing Bush's goal of an "ownership society." Bond said, "The budget tells us the real meaning of the so-called ownership society — it means a society where, unless you're rich, you're on your own."



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