

Sharpton calls FBI probe of finances 'bogus'

By Herb Boyd
Special to Sentinel-Voice

NEW YORK (NNPA) — Angered by a headline in the *New York Post*, the Rev. Al Sharpton called a press conference in front of the paper's headquarters and charged that the story was "bogus."

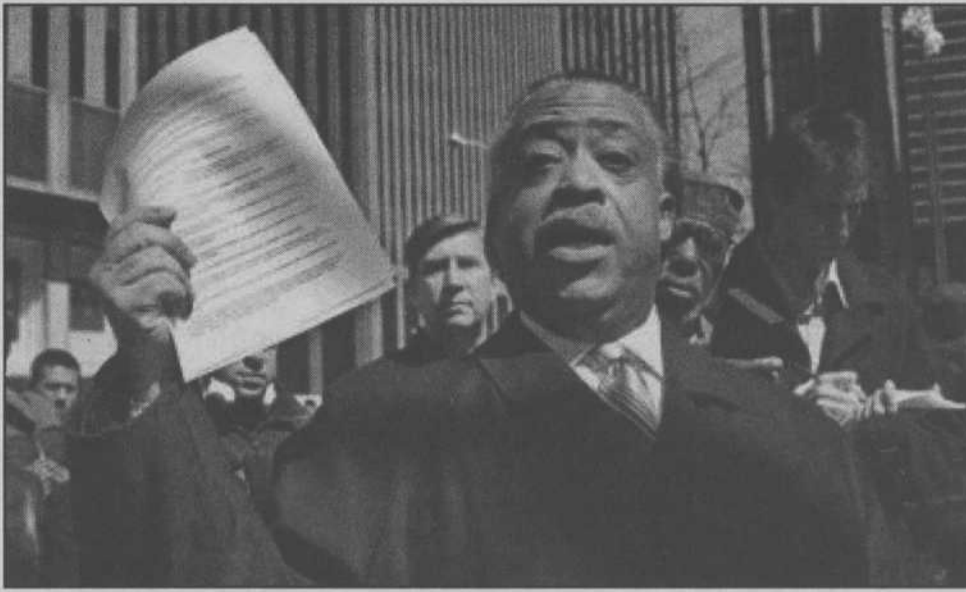
The *Post's* story, as Sharpton explained, was based on one that appeared in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

One of the most damaging assertions in the *Post's* story states that "an FBI wiretap picked up [La-Van] Hawkins telling [Ronald] White he believed they had raised more than \$140,000 for Sharpton in the previous quarter — but Hawkins fretted because Sharpton had reported only about \$50,000 on his federal election filing."

"He's a train wreck — a plane crash waiting to happen," Hawkins told White about Sharpton, according to the paper.

"That's a very important sentence," Sharpton said. "And since they used this as the basis of their story, they should tell the whole story."

Sharpton then recited the part omitted by the *Post*, quoting from the *Inquirer*: "[La-Van] Hawkins apparently was referring to news reports that Sharpton had raised \$54,000 in the second quarter of 2003. It is unclear whether Hawkins understood the details of the campaign-finance reports, because Fed-



The Rev. Al Sharpton holds a news conference in front of the headquarters of the *New York Post* last week in New York disputing a story it wrote.

eral Election Commission records show that Hawkins and his associates made major contributions in the first quarter of 2003."

Sharpton then related that several weeks ago the *Post* erroneously reported that he and William Thompson, the city's comptroller, were under a federal probe for a scheme to defraud the pension fund, which is overseen by Thompson.

"A prosecutor stood in federal court and said there was no wrongdoing," Sharpton continued, "In fact, they dropped our names from the situation. The *Post* didn't report that. ... I challenge not only the *Post* to come forward and print the whole article, but the FBI should release the tape, if they have a

tape, and my FEC filings and I'll show you that everything... was properly filed. And there was no probable cause for an FBI probe of anything."

At the top of the *Post's* story, it indicated that Sharpton was the target of a criminal investigation and had been secretly videotaped pocketing campaign donations from "two shady fundraisers in a New York City hotel room and then asking for more," the *Post* reported.

All the FBI had to do was to consult the filings, Sharpton said, "and they would have seen there were no grounds for a probe." He went on to say, "If it takes the FBI two years to check their findings and report them, then I should have been

president so I could have had an FBI director who understands how to look into things," Sharpton snapped.

He said he had not seen the alleged videotape of him accepting money from La-Van Hawkins and the late Ronald White, who died last November.

Hawkins and White were characterized as shady by the *Post*, a description Sharpton disputed.

"Funny, they weren't considered shady in 2003, when

Mr. White wanted to help our campaign," Sharpton began.

"Mr. White was a lawyer, a director of a bank, and close to the mayor [John Street] of Philadelphia, and Mr. Hawkins. How was I to know that a year and a half later they were going to be prosecuted? So, I guess when James Brown introduced me to Richard Nixon I was supposed to know that he was going to be snared in Watergate the next year. And I guess when I met Bill Clinton I should have known that later he was going to have problems. Not only must I be a preacher, I must also be a prophet."

In the *Post's* story, it was stated that Sharpton had accepted money from Hawkins and White to help qualify for matching federal funds. Also, according to the *Inquirer*, the two men were seeking to curry favor with Sharpton in order to give them a leg up in various business endeavors, including the pension fund.

The conversations between Sharpton and White were captured during a wire-

tap of their phone calls. The FBI has declined to comment on this issue.

"What is absolutely erroneous in all this is that if someone wanted me to help them, I am not a public official... they could hire me," Sharpton said.

"I have a consulting firm. I would not need an election campaign to curry favor for them."

"Can you imagine what would happen if it was a White presidential candidate?" Sharpton asked.

He said he believed he was a target of the FBI, but said that he did not know why, since "I have done nothing wrong."

He said that it might stem from the fact that White was a central figure in the Philadelphia City Hall probe. Hawkins, a fast-food mogul who hails from Detroit, is currently on trial in Philadelphia on charges of helping White to funnel a \$10,000 payment to Philadelphia's ex-treasurer Corey Kemp in an attempt to influence government contracts.

Herb Boyd writes for the *Amsterdam News*

AIDS

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because we don't get treatment, so the prevention that's out there has been targeted towards gay, White men and the bottom line is that infection among other races is going down and we are staying the same."

Harawa also blames economics to the disproportionate number of Blacks living this deadly, yet preventable disease.

"Black people are more likely to be living in poverty and not only are Black women more likely to be living in poverty; they are more likely to be raising children in that situation.

"Living in an impoverished neighborhood is automatically going to put you at a higher risk because in impoverished neighborhoods there is more drug use and higher levels of people trading sex for drugs or money. So, even if you are not, yourself, engaging in those behaviors, the people you are in contact with might be engaging in those behaviors."

Mark McLaurin of the New York AIDS Coalition says we must attack stigma in the Black community.

"There is a certain amount of stigma around being HIV positive and being an AIDS advocate," he says. "In the African-American community in particular, AIDS

prevention is stigma reduction. Once you get past that, it's real education — stigma is the primary barrier," he explains.

Miller, who runs a program in Baltimore, believes we must now take it to the federal level.

"The first strategy would be to address policy. There are way too many policies being made for Blacks that don't include Blacks. The second is that there is way too much research that defines the Black community that isn't done by us and, therefore, isn't interpreted by us."

For example, recent research has said that men on the down low is a huge problem, when in reality more women are getting infected by injecting drugs themselves and sharing those needles or by having sex with an injection drug using partner. If we would have done the research ourselves we would have been able to say that's not the real issue."

He adds, "We have to encourage more Blacks to get into the research field. We have to get more Blacks involved in the politics — not just talking to congress and marching. It's about knowing the language. So much money is going to treatment, what about prioritizing prevention? These are the questions we have to start answering."

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