

SCLC seeks to regain its footing

By Andre Coe

Special to Sentinel-Voice

DESOTO, Texas (NNPA) - National board members from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference met in Dallas recently to announce ambitious plans for the recently embattled civil rights organization founded in 1957 by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. These plans suggest attention will be focused on solving external problems rather than dwell on some of the internal issues that have dominated the organization in recent years.

Among the most ambitious plans that the organization's new President Charles Steele Jr. announced are the establishment of conflict resolution centers worldwide. The conflict resolution centers would return the organization back to King's principles of non-violence and would broaden the scope of the SCLC beyond the borders of America.

Steele is the former Alabama state senator who left politics to help the SCLC and was appointed president last year. The SCLC has been working to overcome image problems in the aftermath of internal and financial turmoil and the resignations of its last

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— Charles Steele, Jr.



two presidents, the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth and Martin Luther King III, last year.

Two conflict resolution centers have already been established in Dayton, Ohio and Dimona, Israel, Steele said.

The center in Israel would not take sides in the Israeli-Palestine conflict but would work to eradicate the violence that is taking place there, Steele said. He added that the ultimate goal of the centers would be to achieve world peace.

Steele said the SCLC is no longer a national organization because it has moved beyond the borders of America. He added that Nation of Islam Minister Louis Farrakhan personally told him the SCLC is the only organization that can achieve

this mission of non-violence and that Black people in America are in a unique position worldwide to achieve this goal because of their history.

Despite a history of slavery, Black people do not want to be terrorists or build bombs, Steele said. Peace cannot be achieved, he said, until we come together at the table of brotherhood.

Steele also said that he has already spoken to the Israeli prime minister.

The prime minister wanted to know how African people survived the trans-Atlantic slave trade and then wondered why some Black people in America seem to be afraid to ask about their own history.

"Sixty-four years of our history have been left out of

the trans-Atlantic slave trade," Steele said. "African Americans, through the SCLC, will be informed of our history."

In addition to the conflict resolution centers, the SCLC said it will also focus on eliminating racism, encouraging economic empowerment, eliminating the use of Taser guns by police and the extension of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

After Steele's announcement, several SCLC members spoke on issues affecting the Black community. National SCLC Treasurer Spiver Gordon said that he is not satisfied with an act that would merely give Blacks the right to vote for a period of time. A law needs to be made that would keep this from ever becoming an issue ever again, he said.

"Even with the bill, the election was stolen in Florida," Gordon said.

"We need to fix this thing so that it becomes permanent, not one that is renewable every few years," added Jerome McCorry, national vice president of the SCLC. "It's time for us to ensure that we come to grips with this thing."

Andre Coe writes for the Dallas Examiner

Black juror is jailed for lying

Special to Sentinel-Voice

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (NNPA) - If you thought you may be faced with jail time for answering a question incorrectly, would you go out of your way to serve as a juror or would you make an excuse and just avoid the service all together?

This is a question that many will be answering in the days to come because of a recent Broward County judge ruling that sent a 19-year-old to jail for four months after he answered a question incorrectly.

Stacey Forbes, a high school dropout with reading problems, said he got confused when answering a questionnaire that required him to answer aloud in a room filled with strangers during jury selection for a drug case on March 22. Forbes has been behind bars for 29 days since Circuit Judge Eileen O'Connor found out on March 22nd that he knowingly lied under oath about his background.

Rep. Chris Smith, D-93 said, "For someone to get four months for that, it could alter their lives. You could start creating a criminal out of someone who is not really a criminal."

Smith has asked the State Attorney's Office for an explanation of the background investigation on Forbes to begin with. Although the State Attorney's Office said Prosecutor Eva Solomos' hunch to check Forbes' background was based on how he answered questions and not race, Smith said, he is concerned whether Forbes, who is Black, received more scrutiny during jury selection than other jurors based on his appearance. Court records do not indicate whether she checked other potential jurors' arrest records.

Kerrick Wiggins, a city worker and founder of Youth Sports of Broward said, "As a resident of Broward County and having been asked to serve on jury duty myself, I was shocked that this type of court request would actually have an individual placed in jail for four months! That's a sentencing that had to have come with unforgiving circumstances, but as the information on the matter came forth, I became outraged. If this young man has problems with reading and comprehending, surely the language in a court room setting would have an even greater chance of confusing him."

Judge O'Connor has been on vacation and has not been available for comment.

While you wait, consider this: Of 156,276 Broward residents summoned for jury duty last year, only 54,116 showed up. That's an absentee rate of 65 percent.

The worse sanction brought against the 102,160 absentees was a \$100 fine. Court administrators did not know the number of fines issued or paid last year. Yet, here's a teen that actually showed up, made a mistake and now he is in jail for that misunderstanding. He was asked to respond to a question he read that asked if he or a member of his family had ever been arrested. Perhaps nervous and confused, Forbes said no, but in fact, he has been arrested, but never convicted. His mistake was turned into a lie that was exposed when a prosecutor checked his record on what the State Attorney's Office is calling a "hunch."



Sentinel-Voice photo by Isadore Washington

FASHION FORWARD

Members of the Anthony L. Pollard Foundation and the Rainbow Dreams Academy Committee received proceeds from the 47th Ebony Fashion Fair, the world's largest traveling fashion show. The tour stopped at the Texas Station Casino. The Alpha Rho chapter of Gamma Phi Delta Sorority, Inc., annually hosts the local stop on the tour. (Back, L to R) Marcia Jordan, Priscilla Johnson, Dr. Christina Clark, Debra Toney, Lauren Pollard, Diane Pollard and Kara Lewis. (Front) Lewis' daughters Cassandra and Eleanor (front) and Diane Pollard's daughter, Erin.

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