

Teachers oppose military recruiters at school

By Kevin Herrera

Special to Sentinel-Voice
LOS ANGELES (NNPA)

Teachers here are issuing an executive order to military recruiters: Stay away from our students.

At a recent rally at Abraham Lincoln High School, educators joined with community activists to announce the beginning of a nationwide campaign called Operation Opt Out, intended to inform parents about their right to withhold a child's personal information from

military recruiters.

"Keep your hands off of my students," said Fernando Ledezma, a member of the board of directors for United Teachers Los Angeles, which has endorsed the campaign. "I am speaking on behalf of thousands of young Chicanos, thousands of young African-Americans and poor Whites who gave their lives all under the auspices of being given an opportunity... You want to give them a real opportunity? Teach them how to read,

teach them how to write, and give them a college education."

Serving in the armed forces has long been a viable option for those without the means for a higher education. Giving four years of your life to the military often meant being rewarded with valuable job experience plus money for college.

But with ground troops still under fire in Iraq and Afghanistan, many high school seniors are reconsidering a career in fighting the war on

terrorism.

"Maybe they could offer you training or money for school, but what good is that if we don't come back?" said Lincoln High junior Andrea Molina. "It's not worth it."

Students like Molina have made it more difficult for recruiters to fulfill their enlistment quotas, which can be as high as 100,000 a year for some branches of the military.

To entice young people, recruiters have resorted to offering treats, from doughnuts

to rides in military vehicles.

Those with Operation Opt Out said some recruiters have even resorted to misleading students, which is why opponents have stepped up their own counter-recruitment efforts, particularly in schools of color where they feel recruiters swarm.

Army recruiters did not return calls seeking comment.

"If you talk to students you will find that since 9/11 and the war in Iraq there have been noticeable differences in military recruiters on campuses," said Roosevelt High School teacher Arlene Inouye, coordinator of the Coalition Against Militarism in Schools, one the members of Operation Opt Out.

"Now we have seen Humvees on campus, pull-up bars, Army vans. They are coming with all kinds of hardware and coming in places they didn't come before. ... There has been a definite change and what we want our school officials to understand is this is something happening today. Maybe before we didn't need to draw so much attention to

have a balance, but now they have to understand the military recruiters are under pressure to get their two to three recruits a month, and they are trying harder than ever to get them from our schools."

Under the federal education law, No Child Left Behind, school districts are required to distribute lists of students who are at least 17-years-old with their names, addresses and telephone numbers to all state colleges and universities and to members of the armed forces. If districts fail to comply with the law, they can be subjected to financial penalties, something that is rare, according to a spokesman for the California Department of Education.

Under the law, families have the option to withhold this information each year by filling out a Request to Withhold Directory Information Form, distributed by the district at the beginning of each school year. The forms are mailed to parents, district officials said, and they are included in the student-parent handbook.

(See Recruiters, Page 15)

Damu Smith continues colon cancer fight

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA)

Damu Smith, the environmental, anti-war, and social justice activist who vowed to fight for his own life last spring after doctors diagnosed him with colon cancer and gave him three to six months to live, crosses a significant health milestone this weekend.

Sunday marks the sixth month since the diagnosis and prognosis given him on March 25.

"My daughter, Asha, said to me, 'Daddy when did that doctor tell you that you had three to six months to live?'"

"I said, 'March 25.' So, she started counting off the time. And then she said, on 'Sept. 25, we're going to have a party right?'"

Actually, Smith will be throwing a Sunday afternoon celebration to give thanks for his improved health, but not before helping to lead a weekend anti-war demonstration on the Washington Mall on Saturday and serving as one of its primary speakers.

"Somebody asked me the other day, 'Are you in remission?' And I said, 'No, I wish I was. I wish I could claim that. The fact is that I still have what I have, just not as bad.'"

Although he is still in stage four, said to be the final stage of colon cancer, Smith said his doctors, last week, recommended against surgery to remove the tumors from his colon since the chemotherapy, Vitamin C infusion, fish oil and other supplements appear to be working to shrink them. He also attributes his improved health to six months of intense prayer, minor surgery, natural healing solutions and being surrounded by positive people that he calls "angels"

who help organize his life and schedule.

"I'm still a long way from being completely healed. But I'm feeling so much better than I was," said Smith. "I cannot jump back into the movement at the same pace. I'm back, but not at the same level because my days are still spent at the doctors and chemo and all that."

This weekend's anti-war march will not be Smith's first since he became ill and collapsed on the streets of Palestine, where he was preparing to lead a Palm Sunday peace march.

After watching events unfold along the Gulf Coast, Smith knew he could not remain on the sidelines.

He was among more than 200 protestors that marched in Lafayette Park, across from the White House Sept. 9 demanding governmental accountability for the environmental conditions in southern Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama.

More than most people, Damu Smith knows the dangers of a ravished environment. He served for 10 years as a toxics campaigner and national associate director of Greenpeace USA before leaving six years ago to start the National Black Environmental Justice Network, a group that fights against contaminated water and toxic waste dumps in Black neighborhoods. Smith contends that New Orleans, already ravaged by the hurricane, is now a second disaster waiting to happen.

"The public health crisis that the people in New Orleans face is all about the toxins in the water that are going to be left," Smith said. "What's going to be happening to our children? They're not talking about this at all. It's both immediate and long term... This is very serious."

The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality reports oil drainages from the thousands of boats that sank, plus thousands of ruptured underground fuel tanks. Smith said the problem is far worse than public officials are letting on.

"They keep talking about it's the oil refineries. But it's also the dead bodies. It's the dead dogs. It is all of the chemicals coming from underground. It's the leaking underground storage tanks and abandoned waste sites in New Orleans. All this stuff is a part of this toxic soup. And the danger to any unborn fetus for any women who went into that water is going to be so severe in the years to come," Smith said. "There's going to have to be long-term monitoring of all the people in New Orleans who waded through that water."

As the floodwaters recede, the Environmental Protection Agency reports that it is still testing residue being left behind. Preliminary test results indicate heavy contamination with bacteria, including elevated levels of E. coli, which lives in the intestines of human beings and other warm-blooded animals and could cause vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain and fever.

Diesel fuels and oils could cause skin irritation problems, such as itchy, red, sore, or peeling skin. Breathing some fuel oils may cause nausea, eye irritation, increased blood pressure, headache, light-headedness, a loss of appetite, poor coordination, and difficulty concentrating, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

Sounding much stronger than he did five months ago as he sat at his dining room table forcing down a bitter natural vitamin drink, Smith, the self-appointed "poster"

case for colon screenings, has a heavy schedule in coming weeks.

He never stopped his "Spirit in Action" one-hour radio talk show on every Tuesday at 11:00 a.m. on WPFW-89.3 in Washington.

Smith also plans to participate in the Millions More Movement on Oct. 15.

"I'm overjoyed... I attribute it to faith... And I will continue to exude that faith through everything that I'm doing. And I'm telling you that it's working."

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