

Maryland Lt. Gov. Steele enters Senate race

By James Wright
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Promising to be an independent-minded U.S. senator if elected in 2006, Maryland Lt. Gov. Michael S. Steele (R) entered the race for the Senate seat currently held by the retiring Paul Sarbanes, a Democrat.

The announcement took place at the Novak Field House on the campus of Prince George's County Community College before a crowd of 350 supporters that included Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich (R), who enthusiastically endorsed Steele for the position.

"It is time to heal our divisions," Steele said. "It is time to empower people, instead of empowering government. It is time to change the culture of our nation's capital. And that is why I am certain it is time for me to run for the United States Senate."

Steele, who once served as the leader of the Maryland Republican Party, took a subtle swipe at both parties.

"For too long, one party worried more about prices in the stock market than prices in the corner market," Steele said, "and too many in the other party preached reconciliation at the same time they practiced division. Red states must be red. Blue states must be blue."

"Black always black and white always white. It may look that way to Washington, but I know that that is not the view from Main Street Maryland."

Steele talked about how his race will em-

phasize more economic empowerment for Blacks.

"And instead of the right to sit at the front counter, the new civil rights struggle would be a struggle for the right to own the diner and to create legacy wealth for our children," he said.

He talked about lowering barriers to small business ownership, fighting terrorism abroad and at home, making sure that health care is a reality for everyone in the 21st century and improving failing public schools.

If Steele is elected, he will be the first Black Republican U.S. senator since Edward Brooke of Massachusetts, who served from 1966 to 1978.

Former congressman and NAACP Chief Executive Officer Kweisi Mfume is seeking the Democratic nomination for the U.S. Senate seat in Maryland.

Elsewhere, Rep. Harold Ford is seeking the Democratic nomination for a U.S. Senate seat from Tennessee, replacing retiring Majority Leader Bill Frist (R). Keith Butler, a Black Detroit minister, has declared his

candidacy for the U.S. Senate in Michigan. If he wins the Republican nomination, he would run against incumbent Sen. Debbie Stabenow.

Steele has no opponent in the Republican primary. He would be the second Black to run for the U.S. Senate in Maryland for the GOP: political activist Alan Keyes lost against Sen. Paul Sarbanes in 1988 and Sen.

Barbara Mikulski in 1992.

Steele would likely face Mfume or Rep. Ben Cardin (D-Md.) in the November 2006 general election. He would be the underdog in

both races. If Mfume wins the Democratic nomination, the Senate contest will feature two African-Americans as their party's nominee.

Steele's exploratory committee has raised approximately \$417,000 for the race. He has been helped by Sen. Elizabeth Dole (R-N.C.), who heads the National Republican Senatorial Committee, with funding and political advice.

Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Senior Research Associate David

Bositis said Steele will face a tough battle.

"Maryland is a very Democratic state, and it has one of the highest proportions of Blacks of any state in the country," he said. "Steele has shown that he does have appeal as a candidate, but it depends on how he conducts his campaign."

Bositis said Steele should minimize his ties with President Bush and focus on being a senator for all Marylanders.

However, Steele may also be facing a national swing toward the Democrats because of the Bush administration's mishandling of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the war in Iraq, the shaky economy and unease in the country.

Former County Executive Wayne Curry, who has been mentioned as a possible running mate for Ehrlich, said he is excited about Steele's race.

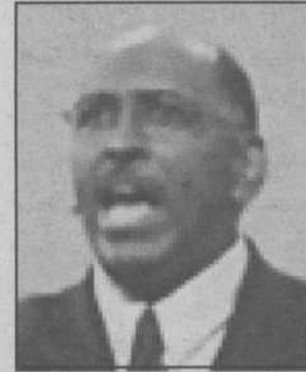
"I have known Michael Steele for years, and I know him as a professional," Curry said. "It is great that he is running for this position, and I appreciate that he is doing this."

Curry, a Democrat, did not indicate whether he would support Steele. He did say that his campaign team would have to work hard to win Prince George's County, which, he noted, has the largest bloc of Democratic voters in the state.

"He needs to translate to the voters of Prince George's County that he is not just 'Michael the Republican' but 'Michael the person,'" Curry said. "If he can do that, he has a real chance."

"It is time to heal our divisions. It is time to empower people, instead of empowering government"

— Michael S. Steele
Maryland Lt. Gov. (R)



NAACP leaders clash over drug ballot issues

By Betty Pleasant
Special to Sentinel-Voice

LOS ANGELES (NNPA) - The local branch of the NAACP is at odds with the venerable organization's state leadership over two ballot measures, just as it was revealed that Alice Huffman, president of the California State Conference of the NAACP, has received \$590,968 from drug manufacturers to help them pass Proposition 78 and defeat Proposition 79.

According to the PhRMA California Initiative Fund Finance Memo obtained through the secretary of state's office, Huffman's company, A.C. Public Affairs, has been engaged since Aug. 11 by PhRMA — the umbrella organization to which 14 of the country's largest pharmaceutical companies belong — to serve as a consultant for the drug firms' campaign to pass Proposition 78 and defeat Proposition 79. Whichever proposition garners the most votes will be enacted into law.

Proposition 78 is the measure on the Nov. 8 ballot that seeks to provide discounted prescription drugs to Californians. PhRMA members have contributed more than \$80 million, reportedly the largest such campaign fund in history, to win passage of

Proposition 78. PhRMA funneled its contributions to its front groups, Californians for Affordable Prescriptions (CAP) and Californians Against the Wrong Prescription (CAWP).

Proposition 79 is also on the Nov. 8 ballot and also provides discounted prescription drugs, but it was developed by the U.S. Consumers Union Inc. and is supported and funded by a wide range of consumer, senior, labor, health and educational organizations, including the American Association of Retired Persons and the Los Angeles and other branches of the NAACP.

Several fundamental differences exist between the two propositions to the extent that two sides have emerged among the state's NAACP activists and political figures: Those who are being paid by the drug companies and those who are not.

According to the spreadsheet provided by the secretary of state, Huffman spent \$415,670 of the money PhRMA gave her on the purchase of pro-Proposition 78 advertising in the print medium, much of it in minority publications. She spent \$290.08 on travel, lodging and meals. She split all of those expenditures in half between CAP and CAWP. Huffman retained a total of

\$175,000 in straight consulting fees.

Also observed in the documents is the fact that former San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown is also a drug industry campaign consultant who has been paid \$350,000 by PhRMA.

Huffman, the drug companies' paid consultant, is head of the state NAACP. At its annual convention in Los Angeles last weekend, the California state NAACP revealed its official position on the ballot propositions: Yes on Proposition 78 and No on Proposition 79.

Huffman contends that her consulting job with the drug companies does not conflict with her job as head of the NAACP. "I always take jobs that are not in conflict with the NAACP because I cannot separate my persona from the NAACP anymore," Huffman said. "I still have to live; I still have a business to run."

She said the NAACP did not have a position on Propositions 78 and 79 when she became the drug companies' consultant and that she, personally, "felt that the labor-backed Proposition 79 was not good for low-income and poor people" before she signed on to push Proposition 78.

According to Ernest Smith, the Los Angeles

NAACP's political action chairman, the local branch is not accepting the state's position on those two measures and is encouraging the Black community to vote No on Proposition 78, the drug company-backed measure, and Yes on Proposition 79, the initiative backed by the coalition of senior, health, labor and educational community.

"We voted in the branch to back 79 and reject 78 regardless of what the state NAACP says because we believe the positions we've taken are in the best interest of the people," Smith said. "That's what the NAACP is about. Doing what's right and fair for the people."

Huffman, together with Assemblyman Mervyn Dymally, D-Compton, opened last weekend's NAACP conference with a hearing titled "The War Against Second-Class Medicine." Dymally, who represents the 52nd District and chairs the Legislative Black Caucus, supports Proposition 78 and opposes Proposition 79. He said he does so "because the writers of Proposition 79 did not confer with people of color before they wrote it."

Dymally said he has not been paid by the drug companies to promote his position. However, the secretary

of state's records show that Dymally has taken \$1,000 each from pharmaceutical giants GlaxoSmithKline and Pfizer this year into his campaign committee.

Dymally admits that when he speaks in support of the drug companies' proposition, he speaks only for himself and not for the Legislative Black Caucus, whose members, like some NAACP branches, tend to follow their own dictates rather than their leaders'.

For example, 47th District Assemblywoman Karen Bass, D-Baldwin Village, vice chair of the Legislative Black Caucus, who has worked in the medical field for many years, couldn't disagree more with Dymally.

"My first question is

who's behind Prop. 78?" Bass said. "It's the drug industry and they propose to reduce their prices voluntarily. I don't believe they would do that voluntarily; if they would, they would have done it by now. Proposition 79 would require them to do it."

She added, "We have a situation now where people are choosing between their medicines and paying their bills, or they take half of the prescribed dose because they cannot afford the full prescription," Bass added. "Prop. 79 is taking a small step toward regulating an industry that can be out of control."

Assemblyman Jerome Horton, D-Inglewood, said (See NAACP, Page 9)

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