

Gordon steadily revamping NAACP

NEW YORK (AP) - Bruce S. Gordon works quickly. The retired businessman has been president of the NAACP for less than a year. But as he presides over his first national convention with the group this week in Washington, he has already overcome the low expectations of many critics, who figured a corporate type had little to offer a group with a history of upending the status quo.

It isn't so much what the former Verizon executive has accomplished as what he has started to do that has earned praise. For instance, he is working on repairing frayed ties with the Bush administration, advocating for Hurricane Katrina victims and kicking off an overhaul of the NAACP's structure and staff.

Now Gordon is facing tougher work — reviving stagnant membership and

pushing a civil rights agenda in a conservative national climate.

"I was very skeptical about him coming on, but when I look at the extraordinary challenges he's faced in his first year—I've seen him engaged," said Ronald Walters, a political scientist at the University of Maryland. "I give him high marks for trying, but it hasn't yielded very much."

Gordon's own to-do list is long. He wants to close racial gaps in wealth, education and incarceration, among other things.

"These are high bars," Gordon said in a recent interview at his Manhattan home. "But if we don't engage in addressing the fundamental issues that, to me,

represent the civil rights struggles of the 21st century, then we shouldn't exist."

Right now, the NAACP is often a bit player in public policy debates.

It denounced the nominations of John Roberts and Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court, for example, but both were approved. It blasted

federal budget cuts targeting the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; they passed. Meanwhile, an IRS investigation of the group, which threatens its nonprofit status, is ongoing.

And the group has taken a low-key approach to one of the year's biggest national (See Gordon, Page 10)

Forum probes diversity matters in advertising

Special to Sentinel-Voice

NEW YORK - Increasing diversity in the advertising industry hinges on holding agencies and their clients accountable, consumers getting more involved, and changing hiring policies, panelists said during a recent Black Enterprise symposium.

The panel discussion "Diversity on Madison Avenue: Myth, Reality, or Illusion?" was held in conjunction with the announcement of *Black Enterprise* magazine's second annual list of the best companies for diversity, featured in the July issue. BE evaluated diversity programs, consulted with diversity experts and corporate diversity officers, and conducted an extensive survey of more than 1,000 of the country's largest publicly traded companies as well as more than 50 leading global companies with significant U.S. operations.

After last year's list was published, more companies made an effort to be included this year with an increase in response of nearly 42 percent. Interest in the list, and efforts made by companies to demonstrate significant representation of African-Americans and other minorities, encouraged BE editors to boost the number of companies on the list from 30 in 2005 to 40 in 2006.

Moderated by National Public Radio host Ed Gordon, the symposium served as a forum to highlight the challenges African-Americans have working in the advertising industry and the small amount of advertising dollars allocated to minority-owned media.

"Even as *Black Enterprise* celebrates the positive strides that companies are making in diversity, it shouldn't be forgotten that the companies are being recognized for improving practices that were once non-existent," said panelist Rev. Al Sharpton, president of National Action Network.

"It is like when my mother would pat me on the head for doing something good after being spanked," he said.

"African-Americans must continue to hold the companies accountable to ensure they are doing better and make noise when they are not," Sharpton said.

Sharpton, along with Ken Smikle, founder and president of *Target Market News*; New York City Councilman Larry

Seabrook; Monica Emmerson, executive director of DaimlerChrysler's corporate diversity office; and Allen Pugh, executive vice president, director of client services at advertising agency GlobalHue, all shared their opinions of the current climate and what improvements need to be made.

"Corporate America has taken too much for granted," Smikle said. "The consumer relationship is buffered by what the ad agencies are doing with their clients."

Smikle said that consumers are largely oblivious to what is going on in the advertising industry.

"Until the information is put out through the Black media as to what is happening with ad agencies and their lack of investing in the Black community, the consumer will not know how to make noise."

Seabrook agreed, adding that there needs to be a connection between the community and the advertising industry.

"We then must call out the corporations that are not responding. We have been too nice to those that have been too nasty," Seabrook said.

Last week, the New York City Commission on Human Rights issued subpoenas to CEOs of 16 New York advertising agencies, as well as people familiar with diversity and hiring in advertising, to appear at a hearing on the issue, currently scheduled for Sept. 25, said New York City Human Rights Deputy Commissioner Avery Mehlman.

"Just as companies that don't hire and promote African-Americans or advertise in Black media must be taken to task, Blacks should patronize companies that have a positive relationship with the community," Emmerson said.

"We must find out what companies are working on our behalf and support those companies," she said.

Near the end of the symposium, Smikle charged everyone in the room to make their voices heard by going home, pulling their favorite product off the shelf and calling the 800-number on the package.

"I want you to ask them when was the last time they spent money on an African-American not-for-profit or given in advertising to the African-American media and when can I get a response?" Emmerson added, "And if you do not get the response you are looking for, make it known in your spending with that company."

Bush to address NAACP at 97th annual gathering

WASHINGTON (AP) - President Bush agreed to speak to the NAACP for the first time since he was a candidate, with the White House announcing the appearance days after the chair of the civil rights group publicly urged him to attend.

The president had declined invitations to the NAACP's annual meeting for five years in a row, and has often been criticized in speeches by the group's leaders. But under new NAACP President and CEO Bruce S. Gordon, relations have improved.

The group is holding its 97th annual gathering this week just a mile from the

White House at the Washington Convention Center.

Presidential spokesperson Tony Snow said Bush decided to speak to the group today because of "a moment of opportunity" for the president to tout his civil rights record and mend fences.

"He has an important role to play, not only in making the case for civil rights, but maybe more importantly, the case for unity," Snow said. "Because as long as we have a nation that's in any way divided along racial lines or where politics become a source of division rather than one of civil debate and trying to perfect the democracy, that's a problem."

Bush's decision comes in a critical midterm election year, when Republicans fear losing control of Congress and Bush has been working to get more votes for the GOP.

Bush received just 11 percent of the Black vote in the 2004 election.

In a speech to the convention Sunday, NAACP Chairman Julian Bond blasted the war in Iraq and attacks on voting rights even as he urged Bush to attend the gathering. "This year the convention has come to the president and we hope and pray he is coming to us," Bond said.

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Expertise Student of the Month

Cristina Morales graciously says "thank you" to her school family at Expertise for naming her their student of the month as she pursues her new future in cosmetology. She humbly acknowledges that being picked by her peer students "is nice." She said her focus remained on her classes for "about six months" and what she aims to gain is clear: "A career... I like hair color mainly." With a wide smile and a winning laugh she emphasized her plans to do what she really loves—"a lot of color." Plus, she says she would consider "maybe coming back and going for something else." She named the Esthetician course as something good to broaden her salon skills and further her career development.



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