

Program to recruit Black male teachers

By K. Chandler

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"The sad reality is that a young boy could go through his entire education without ever having a teacher who looks like me." —Reg Weaver, NEA president of the 2.7 million-strong education organization.

Increasingly, education advocates from around the country are pointing to a direct correlation between the egregiously disproportionate prison statistics of Black males today, along with the dearth of young Black American males who are successfully completing college, and the fact that only 2.4 percent of this nation's 3 million elementary and secondary public school teachers are Black men.

In an effort to change that bedeviling situation, the Call Me MISTER program — named in honor of actor Sidney Poitier's memorable line, "Call me Mister Tibbs" in the 1970 hit movie, "In the Heat of the Night" — was established in 1999 by Clemson University in South Carolina along with three Historical Black colleges — Claflin University, Morris College and Benedict College.

The Call Me MISTER program, which is short for Men Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Mod-

els, was designed to recruit, train and assist Black men academically and financially in obtaining their South Carolina teaching certification in order to exert a positive influence on young Black American males and respond to the critical need for more Black male teachers in many of the state's marginally performing schools.

"Although inspired by the Hollywood movie version, in terms of the development of the Call Me MISTER program we recognize that our legacy comes from the fact that it was unlawful for Black men to be called by their surname," stated Program Director, Roy I. Jones, referring to the pre-and-post Civil War era when Black men were abjectly demeaned and often brutalized in the South, as well as in other parts of the country.

According to Ross Norton, news director at Clemson University, "Students in the modern elementary classroom are rife with personal and developmental problems.

Many children are dealing with broken or dysfunctional homes.

In their personal lives they are exposed to drugs, violence, a lack of supervision and, perhaps most significant, the lack of positive male



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role models.

For minority and non-minority children, the MISTER leading his class represents something they don't have in sports stars and entertainers — a Black man of authority whom they can reach out and touch.

If every MISTER in the program graduates and starts teaching, that will double the number of Black men teaching elementary school in South Carolina," he noted.

Over the years, the Call Me MISTER program has been featured on The Oprah Winfrey Show as the 35th beneficiary of Oprah's Angel's Network in addition to being covered by *Jet* magazine, *Time*, *USA Today* and National Public Radio's "All Things Considered."

The innovative teacher training and recruitment program has also drawn the past and present support of a number of major foundations,

corporate and government entities including: BMW Manufacturing, Wachovia Foundation, DuPont Corporation, the U.S. Department of Education and General Electric Company, just to name a few.

Congress

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made it clear at the CBC swearing in that the CBC motto for the next two years will be "Change the Course."

She told the audience in the packed Library of Congress auditorium, "We won in November because the people said, 'Bring the troops home!'"

The audience responded with wild applause as one man shouted back, "Bring them home! Bring them home!"

"The federal budget is three trillion dollars of your money. Over \$500 billion of that is in Iraq or Afghanistan today. The president is asking for another \$100 billion in another couple of weeks," said Kilpatrick. "That's your money, money that can't go to education, housing and health care... There is no reason that our people have to choose between medication and rent and food and we are blessed to be the richest country in the world."

As the war debate rages, the change in Congressional leadership gives hope for progress on at least some of those issues outlined by Kilpatrick, says Shelton.

New Homeland Security Chairman Thompson agreed in an interview that Congress must be firm about the war.

"Rather than a blanket approval, I think there should be conditions and we should force the administration to come up with a plan and not have Congress held hostage because this president started a personal war," said Thompson.

"The notion that this president, just because he's president, can just add 20 to 30,000 more troops because somebody said that's the way to go, that's not a plan. So, I think we need to say, 'Mr. President, we need to see the plan rather than just you asking for money.'"

But, former CBC Chairman Mel Watt says though he agrees that there must be a "systematic withdrawal" of the troops, cutting the purse strings could do more harm than good.

"The president is the commander-in-chief and short of just stopping funds, which I think the country would not react well to, the Congress really doesn't have control over the strategy of a war," Watt said.

"The only thing that we really have control over is the purse strings. And I think it would be misinterpreted if we abruptly started to squeeze those purse strings. So our leadership is kind of in a bind trying to figure out

Today, program has been expanded to 10 campuses in South Carolina and includes nearly 150 MISTERS in training with 20 program alumni (the first graduating class was in 2004) now teaching in public schools throughout the state.

Enrollees in the three-year Call Me MISTER teaching program are chosen in part from an applicant pool derived from educationally underserved Black American communities, particularly high schools, in affiliation with partnering schools.

Overall support for the program has been extremely encouraging, and coupled with the fact that other states

are now looking at replicating the Call Me MISTER teaching program, Dr. Jones and other administrators are thinking about expanding beyond South Carolina's state boundaries.

"If you want to be a person of influence or make a difference, there is no better job than teaching. There's no way you trade a dollar for a child who says, 'If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't have made it,'" he said.

For more information on the Call Me MISTER program, send an e-mail to mister@clemson.edu or call toll-free 1-800-640-2657.

K. Chandler writes for the *Westside Gazette*.

how we can send a strong message to the president that we don't think this war should continue in this way."

Regardless of what happens with the war, one thing is clear. That is, if Democrats continue to vote as they have, issues of the NAACP will clearly progress.

On the House report cards, Democrats made 136 A's, 41 B's, 15 C's, 8 D's and one F (Gene Taylor, a Miss. Democrat). Republicans made no A's, no B's, no C's, three D's, and 224 F's.

On the House side, those leaders who earned all A's on the NAACP report card — Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) and Majority Whip James E. Clyburn (D-S.C.) — have replaced those who earned consistent Fs: former Republican majority leader Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), who is now replaced by new Republican minority Leader John Boehner (R-OH). The Republican whip is Roy Blunt (R-Mo.)

In the Senate, Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) with A's on the NAACP report card have replaced Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, who has retired with consistent F's. Frist is succeeded by new Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ken.), also with consistent F's.

The Republican Whip is Trent Lott, the former majority leader, who was forced to step down three years ago after a gaff insinuating that America would have been better off under segregationist government. He has also maintained F's.

Only four members of the CBC got other than A's. They were Reps. Sanford Bishop (Ga.), David Scott (Ga.), Julia Carson (Ind.), and now former Rep. Harold Ford Jr. (Tenn.). They all got Bs.

Democrats may appear unified in grade, but Kilpatrick says the CBC must still push an agenda that is meaningful to Black people.

"You heard the speaker stand here and say how great we are — and we are," she told the audience at the swearing in. "She must deliver because Black people delivered that we might have this Democratic majority."

But, another bottom line will be the will of the people, she said. "Our theme is 'Change the Course.' Rise up and say something. Do something different. Build the kingdom now. Confront the crises — HIV, Katrina, the war in Iraq, healthcare, education. You can change all that."

Lawsuit

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been paying in legal bills and fines back into making our highways better and safer," Riley said last Thursday.

When Riley entered office in 2003, the state was paying \$63,000 per week in court fines.

In his first State of the State speech, Riley said ending the long-running case was a top priority.

Working with Attorney General Troy King and the state personnel department, state Transportation Director Joe McInnes hired a team of lawyers to work on each aspect of the case. They quickly whittled down unresolved issues, got the fines stopped, and rebuilt the staff with new hiring and promotions procedures.

The transportation department, which was reduced to 3,500 employees in 1997 when the hiring freeze was in effect, now has 4,500.

The attorney general said there are two lessons to be learned from the case: The state should have moved quickly to institute race-neutral testing for jobs and promotions and "federal judges don't make good department heads."

Ellison said. "We're trying to help bring about understanding. We don't want issues of misunderstanding and division to exist if they don't have to."

Goode's office did not immediately return phone and e-mail messages for comment.

Ellison's mother, Clida Ellison, said in an interview that she thought any controversy over her son's choice was good, "because many people in America are going to learn what the diversity of America is all about."

She described herself as a practicing Catholic.

"I go to Mass every day," she said.

Jefferson

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facing are just a little bit more on my mind right now."

Some critics have argued that only a Bible should be used for the swearing-in. Last month, Virginia Rep. Virgil Goode (R-Va.) warned that unless immigration is tightened, "many more Muslims" will be elected and follow Ellison's lead.

Ellison approached Goode on the House floor Thursday, introducing himself, offering to meet for coffee. According to Ellison, Goode said he'd be interested in doing that. The subject of Goode's comments didn't come up, Ellison said.

"Look, we're trying to build bridges,"