

President makes big promise as another million rolls in Organizer: Blacks should lead MLK memorial

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice
WASHINGTON (NNPA) - The top official of the project to construct a \$100 million memorial to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on the National Mall has promised significant Black inclusion in the project, despite controversy over a major contract that's already gone to a Chinese man.

"We want to make sure that African-Americans get the bulk of the work on this memorial," said Harry E. Johnson Sr., president and CEO of the Martin Luther King Jr. National Memorial Project Foundation, Inc.

"We're going to make sure that when we select the team to construct this memorial and win a \$50 million or more contract, that they have the right look of this community and this country when they build the memorial."

Johnson made the prom-



Sentinel-Voice photo by Gediyon Kifle Rica
Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial President and CEO, Harry Johnson, Art Ryan, Chairman/CEO of Prudential Financial, Inc, and Rep. Donald Payne, D-N.Y.

ise in response to NNPA questions that followed an announcement of another million dollar donation to the project, now at \$79 million.

Art Ryan, chairman and

CEO of Prudential Financial, Inc., a multi-billion dollar insurance company that gave a million dollars to the project last week, says he trusts the project leaders to make fair

decisions in contracting and hiring.

Pointing to Johnson as being among the chief decision makers, Ryan said, "We are here, obviously to support

Dr. King. And we have a lot of faith and trust in the foundation and the decisions that they'll make. There are times when you want to make sure that you're working with the right people. I'm very confident that I'm working with the right people, and I will support their decisions."

Rev. Jesse Jackson publicly lamented that a Chinese artist, Master Lei Yixin, had received the contracts for two sculptures — the "Mountain of Despair," which will be two pillars at the entry of the site, and the "Stone of Hope," which will hold the image of Dr. King.

"If they think that the Chinese guy is the best, it at least should be a joint venture," Jackson says in an NNPA interview. "Part of Dr. King's dream was uplifting African-American people and lifting the world up at the same time. Whoever does this gets a great boost to their reputation. Even with a joint venture, that is a great boost to their career."

Johnson says that a majority Black Design Committee makes decisions on who will ultimately construct the memorial.

"The design committee is actually made up of 90 percent African-American," he said. "As a matter of fact, it was an African-American artist that led us to the Chinese sculptor and said, 'That is the man that can best do

it.'" But, Johnson says Yixin won't be doing it alone.

"The Chinese sculptor would actually be in collaboration with two African-American sculptors; so he will not be out there by himself doing that."

The monument will be built on a four-acre site near the Lincoln Memorial, where King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech during the March on Washington on August 28, 1963.

According to the Memorial staff, the majority of the contracts and subcontracts, including construction for the crescent-shaped walls with quotes from Dr. King and the rest of the four-acre site, have not been decided.

U.S. Rep. Donald Payne of New Jersey, where Prudential is headquartered, recalled during the conference that Prudential invited King to Newark to speak in 1965.

In prepared remarks, Ryan says he has not forgotten the principles for which he says his company stands.

"We still have a ways to go to fully eradicate prejudice, discrimination and injustice in our society and the world," Ryan said. "But with the lasting influence of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., we are keeping our eyes on the prize and we will achieve Dr. King's dream, which is, in reality, the dream of every American."

Producer backs Imus, jabs Sharpton

NEW YORK (AP) - Don Imus' former producer on Friday called Rev. Al Sharpton a "race-baiter" who was looking for attention when he led a campaign to fire the radio host, while Sharpton said Imus and his producer got what they deserved for making a racist, sexist remark on the air.

Bernard McGuirk and Sharpton appeared together for a combative debate on FOX News Channel's "Hannity & Colmes" show. The producer was fired last month for his part in an exchange on the "Imus in the Morning" program in which the members of the Rutgers University women's basketball team were called "nappy headed ho's."

MSNBC took Imus' show off the air on April 11 and CBS fired him from his syndicated radio program a day later for the slur. McGuirk, a 20-year producer and on-air jester for the show that originated on WFAN-AM in New York, called the team "hardcore ho's" in the April 4 exchange with Imus. Sharpton held protests and lobbied both networks to fire Imus.

McGuirk called Sharpton a "crude ... opportunist, a race-baiter" who campaigned against Imus to help his own career and raise his profile.

While McGuirk acknowl-

edged that "these words did hurt these girls," he added, "until you, Reverend Al, got involved, they probably never would have heard of it. They would have probably never, quote unquote, got scarred for life until you got involved for your own self-serving interests."

Sharpton said he wasn't looking for more attention — "if you have any recollection at all, I had been in the papers all year," he said.

He said Imus and McGuirk may have apologized for the remark, but "forgiveness is not the point. The question is the penalty."

"Consumers have the right to say to advertisers, are your standards going to be where people are attacked based on your gender and race?" Sharpton said.

McGuirk countered that Sharpton "terrorized these spineless, thumb-sucking executives" into taking Imus off the air.

In an earlier appearance on "Hannity & Colmes," he said the executives "were in a fetal position under their desks sucking their thumbs on their BlackBerrys, trying to coordinate their response."

Sharpton responded: "What he is saying is we want to apologize and we want to decide what the penalty is."

He said that most people

wanted Imus fired, including a minister who arranged Imus' meeting with the Rutgers team, and many NBC employees.

"Is Al Roker one of these guys hiding under the desk with a BlackBerry?" Sharpton asked.

McGuirk said that Imus "made one small mistake. He ran a red light" and shouldn't have been fired.

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