

Black military recruits drop

By Nisa Islam Muhammad
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — On the streets of the nation's capital, ask any young Black man about joining the military to "be all that he can be" and the answers seem to be the same, "Hell no, we won't go."

"Go where?" said James McAllister. "You must be kidding. The military and go to Iraq? — I'd rather take my chances in D.C. You couldn't pay me to go over there."

That sentiment seems to be reflected in growing numbers of Blacks who used to make up significant numbers of military recruits.

The statistics shows the decline in Blacks covers all four military services for active duty recruits.

The drop is even more dramatic when National Guard and Reserve recruiting is included.

The findings reflect the growing unpopularity of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, particularly among family members and other adults who exert influence over high school and college students considering the military to further their education or build a career.

"The number of Blacks joining the military has

plunged by more than one-third since the Afghanistan and Iraq wars began," wrote Lolita C. Baldor for AP last month. But, she added, "The decline in Black recruits overall has been offset partly by an increase in Hispanic recruits and those who classify themselves as other races or nationalities."

Melissa Harris, a mother of three sons, said to *The Final Call*, "I told both of my sons that the army was not for them. The war is the real weapon of mass destruction. Look how many people have died on both sides because of a lie. Now, the Iraqi people are wishing they had Saddam Hussein back because life was better. It's just a mess and I don't want my sons dying for nothing."

The news of the Black recruit decline seems to come as no surprise to the Pentagon. At the Defense Department, efforts are underway to increase the size of the Army and Marine Corps so the country can better wage what the military believes will be a long battle against terrorism.

Many observers are asking if the effort to increase the size of the military will include reinstating the draft.

"The global war on terror

has taken its toll, no question," said Curt Gilroy, the Pentagon's director of accession policy.

Marine Commandant Gen. James T. Conway agreed that the bloodshed in Iraq — where more than 3,540 U.S. troops have died — is the biggest deterrent for prospective recruits.

"The daily death toll that comes out is, I think, causing people who are the influencers of young men and women in America to take a second look," he said. "So I think that's probably the single most dominant feature."

What has contributed to the public awareness and unpopularity of the war has been the constant voice of warning and guidance given by Min. Louis Farrakhan immediately following the attacks of September 11, 2001.

He has crisscrossed America, speaking to tens of thousands at a time giving them the same message about the foundation of lies and deceit that President Bush created to bomb Afghanistan and invade Iraq.

"There are 30 wars and armed conflicts going on in the world today, with more money being spent through-

out the world on war than on education, with the United States leading the way: The U.S. spends more than \$400 billion per year on military expenditures, but only \$60 billion per year in this country on education," Farrakhan said at the Saviours' Day convention in Detroit earlier this year.

That message seems to be reaching the Black community.

Data reported by AP showed that there were nearly 51,500 new Black recruits for active duty and reserves in 2001, and that number fell to less than 32,000 in 2006, a 38 percent decline.

"The decline is particularly stark for the Army. Blacks represented about 23 percent of the active Army's enlisted recruits in 2000, but 12.4 percent in 2006," said Sgt. Terry Wright, an Army recruiter in Tampa, Fla.

He explained that young people in the Black community have more education and job opportunities now than when he joined the service 14 years ago.

While Black military re-
(See Recruits, Page 4)

Study shows racial disparities in prison

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Blacks in the United States are imprisoned at more than five times the rate of Whites, and Hispanics are locked up at nearly double the White rate, according to a study recently released by a criminal justice policy group.

The report by the Sentencing Project, a Washington-based think tank, found that states in the Midwest and Northeast have the greatest Black-to-White disparity in incarceration. Iowa had the widest disparity in the nation, imprisoning Blacks at more than 13 times the rate of Whites.

Such figures "reflect a failure of social and economic interventions to address crime effectively," as well as racial bias in the justice system, said Marc Mauer, the group's executive director.

Vermont, New Jersey, Connecticut and Wisconsin incarcerated Blacks at more than 10 times the rate of Whites, the group said, citing Justice Department statistics from 2005. Vermont had a ratio of 12.5, followed by New Jersey with 12.4 and Connecticut with 12.

States with the lowest Black-to-White ratio were Hawaii, with 1.9, Georgia with 3.3 and Mississippi with 3.5.

In Iowa, Blacks are imprisoned at a rate more than double the national average. For every 100,000 people in its population, Iowa incarcerates 309 Whites and 4,200 Blacks, the study said.

Paul Stageberg, administrator of the Iowa Division of Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning, said the results are not surprising, but the causes are subject to interpretation. He said the state's disproportionately high Black arrest rates are likely linked to high poverty rates among Blacks and lower educational achievement.

In 2001, a governor's task force released a report that said 24 percent of Iowa prison beds were occupied by Black inmates even though Blacks comprised just over 2 percent of the state's population.

Sharpton wants to target rap's business enablers

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Rev. Al Sharpton, who has challenged the entertainment industry on denigrating lyrics, recently supported a state senator's idea to pull public investments from companies that won't clean up their act.

Holding the entertainment industry accountable will be a primary goal of the newest chapter of Sharpton's National Action Network, said the activist minister, who announced the formation of the Buffalo-Niagara branch while in town to address a convention of Black criminal justice professionals.

Roughly \$3 billion from New York's state pension fund is invested in the entertainment industry, according to state Sen. Antoine Thompson, who requested an inventory of entertainment industry investments from the state comptroller earlier this year.

Thompson suggested leveraging the investments to open dialogue with industry executives.

"We just want to have more responsible entertainment where we're not using language that's offensive to anybody," the Buffalo Democrat said.

"The idea of divesting New York State taxpayers' money from record companies that have a double standard when it comes to language is something that will be a priority," said Sharpton, who led the drive to have Don Imus fired from his syndicated radio show

for calling the Rutgers University women's basketball team "nappy-headed hos."

In April, hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons said the recording and broadcast industries should consistently ban three racial and sexist epithets from all so-called clean versions of rap songs and the airwaves. Expressing concern about the "growing public outrage" over the use of such words in rap lyrics, Simmons said the words "bitch," "ho" and "nigger" should be considered "extreme curse words."

Sharpton said the Buffalo chapter of NAN also would consider town hall forums and other venues to steer young Blacks toward positive goals, especially now that the city has prominent African-Americans elected officials with its first Black mayor, a Black schools superintendent and Black police commissioner.

"I remember many years ago when I would come to Buffalo, we dreamed of days of Black empowerment," Sharpton said. "Now we have to make sure the conduct of our Black citizens complements that achievement. We cannot undermine them with the conduct of killing each other, selling drugs to each other and really celebrating a culture of depravity and decadence."

The Buffalo-Niagara Falls chapter is the 36th branch of NAN, which Sharpton founded to protect civil rights for minorities.



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