

Former college president on trial

HOUSTON (AP) - Jury selection began Monday in the trial of Texas Southern University's former president, accused of mispending more than half a million dollars of school money to lavishly furnish and decorate her homes.

A pool of 120 people began filling out questionnaires in the case of Priscilla Slade. The questioning of potential jurors wasn't expected to begin until Tuesday, said prosecutor Donna Goode. The selection process could take several days.

Testimony could last a month or longer. Among the witnesses is U.S. Housing Secretary Alphonso Jackson, who was on the TSU Board of Regents when Slade was hired as president in 1999.

Slade is facing a sentence of up to life in prison if she's



• Priscilla Slade

convicted. Slade, who is fond of clothing and shoes from Gucci, Dolce & Gabbana and St. John and is usually dressed in bright colors, looked more subdued Monday, wearing a black suit and with her hair pulled back in a ponytail.

Slade, 55, was indicted last year on two counts of misapplication of fiduciary

property with a value over \$200,000. Prosecutors say they plan to try her for only one of the counts.

Prosecutors say that during seven years as president, Slade mispent TSU funds to decorate, remodel and repair the homes she had during her tenure at the university.

"She didn't intend to do anything wrong," said Mike DeGeurin, Slade's attorney. "Any kind of technical rules that were broken, maybe procurement rules or anything that was not done properly, was not done by her anyway. It was done by people below her, possibly by either incompetence or historically doing it that way or whatever reason. It shouldn't be a criminal case."

The spending scandal cost Slade her job in April 2006 at the state's largest histori-

cally Black university. She was credited with getting TSU's finances in order, doubling enrollment, constructing new academic buildings and overhauling the financial aid system.

Besides Slade, three other TSU workers were also indicted. TSU's former chief financial officer, Quintin Wiggins, was sentenced to 10 years in prison in May.

The allegations coincided with reports that revealed a pattern of financial mismanagement at TSU and prompted Gov. Rick Perry to call for a state takeover of the university that was later put on hold. The entire nine-member board of regents resigned at Perry's request.

Goode has said Slade first spent money on her home in the Houston suburb of Mis-

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Romney: Education a 'civil rights issue'

LONDONDERRY, N.H. (AP) - Republican presidential hopeful Mitt Romney has called the failure of inner city schools "the great civil rights issue of our time."

Taking questions at a music hall recently, Romney was asked whether he would be capable of improving race relations as president. He said his personal "colorblindness" would be his most important asset.

"I have a real hard time thinking of people other than as people," he told about 200 people. "I certainly consider myself colorblind. I don't distinguish people based on their race or their ethnicity or their faith."

Romney said he would make sure that those with whom he would surround himself in Washington would reflect the nation's diversity. He said he envisioned calling together a group similar to the "kitchen cabinet" of Black citizens he met with regularly as governor of Massachusetts.

"I would anticipate again having a group of folks who represent a diversity of experience and being able to draw on their lives," he said.

Romney said one of his biggest concerns about race relations involves education.

"I'm really concerned that schools in inner cities are failing our inner city kids — largely minorities — and those kids won't have the kinds of skills to be able to be successful and competitive in the new market economy," he said. "The failure of inner-city schools, in my view, is the great civil rights issue of our time."

Romney said he would work hard to improve schools but did not elaborate. When a woman asked him about how he would support arts and music programs that often are the first to be cut from tight school budgets, he said he was wary of too much federal involvement in education.

Recalling fondly his own high school glee club days, Romney said arts and music education spurs creativity that carries over into adulthood. But he said the federal government shouldn't mandate such programs.

"While it would be tempting to say all schools should have the following programs, that worries me that someday there'd be somebody up there with very different views telling schools what they should and shouldn't do," he said. "I'd like to have local school boards recognize that they need to be concentrating of course on English, math and science, but also some of the cultural elements that make us a society of creative individuals."

Resegregation

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insult to the Rutgers University women's basketball team dominated the airwaves and the streets.

—Meanwhile, a list of racially charged criminal justice cases began heavily circulating.

They include:

—The Nov. 25 wedding day killing of unarmed Black man Sean Bell by New York police officers, which sparked protests into the new year.

—The case of Genarlow Wilson, 21, who is serving 10 years in a Georgia prison as he awaits the state Supreme Court's decision on his conviction of consensual oral sex with a 15-year-old White girl that happened when he was 17.

—The U.S. Supreme Court's ruling against race-conscious public school assignments in Louisville, Ky., and Seattle, Wash., which sent a chilling affect over other such plans across the nation.

—And the Jena Six case, now at full throttle in Louisiana, where 16-year-old Mychal Bell and five other Black high school students could face up to a combined 100 years in prison after a school brawl that started with them being insulted by nooses hung in a so-called "White Tree."

Coinciding with consistent news reports on such cases, Potok says the heated immigration debate that railed in the U.S. Senate well into the spring apparently exacerbated negative reac-

tion to the racial climate. He says the perception of the rising number of Black and Brown people in America is directly connected to the rise in hate groups.

According to the *Intelligence Report*, 602 such groups, including the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Nations, were documented throughout the U.S. in 2000. That number has now risen by 40 percent to 844 in six years, he says, calling it "quite a significant rise and a real one."

Potok describes, "The reaction of very many people is that, 'My country is changing all around me. This is not the country that my forefathers built. It must be because those brown-skinned people are coming in and destroying it.'"

Actual hate crimes and attacks soon follow, he says: "When hate crime gets the worst, it's when the neighborhood starts to approach sort of a tipping point, like 49 percent. But, once you get a significant number of whatever it is, Black people in a White neighborhood, brown people or whatever it is at the 30 or 40 percent mark, then some people start to feel 'My town's been stolen from me by these interlopers.'"

Some places, such as Jena, where Mychal Bell was convicted by an all White jury in a case with a White judge and a White prosecutor, just appear to be a fluke, Potok says. "The civil rights movement just never made it there."

But, as the cases and the

atmosphere of racism mount, activists say Black people can fight back non-violently — and win.

Activist, Rev. Al Sharpton, who has organized community marches in response to all of the most high-profile criminal justice cases, says community mobilization is still among the most effective responses to racism and injustice.

Sharpton says that those who criticize marching and having rallies in response to injustices are shirking what has proven to work.

"The Civil Rights Movement worked. They changed the laws that we are fighting to keep. ...How did they fight them? They fought one battle at a time. They fought Birmingham and then Selma. And those battles have broad ramifications. ...So, as we fight these battles, we must fight single battles that have broad ramifications. For example, we fought one battle of Imus and the whole industry now, including the record industry, is changing the word and all," he said.

Rev. Jesse Jackson agrees. "The laws changed, but the culture keeps kicking back," Jackson said.

"We will keep struggling, that's what we are going to do."

Jackson says the period resurgence of overt racism in America is associated with the fact that an "undercurrent of fear" does not realize the benefits of diversity.

"When the color line is dropped, you have more talent developed. ...I think that

we are making progress, but we are swimming uphill," Jackson said.

"There is a layer of change that's significant, and there's an undercurrent of resistance that's surreal. The undercurrent will take you down."

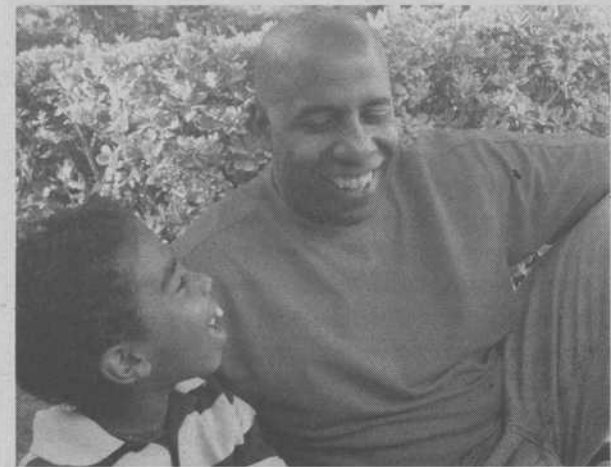
While Jackson and Sharpton often focus on community marches, Dr. Julia Hare, national executive director of the San Francisco-based Black Think Tank, says mobilized Blacks could take other direct action.

"To maintain any kind of supremacy, you've got to maintain some kind of inferiority," says Hare, a psychologist. "The people who put you under this oppression, why should they free you?"

Hare says Black people must free themselves by taking direct action beyond marching, such as collectively boycotting and removing their money from banks that redline in Black communities and by refusing to deal with stores and businesses that disrespect or fail to hire significant numbers of Black people.

She says Black churches, under the inspiration of conscious Black preachers, could play a major role in organizing such targeted protests.

Hare says the same strategies could be used to mobilize Black people to "take over school boards" and establish disciplinary and academic policies that could spark progress for Black children.



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