

Haitians: Insurer discriminated

MIAMI (AP) - Three people have sued Liberty National Life Insurance Co. claiming their insurance was canceled or undervalued because of discrimination against Haitian-Americans.

The plaintiffs say Liberty National asked leading questions about their foreign travel plans and that underwriters listened for a "Haitian" accent, according to the lawsuit filed Jan. 14 in Miami federal court.

Since 2004, Liberty National has denied policies "based solely on the applicant's race and Haitian ancestry, ethnicity and national origin," or replaced them with policies normally only sold to the terminally ill,

the lawsuit claims.

Spokeswoman Joyce Lane of Torchmark Corp., the parent company of Alabama-based Liberty National, recently said she would not comment on an active lawsuit.

In 2006, Liberty National reached a \$6 million settlement in a nationwide class-action lawsuit that accused it of selling policies to Blacks for higher premiums and lower benefits than to other customers.

The new class-action lawsuit was filed by three Haitian-Americans who live in Florida. It seeks at least \$75,000 in compensatory damages.

Two of the plaintiffs claim

they qualified for standard life insurance, but were later issued different policies with higher premiums and lower benefits.

The third plaintiff said a life insurance policy he had for two years was canceled after an underwriter subtly asked him in a friendly phone call if he planned to visit Haiti ever. He replied he would like to do so in the future, and the underwriter told him his policy was immediately canceled, according to the lawsuit.

More than a third of the country's Haitian population lives in Florida, according to the U.S. Census.

Life insurance companies cannot terminate a policy be-

cause of foreign travel, but can refuse to issue one in the first place, said James Hunt, a life insurance actuary with the Consumer Federation of America. Companies also have a limited amount of time to contest a policy and rescind it if information on the application was misrepresented, he said.

"If you're going to Iraq, nobody wants to write you a life insurance policy," Hunt said. "Most of us know Haiti can be a dangerous place."

The U.S. State Department has issued a travel warning for Haiti, due to ongoing security concerns in the impoverished Caribbean country, including the risk of kidnappings.



Rosa Parks in heroic civic rights act of protest in 1955.

Rosa Parks is inducted to hall

MARION, Ala. (AP) - Rosa Parks, who helped launch the Civil Rights Movement by refusing to give up her seat to a White man on a bus in Alabama's capital, will be inducted this year into the state Women's Hall of Fame.

This is the first year that Parks, who died in October 2005 in Detroit at age 92, is eligible; women must be dead for at least two years before being considered.

She will be this year's sole inductee.

"Rosa Parks was a woman of silent dignity and grace whose life changed the state, the nation and the world," said Valerie Pope Burnes, director of the Hall of Fame.

Parks, who worked as a seamstress, was arrested

Dec. 1, 1955, for refusing to give up her seat on a Montgomery city bus. Her arrest prompted Blacks to boycott the city's bus system and led to a Supreme Court decision ending segregation in public transportation.

The Montgomery bus boycott was led by Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., then a relatively unknown young minister. The boycott catapulted him to a leadership role in the Civil Rights Movement.

Parks received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996 and the Congressional Gold Medal in 1999.

The Alabama Women's Hall of Fame, founded in 1970, is at Judson College in Marion.

Kennedy

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Johnetta Sheaber, owner of Secrets Boutique in Washington, D.C., said after the rally that she was convinced the country is ready for its first African American president.

"We will change the course of history," Obama

told the crowd. At the end of the speeches, Stevie Wonder's "Signed, Sealed, Delivered," revved up on the loud speakers.

Sheaber's friend, Patricia Black Chihe, summed up the rally as "awesome!"

Joseph Young writes for the Washington Informer.

Consumers

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ments. A former editor with the *New York Amsterdam News*, Smikle articulated the tribulations of the Black Press: "Give yourself some power by giving your readers their power," he said. Smikle says the report, which gives both local and national configurations of Black buying power, is also a powerful tool for advertising sales for the Black Press, which is often a target of discrimination by local merchants and major corporations.

"It really would be nice if Black newspaper sales folks were the ones to come in to say, 'I've got something new for you that nobody else has,'" Smikle told the group.

Using the Barack Obama presidential campaign as an example of the energy that could come about with new information, he said, "It's time for us to energize our base. ... We must engage this country in a conversation."

Canada quits UN anti-racism meeting

OTTAWA (AP) - Canada has withdrawn its support for a United Nations anti-racism conference scheduled to take place in South Africa next year after deeming it to be anti-Israel, a government official said.

The so-called Durban II conference "has gone completely off the rails" and Canada wants no part of it, said Jason Kenney, Canada's

secretary of state for multiculturalism and Canadian identity.

"We'll attend any conference that is opposed to racism and intolerance, not those that actually promote racism and intolerance," he said.

Kenney said that during the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban, Arab and Muslim countries

criticized Israel, prompting Israel and the United States to walk out in protest. But he added that Canada remained to speak up for Israel.

The UN declined to comment directly on Canada pulling out of the conference, but UN spokeswoman Marie Okabe said, "Racism is too important an issue for member states not to work out their differences."

Kenney said his government was left with no choice but to abandon the process, expressing displeasure with Libya elected to chair the gathering, Cuba appointed vice-chair, and Iran named to the organizing committee.

"[Iran] is a country whose government has publicly expressed its desire to eliminate the only Jewish country in the world," Kenney said.

Obama

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major new endorsements this week as U.S. Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass., and Caroline Kennedy, the brother and daughter of the late President John F. Kennedy, announced their endorsements of him. Sen. Kennedy's son, Rep. Patrick Kennedy, D-R.I., also endorsed Obama this week.

Pundits have called Obama the first African-American candidate perceived as having a serious chance of being elected president.

However, in 1988, Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr. and his "Rainbow Coalition" also stirred excitement and raised levels of hope as he won South Carolina and another five Southern states on Super Tuesday that year, including Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and Virginia.

But, Obama's campaign is significantly different, largely because of his win in Iowa with a population of only 2 percent African-American and more than 90 percent White.

Obama rejects speculation that Independents and even some conservative Republi-

cans could be setting him up to vote against him in the final election in November.

Right-wing conservative commentator Pat Buchanan said in a recent televised interview that he would rather see Obama win because he would be easiest of the Democratic candidates to defeat by the Republican Party.

"That's a silly argument," Obama scoffed in an interview with the NNPA News Service. He says his constituency has been misjudged.

"These aren't people who are... part of some grand conspiracy. These are people who believe that I can bring the country together to get some things done. And that's why the polls show me beating every other Republican who might be nominated."

A Zogby International Poll, published in December, shows Obama beating Mitt Romney of Massachusetts by 18 percent; Sen. John McCain by 4 percent; Arkansas' Mike Huckabee by 5 percent; and Rudy Giuliani by 9 percent.

Clinton also leads the Republicans, but behind Obama and by slightly smaller mar-

gins.

If the chatter that started at the Atlanta Airport is any indication, he will continue to have broad-based support regardless of who ultimately wins the nomination and becomes the party nominee at the Democratic National Convention in Denver, August 25-28.

Discussions continued even among strangers on the plane, headed for the Reagan National Airport in Washington, D.C.

A White man and woman, initially strangers, held an intense conversation:

"My daughter, who is 15, is very excited about him [Obama]," the man said. However, he noted that he wouldn't mind if Clinton wins, especially since he liked her husband's presidency, albeit controversial.

"I think he was a hell of a president. I don't care what he did."

The woman, apparently less enthusiastic about either Clinton, was conciliatory: "If she gets the nomination, I'll back her. But I'm hoping [Obama] will pull it off. But, there's an awful lot of racism yet."



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