

Woman cites bias pageant's lawsuit

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A Hispanic woman who won the Miss California USA contest only to have her crown yanked days later sued the pageant for half a million dollars, alleging rigging and racial bias. The pageant director rejected the claims, saying winners during his tenure have been some of the pageant's most racially diverse ever. Christina Silva, 24, was crowned Miss California USA on Nov. 25. Three days later, the pageant's executive director, Keith Lewis, told her "there has been a mistake and you are not the winner," according to the lawsuit filed in Superior Court.

Raquel Beezley, 21, was subsequently crowned. Silva is of Ecuadorean and Mexican descent. The lawsuit claims Lewis was "uncomfortable with the fact that Miss Silva spoke Spanish with certain vendors; he felt that it may detract from the caliber of the pageant and some of the 'all American girls' may not opt to compete in the following year."

Silva alleges that Lewis, the pageant, its producer K2 Productions and the Miss Universe Organization engaged in fraud, negligence, breach of contract and intentional infliction of emotional distress, among other charges.

Lewis told The Associated Press the allegations of racial bias were unfounded. "I've had three winners since I've been a director," Lewis said. "Two have been African-American, two of four in the history of the state pageant. And the current Miss California USA is 25 percent Filipino," Lewis said, referring to Beezley. "I think my record speaks for itself."

Miss Universe spokeswoman Lark-Marie Anton declined comment. The lawsuit seeks \$500,000 in damages for public humiliation and lost prizes.

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Liberals, in turn, had to accept some restrictions on family planning groups participating in AIDS programs. Conservatives, concerned that money might be diverted to abortion promotion, pushed for a provision that allows the use of funds for HIV/AIDS testing and counseling services in those family planning programs supported by the U.S. government.

A measure in the 2003 act requiring groups receiving funds to have a policy explicitly opposing prostitution and sex trafficking, opposed by some health groups as impeding efforts among sex workers, was also left intact.

CTA

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immediate past chairman of the CTA's board of directors. "The expanded facilities at the CTA will help MGM Mirage and the hospitality industry by developing and training future culinary employees."

"This is irrational generosity."

—Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-Calif.

The White House, which originally promoted doubling the program to \$30 billion, has expressed concern over the \$50 billion figure but not opposed it.

Some conservatives still objected. "This is irrational generosity," said Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-Calif., saying the country doesn't have enough money to help veterans and the elderly. "This is benevolence gone wild."

The bill authorizes \$10 billion a year, or \$50 billion through 2013. Of that, \$41 billion is for AIDS prevention and treatment, \$4 billion

for tuberculosis and \$5 billion for malaria. The actual dollars still have to be approved in annual spending bills, but over the last five years Congress exceeded the \$15 billion goal, appropriating \$19 billion for global AIDS and related programs.

The \$41 billion includes up to \$2 billion a year for the international Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The bill limits U.S. contributions to the Global Fund to one-third of total contributions.

It expands the program, originally focused on 15

mainly sub-Saharan African countries, to include Caribbean nations as well as Malawi, Swaziland and Lesotho in Africa. The goal of the next five years is to prevent 12 million new infections, provide anti-retroviral treatment for 3 million, and train more than 140,000 healthcare workers. The bill increases coordination with drinking water and nutrition programs and efforts to educate girls and women.

"This will be remembered as the single most significant achievement of President Bush's two terms in office," said Rep. Donald Payne, D-N.J., chairman of the Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Africa.

During the ceremony, MGM Mirage announced a \$500,000 gift—spread over five years—to the center, which will be named after the company. The facility will use experienced-based instruction to train clients. According to the Nevada De-

partment of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation, an estimated 57,700 will be created in the next two years.

That number is expected to grow to 100,000 by 2013, as projects like MGM Mirage's City Center, Boyd Gaming's Echelon Place and \$2.8 billion Fountainsbleu open up.

"The Culinary Training Academy will play a major role in preparing employees by providing a practical training environment," CTA president and chief executive officer Steven Horsford says.

The MGM Mirage Events

Center will also provide business and community organizations with catering services for private, corporate and civic functions. Culinary operations are overseen by chef and chief culinary officer Sterling Burpee, who was voted one of Ebony magazine's top 15 African-American chefs of 2007.

The CTA is the largest provider of employment and vocational training for entry-level and veteran hospitality industry workers. The academy annually trains 3,000 clients, placing 86 percent of them in jobs.

Miss USA

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Smith, a former Miss Tennessee USA, said she was headed to Hollywood.

Stewart was headed for the publicity circuit. She said she was eager to travel and spread her message of self-improvement to young women. She noted she was one of only a handful of Black woman crowned Miss USA in the pageant's 57-year history.

"I think the United States is coming together," she said, citing the historic presidential candidacies of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. She declined to name her preference.

"I don't know, we'll see. Fundamentally, I'm a Democrat," she said.

Contestants from all 50 states and the District of Columbia have been in Las Vegas for nearly three weeks, rehearsing and hyping the 57th annual pageant. After stints in Baltimore and Los Angeles, organizers billed the new venue as a city beloved by the event's international audience.

The pageant tried to showed off its edge, featuring a grinding live rock performance by the band Finger Eleven, music from Rihanna, and contestants in barely there Black bikinis and faux-fur coats.

Donny and Marie kept up a steady stream of sibling banter even while swiftly whittling the field.

Donny Osmond told the losers to "put on a poker face" as he sent them home.

"Or use Botox; then it won't move," Marie quipped.

Stewart will compete in the Miss Universe pageant in Vietnam in July. She also becomes a spokeswoman for breast and ovarian cancer awareness and other causes, while traveling to promote the organization.

Miss USA contestants are scored in three categories: swimsuit, evening gown and interview. Miss Alaska USA, Courtney Erin Carroll, was chosen "Miss Photogenic USA" based on voting at the organization's website. The other contestants named Miss Ohio USA, Monica Day, "Miss Congeniality." Unlike the rival Miss America, Miss USA contestants are not asked to perform a talent.

Smith's year on the throne has been marked by fewer racy headlines than her 2006 predecessor, Tara Conner. Conner's underage drinking landed her in rehab and sparked a media circus documenting her fall from grace.

Smith's low point was a fall onstage during the evening gown competition of the Miss Universe pageant in Mexico City. She was booed by the crowd and Miss Japan won the title.

A bigger blunder this year belonged to Miss California USA organizers. The judges



Miss Alaska, Courtney Erin Carroll, reacts as she is awarded the Miss Photogenic USA title during the 2008 Miss USA Pageant at The Planet Hollywood Resort and Casino. Miss Ohio Monica Day was voted Miss Congeniality USA.

crowned the wrong queen in their November contest and reversed it days later, saying Raquel Beezley, of Barstow, was the victim of a vote tabulation error.

Dethroned Miss Los Angeles, Christina Silva, a Hispanic woman, has filed a lawsuit alleging racial bias.

Asked to comment on the lawsuit, Stewart was whisked away by organizers. The

Miss Universe Organization would not comment on the matter.

The panel of judges for the pageant included Heather Mills, model and former wife of Paul McCartney; comedian Rob Schneider; Olympic gold-medal swimmer Amanda Beard; and Christian Siriano, winner of Bravo's fashion reality series, "Project Runway."

Comment

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attended by Republican Senators Mitch McConnell and Jim Bunning.

Davis also called Obama a "snake oil salesman" whom he considers "unqualified to be president" and then touched on the "bitter" comment that has haunted Obama over the last few days.

"If you go to the most expensive private school in Hawaii and then you go to Columbia University and Harvard Law School, you probably don't understand normal Americans and I don't think he does," Davis said.

His remarks were recorded at the GOP dinner that he also recently participated in a "highly classified, national security simulation" with Obama.

"I'm going to tell you something: That boy's finger does not need to be on the button," Davis said. "He could not make a decision in that simulation that related to a nuclear threat to this country."

Monday, Obama spokesman Bill Burton told NBC News: "It's hard to tell what is more outrageous — Representative Davis' condescending and personal attack, or his absurd and offensive claim that Barack Obama is not prepared to defend America."

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