

Job bias complaints hit record

WASHINGTON (AP) — A record number of workers filed federal job discrimination complaints last year, with claims of unfair treatment by older employees seeing the largest increase.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission said last week it received more than 95,000 discrimination claims during the 2008 fiscal year, a 15 percent increase over the previous year.

Charges of age discrimination jumped by 28.7 percent — with 24,582 claims — while allegations based on race, sex and retaliation also surged to record highs.

“The EEOC has not seen an increase of this magnitude in charges filed for many years,” said the commission’s acting chairman, Stuart J. Ishimaru. “While we do not know if it signifies a trend, it is clear that employment discrimination remains a persistent problem.”

With the economy in recession and companies shedding millions of jobs, labor experts suggested that older workers may have suffered a disproportionate hit. Federal

laws barring age discrimination cover workers 40 and older.

“The economy is in melt-down mode and from the point of view of the company, if you lay off an older worker, the cost savings to you are much greater than if you lay off a younger worker,” said Eileen Appelbaum, visiting scholar at the Center for Economic and Policy Research.

Allegations of race discrimination remained the most frequently filed complaint, accounting for 33,937 charges, or 35.6 percent of all

filings last year. That was an 11 percent jump from 2007.

Retaliation was the second most frequent complaint, up 22.6 percent from the previous year. Sex discrimination complaints rose by 14 percent.

The agency says the overall surge could be due to a variety of factors, including economic conditions, increased diversity in the work force, greater employee awareness of the law and the EEOC’s focus on systemic litigation.

And the number of claims could rise even further, said

EEOC spokesman David Grinberg. Since the current data is through Sept. 30 of last year, the numbers may not fully reflect the impact of the recession.

Once a claim is filed, the EEOC has 180 days to investigate. If the agency finds merit, officials usually try to reach a voluntary settlement with the employer. If no settlement is reached, the EEOC or the worker may file a separate lawsuit. In fiscal 2008, the EEOC filed 290 lawsuits, resolved 339 lawsuits and resolved 81,081 private sector charges.

Clyburn accuses Warner race politics on stimulus

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — The highest-ranking Black congressman has questioned whether South Carolina’s governor was “playing the race card” when he compared using federal stimulus money to Zimbabwe and other nations that printed cash in tough economic times.

Gov. Mark Sanford wrote a letter to President Barack Obama earlier this month asking for a waiver to spend \$700 million in stimulus money to pay down some of the state’s debt — a day after comparing the package to other countries that dealt with hard times ineptly. Sanford has been an outspo-

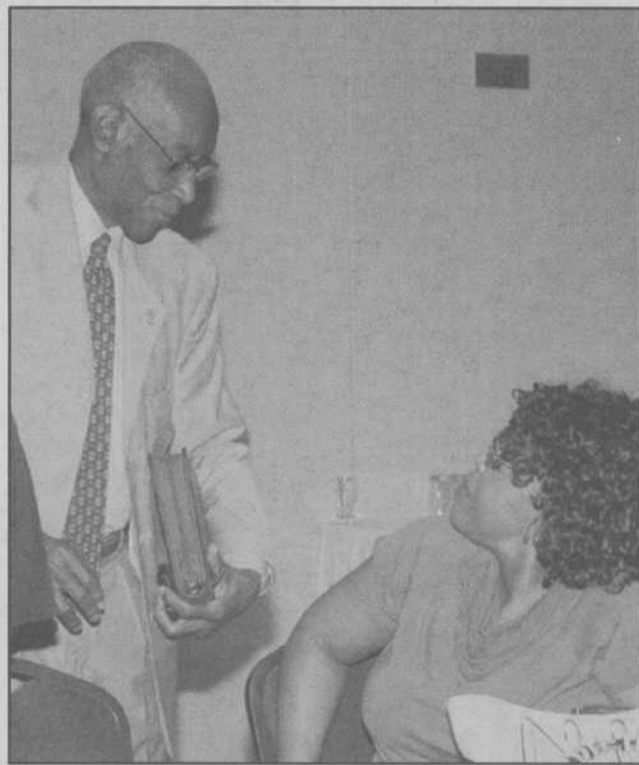
ken critic of the stimulus but hasn’t outright refused any of the money.

Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., has already lambasted Sanford and other governors who said they may not take some of the stimulus money, calling such a move a “slap in the face of African-American.” (See Race, Page 4)

Chamber

(Continued from Page 1) and chief executive officer of Global Entertainment TV Network said, said the company is starting an Internet-based television network. He’s excited about the future. “What I got [from this] was that people are myopically thinking and looking smaller than what they need to, so they need to go back and look at vision casting to look beyond the current economic forecasts by CNN and move forward.”

Businesses can also retool to take advantage of demographic changes in the marketplace, participants said. Several have added bilingual staff, increased their use of technology, collaborated with competitors, began reaching out to clients to gauge their satisfaction and



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy
Fred Willis talks to another participant at the roundtable.

collapse of the economy.”

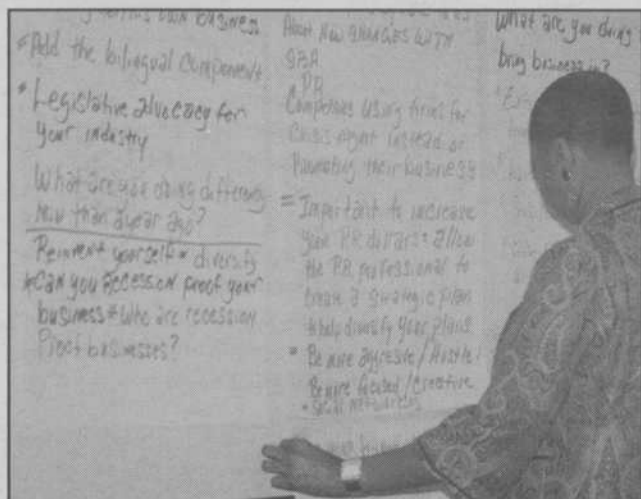
Brandon Bruce, co-partner of Business 2 Business Digital Printing, said it was good to hear how small companies, which are being forced to cut back are retooling for long-term survival. “We heard about how many of these businesses are diversifying themselves, positioning themselves, and staying positive.”

The forum also featured insight for job seekers. John Phillips, chief executive officer of Resume Live, an online interactive job board matching people with employers, said those on the job hunt need their own advocates. “Job seekers need someone fighting for them and helping them to get back to work. That’s what Resume Live does for them. We educate them, train them, and place them with potential employers.”

Established in 1980 at Nevada Black Chamber of Commerce, the group was renamed the Urban Chamber of Commerce in 1997. Its mission is to create and foster an environment that encourages the development and financial success of businesses, especially African-American businesses. The chamber has more than 350 members.

say thank you and developed outside-of-work interests and habits to keep them centered.

Donna Fisher-Brown, a public affairs representative with State Farm Insurance, said she learned that most businesses are suffering. “We are all pretty much in the same place with our businesses, with the economy impacting all of us at some level. We’re all looking for those opportunities so that we can get back to the place that we were at before the



NAACP: Banks duped Blacks

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The NAACP is accusing Wells Fargo and HSBC of forcing Blacks into subprime mortgages while Whites with identical qualifications got lower rates.

Class-action lawsuits were to be filed against the banks Friday in federal court in Los Angeles, Austin Tighe, co-lead counsel for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, told The Associated Press.

Black homebuyers have been 3-1/2 times more likely to receive a subprime loan than White borrowers, and six times more likely to get a subprime rate when refinancing, Tighe said. Blacks still were disproportionately steered into subprime loans when their credit scores, income and down payment were equal to those of White homebuyers, he said.

Melissa Murray, vice president of corporate communications for Wells Fargo & Co., called the lawsuit “totally unfounded and reckless.” The bank is receiving federal bailout funds.

“We have never tolerated, and will never tolerate, discrimination in any way, shape or form in any of our business practices, products, or services,” Murray said.

HSBC said it does not comment on litigation. “HSBC stands by its fair lending and consumer protection practices, and we are confident that we are treating our customers fairly and with integrity,” said Neil Brazil, vice president for public affairs.

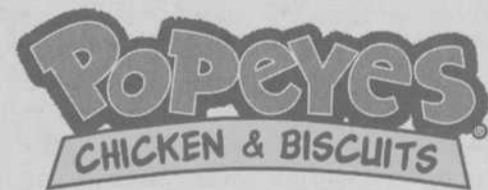
An NAACP member, Amara Weaver of Milwaukee, said she was one of the victims of predatory lending. She bought her first home in 1984, receiving a 6.25 percent fixed-rate mortgage. She says she had a steady job as a human resources director for a social services agency, never missed a mortgage payment and maintained excellent credit.

In 2004, she wanted to buy the house next door for her son to live in. She said the bank promised her a low fixed rate for a \$40,000 loan, but at the closing, when reading the fine print, she noticed that the rate was actually 11 percent. “I was blown away,” said Weaver, an NAACP member. “I didn’t have any choice (but to sign). ...It made me feel violated.”

Similar NAACP lawsuits are pending against a dozen other subprime lenders. “This is systematic, institutionalized racism,” Tighe said. “Once you take out factors relative to income and credit risk, the only difference between the borrowers is the color of their skin.”

Tighe estimated that “tens of thousands” of Blacks had been forced into bad loans, but said it was difficult to gauge the scope of the problem because banks keep much of their internal data private. The lawsuits could force banks to divulge closely guarded information, such as how banks can determine the race of a loan applicant and how federal bailout funds are being spent.

The NAACP is seeking reforms from the banks such as increased transparency in the loan process, educational outreach and internal training.



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