



Black Student Movement Elections Questioned

Defeated presidential candidate denounces alleged last-minute, underground write-in campaign

By Myron B. Pitts
Staff

Black Student Movement elections ended last week, but junior Dana Lumsden, who failed in his second straight bid for BSM president, considered an appeal of election results and denounced what he called a secret write-in campaign.

Arnie Epps, the sophomore president-elect, defeated Lumsden by 44 votes to 41 votes in a write-in election March 7. Epps also won a majority of the vote in the race for vice president but declined the position. Sophomore Stormie Forte filled the position last week.

Lumsden says the election results should be overturned because Epps was listed on the ballot for vice president and was offered two positions by the BSM Elections Board.

He accused outgoing president Sabrina Evans and others of conducting an underground write-in campaign for Epps. "They made me think I was running unopposed," Lumsden said. "They've been planning this a long time."

Evans denied any involvement in the campaign but said she was aware of its existence. "This is a campaign that started long before

I heard about it," she said. "I resent the accusation."

A BSM member who did not want to be identified said Evans called just before the election and told the member to "spread the word" about the write-in campaign for Epps. Evans said a member who wrote in Epps for president could vote him for vice president as well, the member said.

"She said she was calling as a friend and not BSM president," the member said. "She said that the plan was to write in Arnie's name. I didn't spread the word."

Evans said the anonymous member may have misconstrued what was said. Any conversations about Epps were not part of a planned campaign, she said.

Epps said he had little knowledge of the campaign on his behalf. A few people mentioned the matter to him on election day, he said.

Lumsden said Epps told him both on the day before and the day of the election that he was aware of the campaign and would not accept the presidency if it were offered him. And during spring break, Lumsden said Epps indicated in a phone conversation that he would turn down the presidency.

"I was angry," Lumsden said. "I wish he had been more up front

with me at the get-go."

Epps said he never told Lumsden he would not accept the presidency. "I told him it was something I needed to think about," he said.

BSM members acknowledged the unannounced write-in campaign for Epps, but said they were unaware of any particular people calling members about it.

Laura Anderson, BSM minister of information, said the presidential election results surprised her but she had heard of a write-in campaign for Epps.

"There is a network that started and words got passed and things happened," Anderson said. "It certainly wasn't initiated by the (BSM) Central Committee," she said.

Lumsden said he wanted to appeal the election results because the BSM Elections Board offered Epps two positions. The parliamentarian, BSM faculty advisor and another member to be named later would have sat on the appellate committee, he said.

But Harold Wallace, vice chancellor of student affairs and the BSM's advisor, said he would probably not sit on a committee. Instead, he sent Lumsden a letter explaining that the BSM Elections Board hears appeals within 48

hours of the election.

Lumsden said he did not appeal to the board because the matter in question was the board's decision to offer Epps a choice of the two offices. "You don't appeal to the body that voted against you," he said.

Lumsden's appeal would have been his second during this year's elections. Earlier, he unsuccessfully appealed the Elections Board's decision to invalidate his petition bearing the names of BSM members who support his candidacy.

The board ruled unanimously to invalidate the petition, which they said was not turned into the BSM office by the deadline of 5 p.m. Feb. 15. Only the names of candidates with valid petitions were included on the ballot.

Lumsden said he feared his petition would be stolen if left unattended in the BSM office. He left the petition in Carmichael Residence Hall, sliding it under the door of elections board co-chair Kim Williams.

Williams said the petitions issued to candidates stated clearly when and where to turn them in. Because she did not get the form until 7 p.m. that evening, the elections board had no proof of when Lumsden turned it in, she said.

An appeals committee comprised of Evans, the outgoing coparlliamentarians and Wallace upheld the board's decision.

Recent events concerning elections have left BSM members with ambivalent reactions. Evelyn Tol-

grass roots campaign for Arnie."

But Chris Brown, a member of the BSM Elections Board, said he did not know about the campaign until election day. "I had not heard of anybody else running for BSM president," he said.

Epps said he hoped the BSM would move past the issue and return to business. The organization will face new challenges in improving race relations next year, he said. "A lot of people in the BSM are going on with the business of BSM," he said.

Referring to the organization's successful boycott of the Rite-Aid drugstore on Franklin Street, Epps said the BSM had a good year. The BSM organized against the store when an employee was overheard saying African-American hair care products were moved to the front of the store because they were among high-theft items.

The Chapel Hill-Carrboro chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People joined the movement and the hair care products were placed back with other similar products several weeks ago.

"The BSM has become a credible organization," Epps said. "I don't want this election to downplay all the good things that have happened and all the good things planned for the future."

Evans said the controversy was overblown and unfair to Epps. "It is detracting away from his election," she said. "I'm just disgusted that this is even being focused on."

Wallace said elections would

Current Events

iver, former BSM special projects tri-chairperson, called the pro-Epps write-in campaign "underhanded, immature and sneaky." It seemed unlikely that Evans would be involved, she said.

"It really gives me an idea about the sad state of affairs for the Black Student Movement," Toliver said.

The presidential elections should have been halted, she added.

Williams said she found nothing unethical about the Epps presidency campaign unless the candidate or his campaign staff took part. People spoke of the possibility of Epps being president weeks prior to the election, and the campaign was not secret, she said.

"There was a buzz in the BSM community," she said. "I really don't think it was an overnight

be simple if the people involved stuck to proper procedure. "Anybody can be a write-in candidate," he said. "I'm concerned that this has become so complicated. In 18 years this is the first time I've had any involvement with the elections as a faculty advisor."

The anonymous BSM member who said Evans had called on Epps' behalf talked of being "sickened" over the whole affair. "I don't think I want to be a member of the BSM next year."

Said Dillard Massey, the BSM parliamentarian-elect: "It's a shame we would have come to this. Being a black organization, we should have more unity than we've displayed."