

NAACP AND URBAN LEAGUE A HOUSE DIVIDED IN WAR FOR EQUAL JUSTICE?

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WASHINGTON (NNPA)—On the eve of yet another national march for racial justice, the NAACP and the National Urban League appeared strangely on opposite sides of an important case of alleged racial injustice.

The case involves more than 50 current and former Black workers at Indianapolis-based Eli Lilly and Co., which employs some 13,000 people.

Dozens of Blacks from Dallas, Atlanta, Memphis and Charlotte have joined a race discrimination lawsuit against the drug maker and nearly 200 others are poised to testify in the case, appearing to lend credibility to allegations first made in a lawsuit filed last year. The suit accuses the company of hostility toward Black employees, an accusation that Eli Lilly has vehemently rejected as without merit. Such allegations will be the subject of prompt and thorough investigations, said Patty Martin, Lilly's vice president for global diversity.

On one hand, the NAACP has become a plaintiff in the discrimination lawsuit, which also involves a noose threat, and has participated in protests with alleged victims. The National Urban League, however, gave Eli Lilly and several other companies top honors Nov. 15 at its 51st Annual Equal Opportunity Day Awards Dinner in Indianapolis.

An Urban League release says the awards are for "individuals and corporations who perpetuate the principle of equal opportunity and exhibit leadership qualities that result in notable contributions to the cause of equal rights."

"The National Urban League chose to honor Eli Lilly with its Corporate Leadership Award long before we recently learned through press reports that the NAACP had joined a lawsuit against the company," said Marc Morial, Urban League president and CEO, in an e-mailed response to an interview request.

"We stand by our decision to honor Eli Lilly, which is based on their work with us on efforts to reduce health disparities in a number of our affiliate cities. We respect the NAACP, and share with them a century long commitment to equal employment opportunity. While we express no opinion on the merits of the lawsuit at this time, we also do not dismiss the merits inasmuch as we have not heard directly from the NAACP which we are open to," he added.

The Urban League award reveals the need for unifying policies among civil rights organizations, said Dr. Ron Walters, director of the African American Leadership Center at the University of Maryland.

Dr. Walters also points out that Eli Lilly is listed on the Urban League's website as a "Champion" among a string of corporate financial donors.

"Corporations work like that. You get in trouble over here. You

cover your (rear) over here. And this gave them an opportunity to do it by probably big bucks to the National Urban League," he continued.

"The result is that the Urban League gets put into a situation where they can't refuse to acknowledge this. And so they do it. But, they shouldn't do it because there ought to be an etiquette and understanding in the civil rights community, which says when one organization goes out and launches a principled protest against a company or an entity, then the others should refrain from acknowledging those (companies) until the air clears. There ought to be at least an ethic among them that says that."

NAACP Interim President Dennis Hayes issued a statement criticizing Eli Lilly. "Discriminatory practices whether in policy or experience should not be tolerated, are against the law, and do not make good business sense ... Companies have much to lose by improperly addressing offensive behavior of staffers and fostering a culture of unequal treatment," he said.

Plaintiffs in the lawsuit say the company has many racial "minority" friendly policies, but they were rarely applied.

At least one alleged incident involves a noose threat. Lead plaintiff Cassandra Welch had worked for the company 12 years when she was fired in 2004 after complaining to Lilly's human resources department about alleged discrimination by several managers.

Ms. Welch said she found a Black doll with a noose around its neck after raising complaints, according to an NAACP statement, which also said Ms. Welch was fired after being accused of sending falsified e-mails to a co-worker about non-Eli Lilly business.

The Urban League's plan to honor the company amid controversy is reminiscent of a similar situation two years ago. That's when leading Black activist Al Sharpton announced his National Action Network was giving an annual award to Tyson Foods, then the target of a lawsuit in which employees alleged segregated bathrooms with a "Whites Only" sign, pervasive use of the n-word, "monkey," "boy" and "watermelon" insults to Black people, and a noose threat.

Rev. Sharpton quickly and publicly withdrew the award after being made aware of the suit by an NNPA reporter working on the 2005 story. He also withdrew an award to Wal-Mart, which was fighting multiple lawsuits alleging various worker violations.

Similarly, the Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr., has not only resisted receiving Wal-Mart money, but also returned a contribution of more than \$30,000 from British Petroleum in 2005 and announced a boycott of the company at its annual convention that year.

Urban League acknowledgement of Lilly came the night before a coalition of major Black organizations held a protest march on the Justice Department against a rising level of racial violence, hate expressions and unequal criminal, economic and social justice toward Blacks across the nation.

With highly publicized incidents fueling righteous indignation, activists have taken on war-like strategies, calling for unified protests at various pressure points.

"You have a conflict here between the organizational interests and the coalition interests—all of whom are working together for the interest of the whole community," said Dr. Walters.

Merry Christmas To All and To All A Good Night

From eastside to westside
And all around the town
May peace and happiness
Blanket the town.

And to all our good friends
Both far and near
A very good Christmas
And a happy New Year!

From Sumler's Ladies...

Rahni Jere' Sumler
Zoi D. Wiley
Taliyah Ziona Brown

Tanya R. Wiley-Brown
Jermain Sumler-Faison
McKaila Elise Faison



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