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NAACP to push GOP lawmakers on pre-kindergarten



MOVE-IN DAY - Interim NCCU Chancellor Charles L. Becton, second from right, helps some students move in to dormitories at North Carolina Central University. Michael Ruffin, also ships in. Becton has been named interim chancellor while the school looks for a permanent replacement for Charlie Nelms who retired in August. (NCCU Photo by Lawson)

By Emery P. Dalesio

RALEIGH (AP) - The North Carolina NAACP will launch a campaign targeting Republican legislators who have resisted full funding for the state's pre-kindergarten enrichment program, the civil rights organization's head said Aug. 31.

The NAACP plans to hold events statewide drawing attention to GOP leaders' plans to further challenge a state appeals court ruling, the Rev. William Barber said.

A three-judge panel of the state Court of Appeals ruled Aug. 21 that at-risk 4-year-olds must be enrolled in the North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten Program if their parents seek admission. That includes children at risk of falling behind their peers due to chronic health problems, or because their families are in financial hardship or do not speak English at home. As many as 67,000 children may be eligible for the program previously known as More at Four, which could cost taxpayers up to \$300 million a year, according to estimates from Gov. Beverly Perdue's administration.

But the judges stopped short of requiring a vast expansion of the program to include every needy 4-year-old.

House Speaker Thom Tillis, R-Mecklenburg, and Senate leader Phil Berger, R-Rockingham, plan to appeal the decision to the state's Supreme Court, spokesmen for the legislative leaders said last week. The high court can decide whether to consider the case.

Barber scolded GOP leaders, recalling both the Biblical admonishment that Christians should care for those who have little and Martin Luther King's hope for the day when his children would be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

"The rulings of this house have in fact judged our children by the color of their skin and by the amount of money in their parents' pocketbook, the content of their bank account," Barber said standing before the state Legislative Building. "If we are going to lift this state, and lift this nation, you have to lift it from the bottom."

Continuing the court battle could delay expanding the program, depriving thousands of 4-year-olds eligible this year, Barber said. NC Pre-K enrolled about 24,000 children in the just-completed school year, down from about 35,000 in 2010 after lawmakers cut its funding by 20 percent and imposed other restrictions.

Barber said lawmakers should act now with a special legislative session to approve more funding for the program.

Spokesmen for the legislative leaders declined comment Aug. 31, citing ongoing litigation. Attorney General Roy Cooper's office has not yet decided whether to follow through on the request by legislative leaders to pursue the appeal, a spokeswoman said.

The NAACP and other groups this month finished a series of events statewide seeking to draw attention to the impact of poverty in North Carolina.

Black Obama Critic Linked to Right-wing Conservatives

By Freddie Allen
Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Rev. William Owens, a black minister who has launched a national campaign against President Obama because of his support of same-sex marriage, portrays himself as head of an independent grass-roots organization when, in fact, he is being bankrolled by right-wing groups and maintains strong ties to Republican politicians, it has been disclosed.

The Memphis-based Coalition of African American Pastors, USA (CAAP) describes itself on its Web site as "a grass-roots movement of African-American Christians who believe in traditional family values such as supporting the role of religion in American public life, protecting the lives of the unborn, and defending the sacred institution of marriage." It claims that it "is not affiliated with any political party or religious denomination."

However, People for the American Way, a liberal advocacy group, and USA Today has disclosed several close ties between Owens and conservatives.

Owens launched a national campaign in May calling on African-Americans not to vote for Obama because of his support of gay marriage. The group claims to have the support of 3,700 black ministers, a figure that has not been verified.

Although Owens claims to be acting independently, Frank Cannon, head of the American Principles Project, a conservative group opposed to same-sex marriage, acknowledged to USA Today that its political action fund is paying Shirley &

Banister, a public relations firm, to assist CAAP.

In addition, Owens' group has received loans from the conservative Family Research Council and Mississippi Tea Party activist Ed Holliday, according to documents filed with the IRS.

Rev. Timothy McDonald III, senior pastor of the Atlanta-based First Iconium Baptist Church and president of the African-American Ministers in Action of People for the American Way, said Owens' organizations "no relevance, no constituency and no credibility."

Earlier this year, Owens was named African-American liaison for the National Organization for Marriage (NOM), a group that has endorsed Republican Mitt Romney.

According to tax documents, NOM donated more than \$35,733 to Education for All, a nonprofit run by Deborah Owens, the wife of William Owens. The group, which claims to promote education reforms in low-income neighborhoods, also lists Rev. Owens as a contact person on press releases for the organization in 2011.

The memo, titled "National Strategy For Winning The Marriage Battle," came to light after NOM lost a lawsuit in Maine over campaign donor violations during the 2009 state elections.

A section of memo under the heading, "Not a Civil Rights Project," stated: "The strategic goal of this project is to drive a wedge between gays and blacks - two key Democratic constituencies. Find equip, energize and connect African American spokespeople for marriage; develop a media campaign around

their objections to gay marriage as a civil right; provoke the gay marriage base into responding by denouncing these spokesmen and women as bigots."

The confidential internal memo suggested "pushing a marriage amendment in Washington, DC; find attractive young, black Democrats to challenge White gay marriage advocates electorally."

Civil rights leaders were stunned.

"It's one of the most cynical things I've ever heard of or ever seen spelled out in this way," said Julian Bond, chairman emeritus of NAACP on CNN. "The idea that these people are just pawns that can be played with. The black people who oppose gay marriage, the black people who support gay marriage can be moved around like pieces on a chessboard. It's scary."

Benjamin Jealous, president and CEO of the NAACP, said in a statement: "This memo only reveals the limits of a cynical agenda. The truth is that no group, no matter how well-funded, can drive an artificial wedge between our communities. People of color understand what it is like to be the target of discrimination. No public relations strategy will make us forget that."

In 2008, Owens endorsed Republican contender Mike Huckabee for president. He also endorsed Ken Blackwell, the Republican candidate for governor in Ohio.

Despite strong criticism of him, Owens has not backed away from his anti-Obama campaign, comparing President Obama at one news conference to Judas, (Continued On Page 3)



Rev. William Owens

Alabama looks for way to pardon Scottsboro Boys

By Phillip Rawls

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) - Many years ago, public opinion deemed the black Scottsboro Boys innocent of raping two white women. Making that official is taking decades longer.

Only one of the nine Scottsboro Boys was formally pardoned by Alabama before dying. State officials would like to clear the names of the other eight, but figuring out how to rewrite history after 81 years is proving difficult.

Gov. Robert Bentley said he would issue a pardon if state law allowed him to do so, but it doesn't. "We need to right any wrongs that have occurred in the past as best we can. This was a long time ago, and we have moved so far in this state," he said.

The state Board of Pardons and Paroles issued a pardon in 1976 to the only Scottsboro Boy who was known to still be alive, Clarence Norris. But the board's rules don't allow posthumous pardons, and changing those rules could take months.

Some legislators plan to propose a resolution declaring the eight cleared in the view of the state, but it can't be considered until the Legislature's next meeting, scheduled for February.

"It shouldn't be so hard," said Sheila Washington, founder of the Scottsboro Boys Museum and Cultural Center in Scottsboro.

The museum chronicles how race and sex intersected in the segregated South on March 25, 1931, when a sheriff's posse stopped a train at Paint Rock, Ala. Nine black teenagers who were hobnobing thought they were being arrested for fighting with whites on the train. Instead, they were accused of gang-raping two white women who were also riding the freight train.

The nine, from Georgia and Tennessee, went on trial in Scottsboro. All but the youngest received a death sentence but later won new trials. One of the women recanted her story. Five of the Scottsboro Boys eventually had the rape charges dropped, while four were convicted.

The case resulted in two significant U.S. Supreme Court decisions saying that criminal defendants are entitled to effective counsel and that blacks can't be systematically excluded from criminal juries. When Norris obtained his pardon in 1976 with the support of then-Gov. George C. Wallace, there was talk of trying to do something for Andy and Roy Wright, Haywood Patterson, Olen Montgomery, Charlie Weems, Ozie Powell, William Roberson and Eugene Williams. Nothing happened, and then little was said after Norris died in 1989.

Washington and other volunteers opened the Scottsboro Boys Museum in an old church in 2010 and brought the case to the attention of tourists visiting civil rights attractions in the South. She recently (Continued On Page 3)