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TELEPHONE 919-682-2913

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NAACP suspends NC candidate, Curtis Gatewood, over sexual harassment claim

By Martha Waggoner

RALEIGH (AP) - The national NAACP said Sept. 26 that it has suspended a candidate for president of the North Carolina chapter over sexual harassment claims made against him by a former employee.

In a statement posted on its website, the Baltimore-based organization said the Rev. Curtis Gatewood was suspended Sept. 23 from membership immediately pending a hearing into the sexual harassment claim that the former employee made public at a news conference Sept. 22.

NAACP President Derrick Johnson sent the suspension letter to Gatewood, telling him "to immediately cease holding himself out as a member of the Association." He's ineligible to run for president of the North Carolina NAACP because candidates must be members in good standing, the statement says.

Gatewood, who had been a member of the Alamance County NAACP, wrote in a text message to The Associated Press that he will seek a hearing on his suspension. Johnson's letter to Gatewood says he has 20 calendar days to request a hearing.

"The allegations are totally false," Gatewood wrote. He blamed the Rev. William Barber, the past president of the state chapter, for the timing of the harassment claims with the presidential election scheduled for Oct. 5.

"His actions are those more of Judas than Jesus," Gatewood wrote of Barber. "He had already committed crucifixion in 2017. Now here he is in 2019 trying to stop God's miraculous resurrection. But what God has for me; He has for me."

Barber ordered an investigation of the harassment claims in 2017. Gatewood left his job with the North Carolina NAACP during the investigation.

When a complaint is filed, the NAACP constitution allows the president to suspend a member if he or she believes there is the possibility of danger or harm to the organization, Johnson wrote to Gatewood.

Upon reviewing the complaint that Jazmyne Childs, the former employee, filed Sept. 11, "I am satisfied that your continued membership in the association presents a danger or harm to the NAACP and the North Carolina state conference and that action is necessary to prevent or mitigate that harm," Johnson wrote.

The letter later says: "You are directed to immediately cease and desist from holding yourself out as a member of the NAACP."

The suspension came just over 24 hours after a news conference by Childs, 27, the former state youth and college director for the state NAACP, who accused Gatewood, her then-supervisor, of harassment. But it came almost two years after an investigative report by a law professor and attorney found that Childs was a credible witness and Gatewood, now 60 years old, was not. The report concluded that the incidents of harassment had occurred.

Childs said at a news conference that she endured unwanted physical contact and harassment starting shortly after her employment began in January 2017. Childs, 27, said she came forward because the national NAACP didn't respond to her letters seeking that it expel Gatewood from membership, something state chapters cannot do.



Ground Attack, Three Takeaways Spark NCCU in Win over Morgan State - BALTIMORE, Md. - North Carolina Central University amassed 330 yards and four touchdowns on the ground, while adding three interceptions to increase its takeaway total to 16 on the season, as the Eagles defeated Morgan State 27-17 in the MEAC opener for both squads on Saturday night in Baltimore. Photo of Bryan Mills (22) by KeShawn Ennis) NCCU

Morehouse to cut costs, shift money to student aid

ATLANTA (AP) - One of the nation's top historically black colleges is cutting employee salaries and retirement contributions to increase student aid.

The announcement Sept. 24 by Atlanta's Morehouse College comes months after billionaire Robert Smith promised to repay all student loans accumulated by Morehouse's class of 2019. That one-time gift will total \$34 million after the college announced this week that Smith would also repay money borrowed by parents of Morehouse graduates.

Morehouse President David Thomas tells news outlets that, for the next nine months, the all-male college will impose an unpaid monthly furlough day for 415 professional employees and stop retirement contributions of 3% of employee salaries.

"We are trying to take an approach that creates the least disruption to our education programs as well as to the quality of student services," Thomas told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. "No faculty are being laid off or eliminated, and our hourly employees - who tend to be our lowest paid - are not impacted."

Some jobs will also be eliminated, with responsibilities absorbed by remaining employees. The overall cost-cutting effort is meant to save \$3 million, the college said.

Virginia girl: Classmates grabbed her, cut her dreadlocks

SPRINGFIELD, Va. (AP) - Police are investigating a 12-year-old girl's allegation that her classmates grabbed her and cut her dreadlocks on the playground of a northern Virginia private school.

Newsoutlets report the girl says three of her sixth-grade classmates at Immanuel Christian School in Springfield called her hair "ugly" while they assaulted her at recess earlier this week.

The girl is African American. She says her attackers are white, and that they've been bullying her.

The school issued a statement Sept. 26 saying it is disturbed by the allegations and has asked police to investigate.

Harvard president sorry 13th Amendment comment offended some

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (AP) - Harvard University President Lawrence Bacow is saying he regrets the controversial comments he made invoking the 13th Amendment in referring to the university's relationship with wealthy donors.

The Boston Globe reports Bacow was speaking Sept. 24 to Harvard alumni relations and fundraising staff when he referred to the 13th Amendment, which freed slaves in the United States, to say Harvard's individual schools could no longer own specific wealthy graduates.

Elizabeth Warren Seeks To Make Inroads For Black Voters

WASHINGTON (AP) - In a story Sept. 27 about Sen. Elizabeth Warren's campaign in South Carolina, The Associated Press erroneously referenced the city of Rock Hill as a "heavily military community." Rock Hill is not home to a major military installation, and U.S. Census data show veterans make up about 6% of the community's population.

A corrected version of the story is below:

Joe Biden's path to the Democratic presidential nomination centers on South Carolina, where he's counting on support from black voters who are critical to victory. But Elizabeth Warren is working to prove that she can also be a force there - potentially disrupting the former vice president's strategy.

After concentrating on Iowa and New Hampshire, Warren is increasingly focused on South Carolina, home to the nation's first southern primary. She was in the community of Rock Hill on Sept. 28 for a town hall, and will return next month to attend a criminal justice forum in Columbia, the state capital. That follows increased travel to the state in recent weeks, including town halls on the campuses of historically black universities and visits to African American churches.

Warren still lags some of her rivals in endorsements from prominent state lawmakers or pastors. But her South Carolina moves will test whether the strength she demonstrated this summer in predominantly white Iowa and New Hampshire can carry over to states with more diverse electorates. That's a key hurdle for any Democratic nominee to clear if they hope to recreate the multicultural coalition that helped Barack Obama win the White House twice.

While many black voters are loyal to Biden, who served as Obama's No. 2, there are signs some are open to other candidates.

"Black voters aren't all that committed to Biden," said Black Voters Matter co-founder Cliff Albright. "His black support boils down to two things: His affiliation with Barack Obama and his electability."

Rather than trying to "out Obama" Biden, Albright said Warren should make her own case for electability.

With her plans to tax the wealthy to pay for programs benefiting the middle class, Warren is emerging as a chief rival to Biden, especially among progressive voters. Recent polls in Iowa and New Hampshire found her in a close race for first with the former vice president. And at least one poll published this week by Quinnipiac University suggested that trend could be playing out nationally.

But Biden's support among black voters still far outpaces that of Warren. The Quinnipiac poll showed that even as Warren's support among black voters has grown nationally, Biden still comes out well ahead. Her biggest gains were among college-educated whites.

Kennedie Fee represents the challenges that remain for Warren. The 18-year-old African American student at Clemson University is precisely the type of voter Warren would like to attract. But she said she plans to cast her first presidential primary vote for Biden, praising "his past, the points he's making, being vice president for Obama" and desire to curb institutional racism in the criminal justice system.

"He's kind of reaching out to all people," Fee said. Activist and educator Brittany Packnett said Warren has many women of color on her campaign but might benefit from putting them in more public roles.

"There are people on her team who have been working in our communities for a long time," said Packnett, who hasn't endorsed any 2020 candidate. "That's one of her biggest advantages."

Other 2020 candidates are also prioritizing South Carolina. Kamala Harris, one of two black candidates in the race, sees the state as a must-win, but has shifted much of her attention lately to Iowa. Bernie Sanders, meanwhile, is trying to learn from his resounding 2016 defeat in South Carolina, which blunted his momentum after a strong showing in Iowa and a decisive win in New Hampshire.

Winfrey shocks fundraisers with \$1M donation for students

CHARLOTTE (AP) - Oprah Winfrey shocked attendees at a North Carolina fundraiser by announcing a donation of more than \$1 million toward the United Negro College Fund.

The Charlotte Observer reports that former talk-show host and OWN television network chief made the surprise announcement Sept. 28 while speaking at Charlotte's 17th annual Maya Angelou Women Who Lead Luncheon.

United Negro College Fund officials were hoping the luncheon would help raise \$500,000 for deserving area students to attend historically black colleges.

At the time of Winfrey's address, a running tally at the event showed that about \$1.15 million had been raised. That's when Winfrey said she was going to match the total, prompting a standing ovation from the stunned audience.

Warren wants to avoid becoming the Sanders of the 2020 race - the progressive who does well in the first contests in overwhelmingly white states only to crash in South Carolina. Her campaign has prioritized outreach to minority communities. Supporters suggest that as she gains strength in other early voting states, she could improve her standing in South Carolina, where voters ultimately want to side with someone who can win the nomination and take on President Donald Trump.

South Carolina voters were similarly skeptical of Obama until he won the 2008 Iowa caucuses. After prevailing in Iowa and New Hampshire in 2004, John Kerry finished a strong second in South Carolina, falling to Sen. John Edwards of neighboring North Carolina, but beating a black candidate, Rev. Al Sharpton.

BlackPAC Executive Director Adrienne Shropshire said Warren could find similar success.

"When black voters are paying close attention, support for Warren goes up," Shropshire said.

Haines reported from Philadelphia. Associated Press writers Meg Kimard in Columbia, S.C., and Michelle Price in Las Vegas contributed to this report.



OPRAH WINFREY