

# 'Caucus' immediate future is political only

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Bill James, a longtime caucus critic. The BPC was fined \$4,500 and its general fund ordered closed, limiting the caucus' fund raising to political giving only. But will being a full-fledged PAC make much difference?

"It doesn't sound a death knell, it just forces us to be more inventive in terms of fund raising," BPC Chairman Franklin McCain said. "We'll have to reach out to more people."

"They've always been a PAC," said Ted Arrington PhD, chairman of UNC Charlotte's political science department. "They'll have to keep a better track of the money. It's a tough time, but they'll survive. They're a pretty hearty group."

"I would think it's a major setback," said Geneal Gregory, a caucus member for 22 years and official with the Mecklenburg Democratic Party. "It's taken the State Board of Elections to say you need to regroup."

The change to full-time PAC will end contributions for community-oriented programs and support from black churches, which are

banned from political giving as a tax-exempt entity. Also, individuals who they don't agree with the caucus' progressive positions but may have backed community programs will likely disappear.

"It means everybody who makes a contribution could be considered a member of the PAC," McCain said. "Churches would be limited. We just have to go after individuals to join us."

The elections board's actions - which included fines - confirmed long-term problems with the caucus' accounting practices. The difficulties, caucus insiders say, can be traced to a growing disconnect between leadership and membership. McCain, who became president last June and was not involved in the Cunningham loan, said caucus bylaws now require executives undergo training sessions on state election law. He attributed past mistakes to legal ignorance and overzealousness.

"I think there are one or two persons in the caucus who were perhaps over-enthusiastic," McCain said. "There was no deliberate plan of deception. Our books were always open. We're not that stupid" not openly defy election laws.

Gregory contends the culture that led to sanctions in the first place hasn't been

dealt with by caucus leaders.

"How do you change the bylaws when you don't communicate" with caucus members, she asks. "It is a lack of communication from the top down. They have not received any correspondence from the top down and there needs to be an overhaul from the top down."

The caucus' strength has never been its ability to raise money, which is the province of regulated professions and business on the state and national level, Arrington said. Mobilizing black voters - nearly exclusively to Democratic candidates - is what makes the BPC a force in local elections.

"They've never been a major financial power like real estate (professionals) or Bank of America," he said. "It's the organizing that gets people to contribute."

That will continue, Davis said, but it comes at a price.

"If we don't do better, we may be back again and this time somebody's going to do some jail time because you just can't go violating the laws of North Carolina," he said. "But more than anything, I hate to say Bill James was right."

The caucus is accepting nominations for officers through May 14. To submit a nomination or for information, call Shirley Fulton at (704) 358-8144.



McCain

# Initiative to curb tobacco use

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be held across the country.

Among the activities planned:

The National Urban League will teach youth to become peer-to-peer anti-smoking trainers and will expand its health education and behavior modification initiative targeting urban and other African-American families and neighborhoods;

- The NAACP will form a health advocacy work group that will make tobacco control a part of the organization's health agenda as well as establish a health advocacy presence on its national website, NAACP.org;

- The Congressional Black Caucus Foundation will conduct tobacco control prevention and cessation initiatives at 10 historically Black colleges and universities and collect data that will subsequently be disseminated through CBCF publications;

- The National Conference of Black Mayors Inc. will heighten awareness about second-hand smoke in African-American communities and work to collect 100,000 commitment forms from households promising to participate in second-hand smoke reduction. The NCBM will also provide cash awards to municipalities for carrying out innovative local programs to reduce exposure to second hand smoke and

- The National Association of Neighborhoods will serve as the coordinating and managing partner of the overall initiative and six key annual events. The NAN will also form and facilitate a policy committee, composed of Legacy and coalition members to oversee the initiatives.

The coalition is already being viewed as setting a precedent for future collaboration

against social ills in the black community.

"Each of us has the African-American community as a constituency and we tend to work separately to solve the same problems," says NNPF Chairman Brian Townsend, publisher of the Precinct Reporter in San Bernadino, Calif. "This time we'll be able to provide a focused, centered and viable solution to a health issue. We'll have all of these groups working together on the same issue focusing on similar solutions at the same time with dialogue. And so for the first time ever, we should see a real dent in that issue. In fact, it should inspire us to find some other issues in our community where we can come together at the same time in a focused venture to solve those issues as well."

About 45,000 African-Americans die from tobacco related deaths each year. If current smoking patterns of African Americans continue, an estimated 1.6 million black people currently under the age of 18 will become regular smokers, and about 500,000 of them will eventually die of a smoking-related disease.

Under the grant, each organization will receive \$250,000 per year, for a total of \$750,000 over the three-year period.

George E. Curry, editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service, will moderate town hall-style meetings around the country with a goal of increasing awareness of the dangers of tobacco and its harmful effects on the health of African-Americans.

The "African American Partners for a Tobacco-Free Society" marks a new direction on the part of the American Legacy Foundation. The project was awarded through Legacy's Priority Populations Initiative.

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