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Audit finds trouble at Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority

By Jessica Gresko

WASHINGTON (AP) - A financial audit of the nation's oldest black sorority found significant accounting problems including a secret set of books used by top officials to divert money, findings that bolster some claims in a lawsuit.

The audit of the Chicago-based Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, which was completed in December and provided to The Associated Press, also found two former top officials continued to use sorority credit cards after their service ended, failing to appropriately document tens of thousands of dollars in charges. A pending 2009 lawsuit against the organization and officials including its former president, Illinois resident Barbara McKinzie, contains similar allegations.

The audit by the Illinois-based accounting firm Ragland & Associates covers the year 2010 and is an annual audit paid for by the society. It finds that in that year McKinzie and two other top officials secretly created a second set of financial books to get around the sorority's accounting policies.

"The intent was to divert and misappropriate AKA funds," according to the audit, which found nearly \$1.7 million in payments made without authorization.

Approximately \$282,000 in credit card charges on the second set of books appear to be fraudulent, including personal charges the sorority wasn't reimbursed for, the audit found.

A sorority document written in response to the audit says the sorority discontinued the use of the second set of books in December 2010 and is currently developing written travel and entertainment policies that govern credit card use.

Alpha Kappa Alpha said in a statement March 22 that it is pleased to have the audit's findings and that the sorority has made "great progress in enhancing the organization's operational policies and procedures," including taking steps suggested in the audit.

"We remain committed to preserving the assets of the organization and to continually reviewing and strengthening our operations. The audit's findings are essential to that process," the statement said.

McKinzie's lawyer, Dale Cooter, said he had not seen the audit but said his client "did not create a fraudulent set of books."

The pending lawsuit against the sorority, filed in the District of Columbia by sorority members, alleges McKinzie improperly used a sorority credit card for personal items including jewelry, designer clothing and lingerie. In court papers filed in March, McKinzie denies that she used the credit card inappropriately.

The lawsuit was initially dismissed in early 2010, but it was reinstated last August by an appeals court, which said the dismissal was premature. It seeks to recover allegedly misused money as well as punitive damages.

The lawsuit also includes an allegation about two wax statues the sorority paid for during McKinzie's tenure as president, from 2006 to 2010. One of the two statues commissioned for the National Great Blacks in Wax Museum in Baltimore was of McKinzie. The lawsuit alleges thousands of dollars over and above the cost of the statues went unaccounted for.

AKA was founded in 1908 at Howard University in Washington and has a worldwide membership of over 200,000.



BARBARA MCKINZIE

Trayvon Martin, my son, and the Black Male Code

By Jesse Washington

PHILADELPHIA (AP) - I thought my son would be much older before I had to tell him about the Black Male Code. He's only 12, still sleeping with stuffed animals, still afraid of the dark. But after the Trayvon Martin tragedy, I needed to explain to my child that soon people might be afraid of him.



Trayvon Martin

We were in the car on the way to school when a story about Martin came on the radio. "The guy who killed him should get arrested. The dead guy was unarmed!" my son said after hearing that neighborhood watch captain George Zimmerman had claimed self-defense in the shooting in Sanford, Florida.

We listened to the rest of the story, describing how Zimmerman had spotted Martin, who was 17, walking home from the store on a rainy night, the hood of his sweatshirt pulled over his head. When it was over, I turned off the radio and told my son about the rules he needs to follow to avoid becoming another Trayvon Martin - a black male who Zimmerman assumed was "suspicious" and "up to no good."

As I explained it, the Code goes like this:

Always pay close attention to your surroundings, son, especially if you are in an affluent neighborhood where black folks are few. Understand that even though you are not a criminal, some people might assume you are, especially if you are wearing certain clothes.

Never argue with police, but protect your dignity and take pride in humility. When confronted by someone with a badge or a gun, do not flee, fight, or put your hands anywhere other than up.

Please don't assume, son, that all white people view you as a threat. America is better than that. Suspicion and bitterness can imprison you. But as a black male, you must go above and beyond to show strangers what type of person you really are.

I was far from alone in laying out these instructions. Across the country this week, parents were talking to their children, especially their black sons, about the Code. It's a talk the black

community in the U.S. has passed down for generations, an evolving oral tradition from the days when an errant remark could easily cost black people their job, their freedom, or sometimes their life.

10 11eating and talking, when a squadron of police cars swooped in and a helicopter rumbled overhead.

"We got a report that a riot was going on," police told them (Continued On Page 15)



Family and friends came out to celebrate Mrs. Artelia Marsh Perry and the Lawrence & Artelia Perry Scholarship Fund. See photos on page 3.

What makes NC different in gay marriage debate?

By Tom Breen

RALEIGH (AP) - From Texas to Virginia, the South has spoken with almost one voice on same-sex marriage, amending state constitutions to ban the practice in hopes of blocking court decisions that would allow gays and lesbians to marry.

It's "almost" one voice because there's a discordant note in the Southern choir.

North Carolina, which likes to distinguish itself as a "vale of humility" surrounded by more bombastic neighbors, is the last state in the region without such an amendment. That fact is repeated constantly in the debate over a May 8 referendum when voters will have a chance to change the situation. But while it's bandied about by both sides, it's less clear what the distinction means.

Is it simply because the North Carolina Democrats who controlled the Legislature until 2010 had no interest in putting the amendment up for a vote? Or does it reflect the history and outlook of a state where leaders shepherded desegregation into law during the 1960s with little of the violence that broke out elsewhere?

Both explanations have merit in a state where Republicans waited nearly 140 years to take full control of the General Assembly and in which the political careers of moderate Democrat Jim Hunt and conservative Republican stalwart Jesse Helms could flourish at the same time, thanks to some of the same voters.

"North Carolina is an ambivalent state," said Harry Watson, director of the Center for the Study of the American South at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. "It's got very strong conservative instincts, and it's got very strong liberal instincts. It's one of the things that's peculiar about Tar Heel politics that voters can go either way depending on the issue or the politician."

Raleigh resident Molly Beavers, 25, whose front lawn is adorned with a sign urging voters to reject the amendment, summed up that paradox in contemporary politics.

"In some ways I feel like we've made a lot of progress and I know we voted as a state for (Barack) Obama in 2008, which was a big deal," she said. "But now our state Legislature's kind of gone the other way."

The state will be front and center in September, when Charlotte hosts the Democratic National Convention at which President Obama is nominated for a second term.

Missouri became the first U.S. state to pass a constitutional amendment against same-sex marriage in August 2004, less than a year after the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled that that state's constitution guaranteed same-sex couples the right to marry. The first Southern state to impose a constitutional ban was Louisiana, voting a month after Missouri. They were followed in November by Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Arkansas and others outside the region.

By the end of 2008, every state in the South had an amendment except North Carolina. West Virginia also lacks a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage, but that state - which was created when it broke away from the rest of Virginia to fight alongside the Union in the Civil War - culturally shares as much or more with Rust Belt neighbors like Ohio and Pennsylvania as with Dixie.

Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley recently signed legislation legalizing gay marriage, but opponents are seeking to overturn the law through a ballot vote.

In North Carolina, there's little doubt the immediate reason for the absence of a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage is that Democrats controlled the General Assembly until 2010. A bill that would amend the constitution was first introduced in May 2004 and in every (Continued On Page 15)

Aide: Obama reacted as parent to Florida shooting

WASHINGTON (AP) - A top presidential adviser says President Barack Obama's decision to comment on the shooting death of an African-American teenager in Florida was motivated by parental instinct more than the incident's emergence as a racial issue.

Senior White House adviser David Plouffe says Obama reacted instinctively as a parent last week in saying that Americans needed "some soul searching" in the wake of the slaying of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin by a neighborhood watch volunteer. The gunman was not charged, prompting probes by the Justice Department and local authorities.

Obama said he supported the investigations, noting: "If I had son, he'd look like Trayvon."

Speaking on "Fox News Sunday," Plouffe said Obama "was speaking powerfully about this as a parent." Plouffe added that "no matter gender or race, this is a tragedy."

NC group apologizes for blog post's Obama image

By Tom Breen

RALEIGH (AP) - A prominent conservative think tank in North Carolina apologized Thursday for a freelance blogger's decision to post a photo illustration depicting President Barack Obama clad in sexually suggestive clothing and eating from a bucket of fried chicken.

John Hood, president of the Raleigh-based John Locke Foundation, said he had the image removed from the group's Meck Deck blog on Wednesday after a reader brought it to his attention. Tara Servatius, the writer who posted the illustration, ended her association with the blog Thursday morning before Hood had a chance to ask her to leave, he said.

"I'm embarrassed and angry today," Hood said in a statement. "The illustration associated with this blog entry was offensive and utterly inappropriate for our blog or for anyone else's."

On his Facebook page, Hood wrote, "She is no longer a contributor to our site," referring to Servatius. "I would have made that decision for her, but she beat me to the punch by ending her role."

The image, which was no longer available on the Meck Deck site but could still be seen on a blog post by WRAL-TV reporter Laura Leslie, is a small and low-resolution depiction of the president's head crudely pasted onto a body clad in high-heeled boots and other garments suggestive of fetish wear. Between his spread legs is a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken.

The image accompanied a post by Servatius titled "Obama Goes Pro Gay Marriage to Get NC on Election Day," in which she argued that the president had electoral strategy in mind when he criticized the proposed amendment to North Carolina's constitution that would ban same-sex marriage.

"I am genuinely sorry my inclusion of the photo has caused controversy for the John Locke Foundation," Servatius wrote Thursday (Continued On Page 15)

Multi-hour arguments heard at Supreme Court

By Jesse J. Holland

WASHINGTON (AP) - The Supreme Court will hear six hours of argument over President Barack Obama's health care law, its longest argument in almost 45 years. Since 1970, most cases have been allotted only one hour, down from two before that. The best-known recent multi-hour arguments are far from the longest in modern history:

Recent
- McConnell v. Federal Election Commission: Four hours, five minutes on Sept. 8, 2003. The court upheld the ban on "soft money" campaign contributions in the McCain-Feingold Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2002.

- Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission: Two hours, 33 minutes, March 24, 2009 and Sept. 9, 2009. Citing the First Amendment, the court struck down a decades-old government ban on spending by corporations and unions to support or attack political candidates. After an hour of arguments the first day, the justices recalled the lawyers for a second day six months later.

- United States v. Nixon: Three hours on July 8, 1974. The court decided that President Richard Nixon's claim of executive privilege to resist a the Watergate special prosecutor's subpoena for White House tape recordings and documents was not completely immune from judicial review and therefore he must comply. Nixon turned over the tapes and resigned soon after.

Earlier
- Arizona v. California: 16 hours, three minutes on Jan. 8-11, 1962. This original jurisdiction case and others like it are different because no other lower court heard the issue before the Supreme Court. This was a fight between states over how much water could be legally taken out of the Colorado River for a state's use.

- United States v. Louisiana: 13 hours and 32 minutes on Oct. 12-15, 1956. Another original jurisdiction case over whether the state or the federal government has rights to "lands, minerals and other natural resources" off Louisiana's coast.

- Brown v. Board of Education II: 13 hours, 25 minutes on April 11-14, 1955. This case was a follow-up to the famous Brown v. Board of Education ruling that struck down racial segregation in public schools. Brown II was the court's attempt to specify how public schools were to desegregate and is remembered for the court's directive that desegregation proceed with "all deliberate speed."

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