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Trump: His support for black colleges remains 'unwavering'

By Darlene Superville
WASHINGTON (AP) - President Donald Trump declared May 7 that his support for historically black colleges and universities remains "unwavering."

Trump sought to clarify an earlier statement that some higher education officials interpreted to mean that he planned to end a capital financing program that helps these institutions repair, renovate and build new facilities. Congressional Black Caucus members criticized the move.

The earlier statement was attached to a spending bill Trump signed May 5 to keep the government operating through September.

Trump said in the signing statement that the administration "shall treat provisions that allocate benefits on the basis of race, ethnicity and gender ... in a manner consistent with the requirement to afford equal protection of the laws" under the due process clause of the Fifth Amendment. The Historically Black College and University Capital Financing Program Account was one of several programs named in that section of the statement.

In response, Reps. John Conyers, D-Mich., and Cedric Richmond, D-La., who is chairman of the black caucus, said Trump's statement was "misinformed factually" and not "grounded in any serious constitutional analysis."

"For a president who pledged to reach out to African-Americans and other minorities, this statement is stunningly careless and divisive. We urge him to reconsider immediately," the lawmakers said in a statement.

Trump said May 7 that the earlier statement spelled out "my intention to spend the funds it appropriates, including the funds for

Prosecutor reviewing murder case of man in prison 22 years

GREENVILLE (AP) - A district attorney says it is conducting another investigation into whether a North Carolina man who has spent 22 years in prison on a murder charge really committed the crime.

The NAACP has fought to have Dontae Sharpe's conviction overturned for years. Sharpe was 19 when he received a life sentence for the murder of 33-year-old George Radcliffe in Greenville. Authorities say Radcliffe was shot during a drug buy in 1994.

An eyewitness recanted her testimony just months after the trial.

Pitt County District Attorney Kimberly Robb told The Daily Reflector that prosecutors are finishing a review of the case and plans to talk to Gov. Roy Cooper's office to review the findings.

historically black colleges and universities, consistently with my responsibilities under the Constitution. It does not affect my unwavering support for HBCUs and their critical educational missions."

Trump highlighted his signing of an executive order earlier this year to move an office dedicated to these institutions from the Education Department to the White House. The

order also directs the office to help these institutions become financially stronger, among other steps.

Trump also noted that Education Secretary Betsy DeVos plans to deliver her first commencement address this week at Bethune-Cookman University, a historically black university founded in Daytona Beach, Florida, by civil rights activist Mary McLeod Bethune.



Marc Morial, the president and CEO of the National Urban League, suggested that recent activism against many of the Trump Administration's proposals, caused the White House to change course. In this photo, Morial speaks during the "2016 State of Black America" launch event at the Newseum in Washington, D.C. (Freddie Allen/AMG/NNPA)

Blacks Show Slight Gains in 2017 State of Black America Report; Equality Index for Blacks Inches Closer to Whites in the 2017

By Lauren Victoria Burke
(NNPA Newswire Contributor)

In their annual State of Black America report, called "Protect Our Progress," the National Urban League (NUL) suggested that the nation should invest in a "Main Street Marshall Plan" that would solidify gains made by Black Americans during the Obama Administration.

The plan includes many policy ideas the NUL has proposed in previous reports including funding for expanding pre-K, increased Pell grant funding, increasing the minimum wage, and funding for summer jobs.

"During the Obama era, the economy added 15 million new jobs, the Black unemployment rate dropped and the high school graduation rate for African Americans soared. Now that progress, and much more, is threatened," said Marc Morial, the president and CEO of the National Urban League, during a brief press conference about the release of the 2017 report.

By the metrics the report used to assemble their data, the 2017 State of Black America report concluded that:

- The overall equality index for African Americans is 72.3 percent, up from 72.2 percent the year before;
- The social justice index for Black Americans dipped from 60.9 percent to 57.4 percent;
- The health index for Black Americans grew from 79.4 percent in 2016 to 80 percent in the 2017 report.

Morial also suggested that recent activism against many of the Trump Administration's proposals, including massive cuts to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, have been delayed or blocked completely.

"Because of the vital work of the Urban League and other civil rights activists the administration has backed off of many of their first massive proposed cuts," said Morial. "These cuts would be a massive move backwards for African Americans."

Morial has a familiar ask: A \$4 trillion investment in education, infrastructure and job training. The "Main Street Marshall Plan" is one of the most detailed proposals impacting African Americans put forward by any civil rights organization in the U.S.

"These main streets are in big cities and in small towns...they are where this nation's poor and middle class live," said Morial. "We need action and not rhetoric."

A special about the State of Black America will air on TV One on May 31.

Learn more about the 2017 State of Black America report at <http://stateofblackamerica.org>.



Ms. Kimberly Pierson, mother of Alton Sterling's son Na'Quincy Pierson, cries as she speaks to reporters following a meeting with the U.S. Justice Department at federal court in Baton Rouge La., Wednesday, May 3. An investigation into the police shooting death of Sterling in Baton Rouge found that there was not enough evidence to prove that the white officers acted unreasonably and willfully, a federal prosecutor said May 3. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)

3 shootings by police put spotlight on Justice Department

By Sadie Gurman and Errin Haines Whack

WASHINGTON (AP) - Three deadly police shootings of black people. Three sets of facts. Three potentially different outcomes.

On the same day a white former patrolman in South Carolina pleaded guilty to federal civil rights charges for killing a motorist, word came down that the U.S. Justice Department would not prosecute two white officers in the shooting death of a man in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. And a white suburban Dallas officer was fired after fatally shooting a 15-year-old boy as the car he was riding in was driving away.

Civil rights activists are watching closely for clues to how the Trump administration's Justice Department intends to handle racially charged shootings by police. But drawing any conclusions about the department from those cases is risky, in part because each one is different and because prosecutions of officers are difficult and rare no matter the administration.

And while Attorney General Jeff Sessions has said he believes sweeping federal investigations of police departments can hurt officer morale and undermine crime-fighting, he has also promised his Justice Department will prosecute individual officers who break the law.

"I don't really think you can read that much into it," said Jonathan Smith, a civil rights attorney in the Obama Justice Department, noting that in two of the cases, the investigations began before Sessions took office.

Here's a look at each case and how communities are responding.

WALTER SCOTT

Officer Michael Slager shot Scott five times in the back as the unarmed 50-year-old man ran away during a traffic stop, and cellphone video of the 2015 shooting was viewed millions of times around the world.

Slager pleaded guilty May 2 to violating Scott's civil rights by shooting without justification. He could go to prison for decades. The charges were brought a year ago, during the Obama administration.

Scott's mother said the admission of guilt was all she needed to move on.

But the Scott case was unusual. For one, prosecutors had video that clearly showed that Scott was running from Slager and was at least 17 feet away when he was shot. That contradicted an account the officer gave investigators before the video surfaced. In pleading guilty, Slager dropped his claim that he feared for his life.

The community has been uneasy, but there hasn't been the widespread unrest other cities have seen.

Ashley Williams, an organizer with Charlotte Uprising in North Carolina who has staged a number of actions around killings of black people by police, was unsatisfied with Slager's guilty plea, since he neither admitted to nor was convicted of murdering Scott.

"What's happening right now, especially this week, is representative of the failures in the system we're told to rely on," Williams said.

ALTON STERLING

The Justice Department declined to charge two Baton Rouge officers with civil rights violations in the death of Sterling, who was shot during a struggle on the pavement outside a convenience store in July. Prosecutors said they could not prove the officers acted unreasonably.

According to the Justice Department, the officers said they saw the butt of a gun in one of Sterling's pants pockets and saw him try to reach for it before he was shot. A loaded gun was recovered from the 37-year-old man's pocket, prosecutors said.

Authorities in such cases must meet a difficult standard of proof, a challenge that has complicated prosecutions in past police shootings.

"It is not enough to show that the officer made a mistake, acted negligently, acted by accident or mistake, or even exercised bad judgment," the department said.

Myra Richardson, an organizer with The Wave, a youth-led activist group in Baton Rouge, said Sterling's case is "representative of the longstanding history of violence that is sanctioned by the state and mistrust in the police." Richardson said organizers will continue to work on behalf of Sterling's family and in the broader fight to end killings of blacks by police.

JORDAN EDWARDS

It was unclear whether the Justice Department will investigate the shooting of the 15-year-old on May 6. He was killed by a Texas officer investigating an underage drinking complaint at a house party the high school freshman was leaving. The boy's family has not called for federal intervention.

The officer, Roy Oliver, was fired May 2 for violating departmental policy. Police said video showed that the car Jordan was in was moving away from police, not going toward them in reverse, as the Balch Springs Police Department originally claimed.

Rashad Robinson, executive director of the online racial justice organization Color of Change, is calling for an investigation but is not yet pushing for federal intervention.

"Most of the time, we are calling for federal intervention when the state can't actually do it," Robinson said. "It is not because we think that federal intervention is the only way. It is because local officials have refused to hold individuals accountable. We want independent, clear investigations."