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'Serious discussions' about DNC changes, top Democrat says

By Lisa Mascaro

WASHINGTON (AP) - A top Democrat in Congress said Feb. 7 the party's future under Tom Perez is under scrutiny amid fallout from the Iowa caucuses and the winnowing of the presidential primary field to the exclusion of candidates of color.

Rep. Jim Clyburn of South Carolina, the third-ranking House Democrat, stopped short of saying Perez must go as leader of the Democratic National Committee.

"That's a decision for him," he said.

But the highest-ranking African American lawmaker in the House said during an interview with C-SPAN's "Newsmakers" that Iowa shouldn't play such an outsized role as an early vote state and that debate rules left "very raw feelings" within the Congressional Black Caucus after the exit of black presidential hopefuls Kamala Harris and Cory Booker.

"There are some serious discussions taking place here on Capitol Hill as to what ought to happen at the DNC," Clyburn said in the interview.

"Iowa should be in the mix, but we shouldn't launch the entire campaign with such a small sampling with what the country's all about," he said.

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North Carolina A&T makes move to Big South Conference

GREENSBORO (AP) - North Carolina A&T is moving out of the conference of historically black colleges that it formed nearly 50 years ago to the Big South Conference, school officials announced Friday.

The school's 13 trustees voted to leave the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference on June 30, 2021, and move to the Big South the next day.

University leaders said A&T is making the move primarily to help student-athletes by significantly reducing time spent traveling to games. While the Big South's three football-only schools are in Alabama, Georgia and New Jersey, the conference's 11 current full-time members are all located in the Carolinas and Virginia.

"We have been looking carefully at our opportunities in athletics for five years and more intensively over the past year," A&T Chancellor Harold Martin said in a statement released by the Big South Conference.

"We're pleased to have brought that process to fruition and excited to be ushering in a new alliance with the Big South," Martin said. "This move makes great sense for our student-athletes, for our fans and for our bottom line. We will always have a place in our hearts for the MEAC, and we look forward to what the new conference will make possible for the Aggies."

The vote was not unanimous. The lone no vote came from retired judge and A&T graduate Paul Jones, who said he was concerned that alumni might not support the school's teams because the school will no longer share a conference with its traditional rivals.

A&T leaders said they plan to continue playing traditional rivals - N.C. Central and other historically black colleges and universities - in football and other sports.

W. Taylor Reveley IV, president of Longwood University and the Big South Conference, called A&T "a perfect fit for the Big South" because of "its location, its proud history and academic reputation, its loyal base of alumni and other supporters, and its commitment to excellence."

A&T is the second school to leave the MEAC for the Big South. Hampton University in Virginia joined the Big South in 2018.

Police in North Carolina seek man they say set woman on fire

KINSTON (AP) - An unknown man approached a woman in her car, doused her with gasoline and set her on fire, police said Feb. 3.

An officer flagged down by a passerby found a 24-year-old woman on a sidewalk who was suffering severe burns to her upper body, Kinston police said in a Facebook post.

According to investigators, the woman was driving a car which had stopped when she was approached by an unknown person who doused the victim with a flammable liquid and set her on fire. The suspect in this case has been described as a black male of 20-30 years.

Emergency personnel responded to the victim, who was taken to a local hospital before she was flown to North Carolina Jaycee Burn Center in Chapel Hill. Her condition wasn't known on Feb. 3.

Annual "Mass Moral March" draws thousands in North Carolina

RALEIGH (AP) - Thousands of people took to the streets Feb. 8 in an annual march and rally designed to call for action on social and economic justice issues in North Carolina.

The 14th annual "Mass Moral March on Raleigh" drew support from the state NAACP, over 200 other organizations and their supporters.

Participants marched to the old Capitol building for a 14-point "People's Agenda" that includes laws that expand health care coverage, create livable wages, redress racial wrongs and grant collective bargaining for government employees.

The event began in 2007 with the leadership of then-state NAACP president the Rev. William Barber of Goldsboro, who is now president of the national organization Repairers of the Breach.

From the dozens of signs and banners people carried during the march, a clear message emerged: Change starts at the ballot box. "I'm tired of crying. I'm tired of mourning, and I'm going to fight with love," Barber told the crowd. "I'm going to fight with truth. I'm going to fight with marching. I'm going to fight at the ballot box. ... It's time to vote. It's time to intensify and embolden your agitation."



The statewide kickoff to Black History Month at the North Carolina Museum of History in Raleigh was held January 25. See scenes from the celebration on page 8. (Photo by Artije Photography/Ronald Parker.)

Woman's lawsuit seeks at least \$15M from NAACP, former boss

By Martha Waggoner

RALEIGH (AP) - A woman who repeatedly told the national NAACP that her supervisor in the North Carolina conference had sexually harassed her is suing the national group and her former boss.

Jazmyne Childs is seeking at least \$15 million for her emotional and mental distress that she says civil rights organization condoned through its inaction.

In the lawsuit filed Feb. 3 in Durham County court, attorneys for Childs said she was sexually harassed by the Rev. Curtis Gatewood when she was youth and college field secretary for the state conference in 2017. She suffers from depression, anxiety, nervousness and insomnia, the lawsuit says.

The lawsuit seeks more than \$5 million in compensatory damages and more than \$25,000 in punitive damages on each of three claims: battery, assault and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

NAACP officials and Gatewood did not immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press.

The national NAACP knew about the harassment when it received a report from an outside investigator in October 2017 that concluded that Gatewood harassed Childs, yet took no action, the lawsuit says.

The NAACP "is liable for the misconduct for Gatewood because the National NAACP ratified Gatewood's conduct," it says.

Gatewood, who was interim field director and managed the state conference NAACP staff, "suddenly resigned" in June 2017, the lawsuit said. However, he continued to show up at events attended by Childs, even after receiving a cease-and-desist letter in December 2017, the lawsuit said, leading to her resignation.

Childs, who was hired in January 2017, resigned in August 2018 because she feared Gatewood "would continue to stalk and intimidate her," the lawsuit says.

The lawsuit says that Childs, now 27, first became fearful of the now 60-year-old Gatewood on Feb. 6, 2017, when he closed an office door as they met to discuss a rally. "While talking to her, he kept looking her up and down in a sexual and intimidating manner," the lawsuit says. "Ms. Childs was afraid."

Similar harassment continued over the next few months, the lawsuit says.

On May 2, 2017, Childs was in a conference room with the lights off as she prepared for a co-worker's farewell party, it says. "Suddenly, she felt someone's breath on the back of her neck and then felt someone press his penis up against her buttocks," the lawsuit said, adding that Gatewood was behind her.

"Why are you hovering over me. That's gross. Move," Childs yelled, according to the lawsuit. Gatewood said he was looking for a receipt and left the room, it says.

Childs described the harassment at a news conference in September after she had written several letters to NAACP President Derrick Johnson. She wrote him in June and twice in September and sought a disciplinary hearing for Gatewood in her second letter. The NAACP responded to none of the letters, she said.

Johnson suspended Gatewood from membership the day after Childs' news conference, pending a hearing on her allegations.

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