

Reverse bias suit settlement debated

By KENDALL WILSON
Special to the NNPA
From The Philadelphia Tribune

Affirmative action advocates and opponents are offering mixed reviews over the high-profile case settled by the Piscataway, N.J., school board with Sharon Taxman, a white teacher who claimed she was laid off in violation of her civil rights.

On Thursday, Nov. 20, the school board decided it would not appeal Taxman's case before the U.S. Supreme Court and voted 5-3 to settle the \$443,500 suit.

The move came after the Black Leadership Forum (BLF) an alliance of civil rights groups that includes the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), agreed to pay 70 percent of the settlement.

The board decided to take this action because they believed the nation's highest court has grown increasingly hostile to race-based policies in recent years, and that the court was expected to yield a major ruling on affirmative action in the process.

Taxman was laid off from her teaching position in the business department in 1989, while Debra

Williams, a black teacher, was retained. Both were hired the same day and were considered equally qualified by the school board. But while Taxman had more teaching experience, Williams held the superior academic credentials with a master's degree.

Taxman, 50, said she was "glad" the case was over, and called the settlement "kind of anti-climactic."

Williams, in tears after the confirmation of the settlement, still insisted she was far more qualified than Taxman and contended that having an advanced degree apparently means nothing "but a slap in the face."

Meanwhile, advocates and opponents of affirmative action read different messages into the settlement.

"The great debate on affirmative action will go on in Congress, the states and the lower courts because affirmative action is legal," said Kathy Rogers, executive director of the National Organization of Women's (NOW) Legal Defense and Educational Fund. "It works, it's necessary and it's fair."

"This settlement demonstrates the panic within the civil rights

establishment," said Clint Bolick of the conservative Institute for Justice in Washington. "This could have been a knockout blow for racial preferences."

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, who helped raise some of the money in the settlement, described the case as one "riddled with problems."

"The black teacher has a master's degree and the white teacher didn't," said Jackson. "So, they are not equals academically. This case would have been distortion of the issue."

Taxman's attorney, Steven Klausner, said it was obvious to him that "they (civil rights groups) were afraid that affirmative action might be very damaged."

But NAACP President Kweisi Mfume agreed with Jackson about the damage that the "distortion" of the facts could have brought to the fight to maintain affirmative action.

"Distorted facts make for distorted results," he said. "It was in the best interests of the nation that the future of affirmative action be based on a clearly articulated record and not on a case that the extreme right wing has distorted and defined as something else."

Sports superstars fight prejudice in poster series

NEW YORK — If you really believe in America, prejudice is foul play, states the new Sports Poster Series issued by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL).

"This nine-poster series has major importance and resonance with sports fans everywhere, especially young people who look to these talented athletes as role models," said Howard P. Berkowitz, ADL national chairman, and Graham H. Foxman, ADL national director.

"These posters feature today's superstars of the world of sports, delivering a hard-hitting anti-prejudice message." The Prejudice is Foul Play sports posters profile Philadelphia 76ers captain Eric Lindros, Detroit Pistons forward Grant Hill, San Francisco 49er quarterback Steve Young, Olympic gymnast and medalist Kerri Strug, Miami heat coach Pat Riley, tennis star Michael Chang, LPGA championship golfer Nancy Lopez, WBC welterweight boxing champion Oscar De La Hoya and Alexi Lalas, defender for New England Revolution soccer team.

with the slogan, highlight the grace and power of the athletes. The posters come with a discussion guide for greater classroom impact. The ADL initiated its sports poster series in 1984.

The ADL Sports Poster Series can be ordered for \$20 plus \$3.90 for shipping and handling by calling 1-800-343-5540 or faxing to (201) 652-1973. Order this series, and for a limited time receive a free special bonus: Michael Jordan and Charles Barkley four-color sports posters.

The Anti-Defamation League, founded in 1913, is the world's leading organization fighting anti-Semitism through programs and services that counteract hatred, prejudice and bigotry.

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SOS expands to 12 new counties, thanks to grant

Gov. Jim Hunt's SOS (Support Our Students) after-school initiative is expanding to 12 new counties and boosting its efforts in 10 counties where it is already underway, including Forsyth County.

"I've seen first-hand the tremendous difference SOS can make in a student's life," said Hunt, who volunteers with SOS along with his wife, Carolyn. "Thousands of children across our state are getting the vital one-on-one guidance that can really keep them on the right path. Our goal should be nothing less than to help every child, in every county who needs it."

meet the needs of youth in their community.

In Forsyth County, the extra funding will allow SOS to open a new site at downtown Middle School, serving 80 more students each day. Last year Forsyth SOS started a partnership with the police department, allowing off-duty police officers to volunteer to mentor and tutor students. Another partnership with the Kernersville YMCA allowed SOS to serve three more middle schools.

Hunt created SOS in 1994 during the Special Session on Crime as a means of preventing juvenile crime and increasing student performance. SOS currently reaches 9,000 youth in 64 counties. With this expansion, SOS will reach more than 11,300 youth in 76 counties.

SOS helps prevent juvenile crime by rallying communities around their young people, helping to steer them away from trouble. Students get help with homework, and a chance to participate in productive activities such as drug and alcohol prevention and conflict resolution workshops.

In 1996, SOS was honored as one of the most innovative efforts in the country by the Council of State Governments. Last year, an independent evaluation of the program found that SOS counties had fewer training school commitments and fewer "latchkey" children, and the youth involved in the program had improved grades.



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