

News at a Glance

Spellings: 'Serious lapses' in publicity

WASHINGTON (AP) — Education Secretary Margaret Spellings said last Friday that senior agency officials showed "serious lapses in judgment" and a disregard for taxpayer money in the hiring of conservative commentator Armstrong Williams.

Spellings, responding to an independent investigation of the hiring, appeared to put blame for the controversy on her predecessor, Rod Paige, though she didn't name him.

"My personal observation is the Office of the Secretary carries weight," Spellings said in a statement. "When the secretary, his/her chief of staff and other senior officers urge, hint, suggest or recommend anything, it can start a chain reaction within the building to carry out the request, such as what occurred beginning in March 2003. As a result, it is the secretary who must be careful about and is ultimately responsible for the signals that his/her office sends."

The report by the department's inspector general was to be released later that afternoon.



Williams

Teacher resigns after appearing in blackface at basketball game

MACON, Ga. (AP) — A high school teacher who wore blackface at a student-faculty basketball game has resigned, saying, "It was poor judgment and will never happen again."

Greg Dougherty said the school had offered to renew his contract for the fall, but he turned it down. The deal would have seen him suspended without pay and barred from school property and events for the rest of the current academic year.

Photographs from the Central High School game on March 25 show Dougherty wearing an exaggerated, Afro-style wig with brownish makeup covering his face and arms. A student also is pictured wearing brown makeup on his face and arms.

"I offer an apology to anybody I offended," Dougherty said last Thursday. "My intent was never to offend. I was trying to generate laughter. It was poor judgment and will never happen again."

In 1999 Dougherty was accused of making sexually inappropriate comments to female students, Bibb County Schools Superintendent Sharon Patterson said.

"There's a pattern now of judgment issues," Patterson said.

'Little Rock Nine' stamp due in August

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Commemorating a historic moment in the country's race relations, the U.S. Postal Service will issue a "1957 Little Rock Nine" stamp this summer.

The stamp will be part of the Postal Service series To Form a More Perfect Union, which commemorates nine other civil rights milestones. The Little Rock Nine stamp will become available with a ceremony at Little Rock Central High School on Aug. 30.

The school became internationally known Sept. 2, 1957, when Gov. Orval Faubus sent Arkansas National Guardsmen there "to maintain ... the peace and good order of the community" and directed the Guard to prevent nine black students from entering the all-white school.

President Dwight Eisenhower later federalized the National Guard and sent the 101st Airborne Division Troops to the school to enforce court-ordered school integration. The black students attended school the rest of the year under federal protection.

Although the series of stamps will be available at post offices across the country, Little Rock postal officials will offer a special cancellation on the day of issuance and for 30 days afterward. Stamp collectors, historians and those connected to commemorative stamps often seek the cancellation, which adds to the collector value of the stamp, said Leisa Tolliver-Gay, a customer relations coordinator for the Postal Service in Arkansas.

The Little Rock Nine stamp is based on George Hunt's 1997 "America Cares" painting.

It depicts nine children, a soldier, and another adult who represents the black students' mentor, Daisy Bates, and the parents and other adults who worked behind the scenes.

Gates to step down as Harvard African-American studies chairman

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (AP) — Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. said Friday he will resign as chairman of the African and African-American studies department in 2006 and intends to remain at the university.

Gates, 54, said his plan is not related to the loss of three of its scholars this year, or to university President Lawrence Summers, whose leadership has been criticized this year. Gates said he has no plans to leave Harvard after stepping down as chairman July 1, 2006, and intends to continue teaching and directing Harvard's W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research.

"Fifteen years is long enough for any chair," Gates told The Boston Globe. "I would never leave the chairmanship if I thought the department was vulnerable in any way."

When former Harvard President Neil Rudenstine recruited Gates from Duke University in 1991, the program had only two professors. Gates is credited with growing the department and raising the profile of African and African-American studies.

The program lost high-profile scholars in 2002, when Cornel West left for Princeton after a disagreement with Summers. Another celebrated professor, K. Anthony Appiah, also left for Princeton that year.

Last fall, Lawrence Bobo and his wife, Marcyliena Morgan, went to Stanford after Morgan was denied tenure, and Michael C. Dawson, a close collaborator with Bobo, left for the University of Chicago.



Gates

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Sharpton: FBI probe is 'bogus'

BY HERB BOYD
AMSTERDAM NEWS

NEW YORK (NNPA) — Angered by a headline in the New York Post, the Rev. Al Sharpton called a press conference in front of the paper's headquarters and charged that the story was "bogus."

The Post's story, as Sharpton explained, was based on one that appeared in the Philadelphia Inquirer.

One of the most damaging assertions in the Post's story states that "an FBI wiretap picked up (La-Van) Hawkins telling (Ronald) White he believed they had raised more than \$140,000 for Sharpton in the previous quarter — but Hawkins fretted because Sharpton had reported only about \$50,000 on his federal election filing." He's a train wreck — a plane crash waiting to happen," Hawkins told White about Sharpton, according to the paper.

"That's a very important sentence," Sharpton said. "And since they used this as the basis of their story, they should tell the whole story."

Sharpton then recited the part omitted by the Post, quoting from the Inquirer: "(La-Van) Hawkins apparently was referring to news reports that Sharpton had raised \$54,000 in the second quarter of 2003. It is unclear whether Hawkins understood the details of the campaign-finance reports, because Federal Election Commission records show that



File Photo

Al Sharpton is defending himself against serious allegations.

Hawkins and his associates made major contributions in the first quarter of 2003."

Sharpton then related that several weeks ago the Post erroneously reported that he and William Thompson, the

city's comptroller, were under a federal probe for a scheme to defraud the pension fund, which is overseen by Thompson.

"A prosecutor stood in federal court and said there was no

wrongdoing," Sharpton continued. "In fact, they dropped our names from the situation. The Post didn't report that. ... I challenge not only the Post to come forward and print the

See Sharpton on A4

BET to cancel its nightly newscast

BY HAZEL TRICE EDNEY
NNPA CORRESPONDENT

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Black Entertainment Television has axed its only remaining public affairs program, "BET Nightly News," landing another blow to the nation's black news and information sources.

"People had been hopeful that there would be some shred of information relevant to the black community left on BET," said Ron Daniels, executive director of the New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights. "But clearly there is more of an emphasis on entertainment than education. This is a tragic loss and not a very hopeful sign."

BET President and Chief Operating Officer Debra Lee announced the programming change last week, saying the network will revert to hourly news updates throughout the day instead of one set program in the evening.

"Strategically, this new approach strengthens our news product by responding directly to the changing needs and preferences of BET viewers," said Lee in a news statement. "When combined with plans to expand our news specials, we'll have news programming that's fast, flexible, accessible and timely."

"There are other news coverage options at our disposal which we're also considering, including the possibility of a weekend news magazine or analysis show."

BET founder and CEO Robert L. Johnson, who has undergone much criticism after the cutting of other news-oriented programming, was quick to explain the new program format.

"News and public affairs have always been historically important parts of the BET lineup, and have earned numerous awards over the years. But it's now time to enhance our delivery of that product in a way that's more engaging," he said in a statement. "By no means is this a lessening of our news commitment, but instead an improvement of our overall news offering."

What BET officials are calling a "new approach" is actually an old one that BET



Debra Lee

used in the 1990.

BET viewers see the new format, set to start this summer, as a continued dismantling of substantive programs for black viewers that started with the cutting of "Lead Story," "BET Tonight" and "Teen Summit," all in late 2002. "BET Nightly News" was the last major news source to leave the station since BET was purchased by Viacom, one of the largest global media empires, in 2000.

However, Johnson and Lee

have repeatedly stated that program decisions have been made by them, not Viacom.

"I wasn't surprised," said Ed Gordon, former host of BET's "Lead Story" and now host of "News and Notes with Ed Gordon," aired each weekday on National Public Radio. "I think that the news show had been diluted over the years and the show that they produce now, while all of the people were very hardworking and well-intentioned at putting

See BET on A5



Bates

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