



Johnson Named New Senior Director Of External Relations At The YWCA

- Page 3

Black Press: The Voice Of Black America – Part III

- Page 4

Movie Review: Dawn Of The Planet Of The Apes

- Page 8



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Black Leaders Call For Investigation Into DOC Employment Practices

On Tuesday, representatives from many local Black organizations held a press conference to call attention the lack of employment and advancement opportunities within the Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC).

The group — which includes the Seattle, Tacoma and State NAACPs; the Tacoma Black Collective; the Seattle Black Firefighters Association; the Washington Black Christian Clergy; the Community Coalition for Contracts and Jobs; A. Phillip Randolph Institute and others — wrote a letter to U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder asking the U.S. Justice Department to investigate the “deplorable and significant instances of racial discrimination in the Washington State Department of Corrections.”

The groups claim that the DOC has a culture of institutional racism that has become systemic and experienced at all levels of the agency, as many employees despite their qualifications and experience are being denied jobs and access to opportunities for promotions.

According to Lacy Steele, president emeritus of the Seattle King County NAACP, African Americans make up 19 percent of those who are incarcerated, but only 5.3 percent of the DOC workforce.

“There is an absence of African Americans in positions of decision making and we want to do something about it,” said Steele. “The best way to do something about it is to get somebody from the outside to come in and investigate.”

Eddie Rye, Jr. with the Coalition for Contracts and Jobs says that the groups chose to call on the Attorney General’s office because they believe that the 1964 Civil Rights Act supersedes Initiative 200 — which outlaws affirmative action in Washington state.

“Many in this state and many public agencies are allowing the



Community activist Eddie Rye, Jr., left, talks to the media about the employment practices of the Washington State Department of Corrections, while Renton City Councilmember Greg Taylor, right, looks on. Staff Photo/Chris B. Bennett.

state law to trump federal law,” says Rye.

“A law is being violated,” Rye continued. “Title VI and Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act is being violated. We don’t need to go to court, if there is a violation then that violation needs to be dealt with.”

According to the group, individuals hired in positions of influence within the department are “hand selected and appointed without being required to go through formal interview processes” and qualified employees are not given the chance to compete for positions.

“All of the appointment of the last six months have been White males,” said Rye. “Most of them without any corrections experience and no job announcement.”

“They can do it because of I-200 and it is something that we cannot accept any longer,” added Rye.

Verlene Jones-Davis of the A. Phillip Randolph Institute agrees.

“When you start to examine the staff that works for the Department of Corrections, we don’t see people that look like

us,” says Jones-Davis.

“When you look at their education and training materials and the materials they send out for recruitment we do not see African Americans on them,” she continued. “It sends a message to our community that they have no intentions of providing jobs for us.”

The group is also concerned about other agencies and municipalities across the state, as they feel that many of them are also hiding behind I-200 to deny opportunities for employment and advancement to people of color.

Renton City Councilman Greg Taylor says that these same disparities in employment exist in many cities located in South King County. According to Taylor, Renton and Kent have populations that are approximately 51 percent people of color but make up only about 11 percent of the public workforce, Seatac and Tukwila have populations that are nearly 62 percent people of color and also have low levels of minority representation in the public sector workforce.

“Our residents pay taxes and

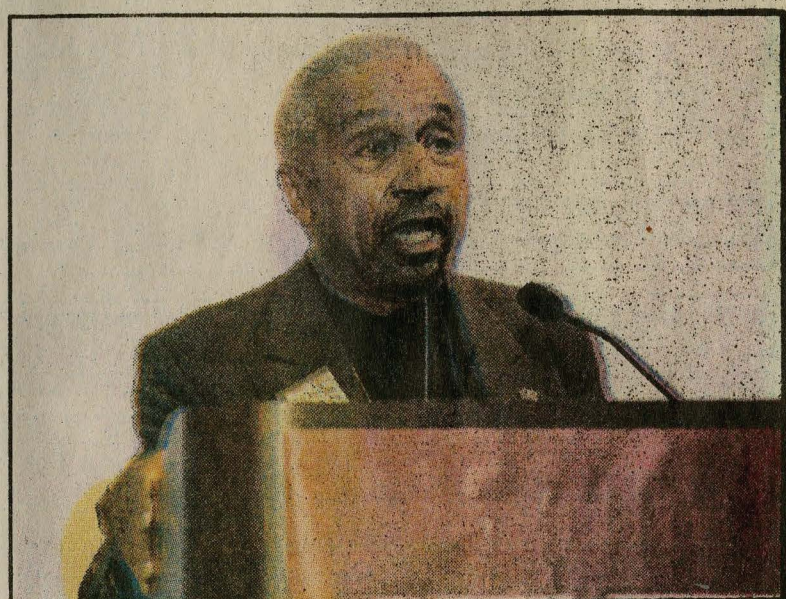
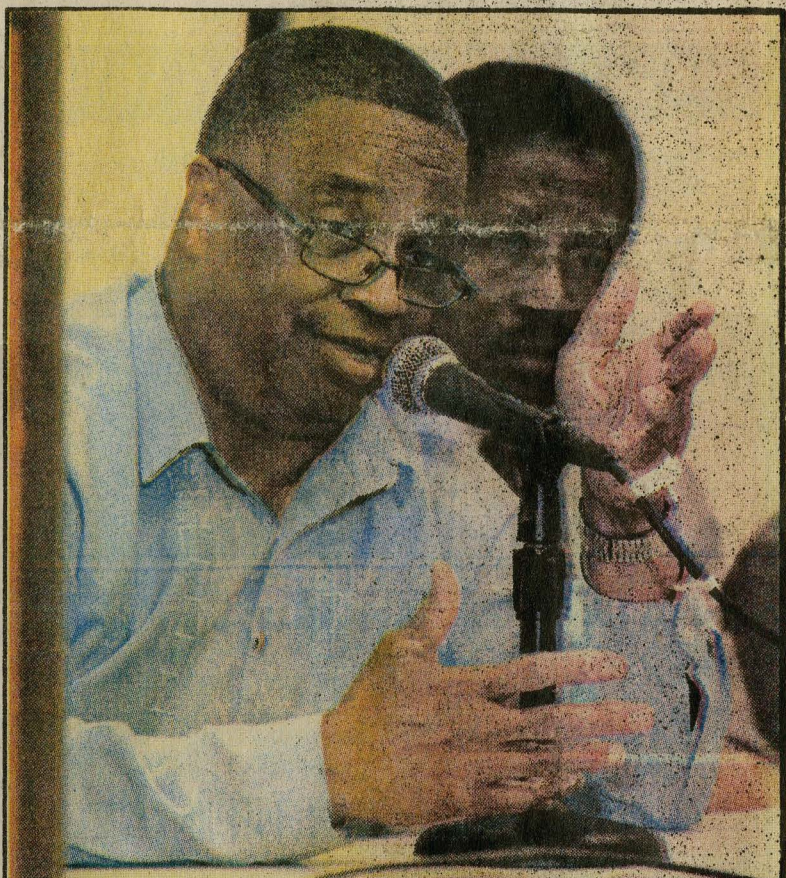
when you use public dollars to exclude the hiring of people of color then that creates another problem,” says Taylor. “I’m very interested in trying to unwind the notion that I-200 has some validity to prevent hiring qualified people of color. African American people particularly because we seem to be the group that is most unlikely to get hired.”

“If we are going to be the highest number behind the jail cells then there should be people hired who are sensitive to our culture, to our needs, and who are committed to rehabilitation and insuring that we having opportunities when we leave [prison] as well as opportunities to work for the department of corrections,” said Jones-Davis.

The group is waiting to hear back from the DOJ about their inquiry as well as local and state officials. However, they vow that they will not let this issue die.

“We are the watchdogs and we are not going anywhere,” said Rev. Gregory Christopher president of the Tacoma NAACP. “We will be here until justice is done.”

Pictorial Highlights Of Seattle’s 50th Anniversary Celebration Of The 1964 Civil Rights Act



Photos by Flyright Productions

Seattle Public Schools To Create New Office Of Internal Audit And Ethics

In an effort to improve accountability and transparency in Seattle Public Schools, Superintendent José Banda announced that Seattle Public Schools is establishing its own Office of Internal Audit and Ethics.

The new office, which reports directly to the Seattle School Board, will be managed by current SPS Internal Auditor Andrew Medina, who will now also serve as the District’s Ethics Officer.

The Office of Internal Audit and Ethics will offer the same

services that have been provided by the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC): receiving and investigating complaints of violations of the District’s ethics policy and managing complaints of retaliation against whistleblowers. The office will oversee the district’s whistleblower hotline and website, and is committed to maintaining the anonymity of callers who wish to remain anonymous.

Medina, who came to Seattle Public Schools from the Port of

Seattle when the district established an Office of Internal Audit in 2011, will continue to work independently, reporting directly to the chair of the School Board’s Audit and Finance Committee. Medina has 21 years of experience as both an internal auditor and auditor, and is a Certified Fraud Examiner and a Certified Public Accountant.

“We want to thank the City of Seattle and Seattle Elections and Ethics Commission Executive Director Wayne Barnett for their work over the past three years to assist SPS in

developing an ethics policy and providing ethics training for district employees,” said Superintendent José Banda. “Andrew Medina has done an excellent job as internal auditor and is the perfect choice to provide oversight and management of this new office.”

Medina’s appointment is effective immediately. The new ethics hotline is (206) 252-0004 and email is ethics@seattleschools.org.

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