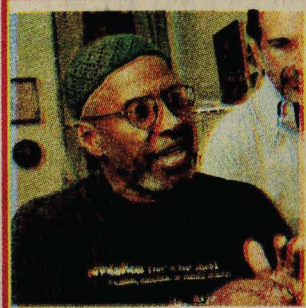




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The Seattle Medium

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Vendors Named In Seattle Schools Financial Probe To Tell Their Story

The Urban League Of Metropolitan Seattle (ULMS) and other prominent members of the African American community who were named in a recently released state auditor's report questioning \$1.8 million in expenses associated with The Seattle Public Schools Regional Small Business Development Program — a program created to help local small businesses compete for contracting opportunities with the district — will hold a press conference Wednesday morning to talk about their role with the program.

According to the auditor's report, Seattle Public Schools spent over \$1.5 million for "questionable" services that allegedly did not benefit the district directly or could have been performed by district personnel, and over \$280,000 for services it didn't receive or for services that benefited a private company. The report claims that

the ULMS received \$595,000 from the school district over four years to help prepare minority contractors for government work.

For example, the report indicates that the ULMS was paid \$25,000 for a software subscription fee for a database designed to match small business owners with general contractors that according to district employees was allegedly not utilized by the district.

In addition to the ULMS, other members of the African American community were named as allegedly overbilling the district, or whose work allegedly provided little or no public benefit. Many of the vendors in question claim that they did nothing wrong and that the report does not tell the complete story.

In a press advisory released by the ULMS, during the press conference Tony Benjamin, acting CEO of the ULMS, will

address "the recent untrue allegations that the Urban League might not have lived up to their obligations in a \$245,000 contract signed in 2005 with the Seattle School District, with subsequent services rendered for payment of an additional \$340,000."

Community Activist Eddie Rye, Jr., who was cited in the report for allegedly billing the district for more hours than spent at meetings, disputes some of the finding as well. In a statement provided to the Medium by Rye, Rye claims that he "filed monthly reports initially of [his] activities that were in congruence with [his] scope of work approved by the Seattle School District, later the reporting requirements were changed to weekly summaries. All of these reports should be on file with the District and were available to the Auditors and if there were any questions regarding my performance the

auditors certainly didn't express them to me during my interview with them."

Rye, along with other activists, claims that the auditors' narrow scope of investigation prevented them from seeing the overall benefit of the program.

"The Auditors had absolutely no clue of small business development, some of

the comments made in their audit report are personal opinions and I was not asked to respond to some of their findings that were published," said Rye in the statement.

Benjamin hopes that the record will finally be made straight and that the ULMS will be cleared of any wrongdoing.

"Despite the allegations, inferences, audits and headlines,

let me be clear: we lived up to contractual obligations and requirements to the Seattle School District — and then some," Benjamin said.

The Seattle School board will also determine the fate of Seattle Schools Superintendent Dr. Maria Goodloe-Johnson, as a result of the report/investigation, this week.

Thousands March Against Re-segregation In N. Carolina



Thousands march against segregation in Wake County, N.C. Schools. Protesters will return to press legislators March 9.

By Joi C. Ridley

(TriceEdneyWire.com) - Thousands of people from around the country gathered in North Carolina early this month to say no to attempts to re-segregate the schools in the state's largest county.

The Wake County school board is run by new Tea Party-backed school board members who have advanced an agenda of "neighborhood schooling" that would drastically reduce school diversity and roll back the clock on years of progress. In January, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan condemned the school board's plan and a complaint has been filed with the education department's Office for Civil Rights by the state NAACP.

"Separate but equal was wrong then, and it is wrong now," stated NAACP President and CEO Benjamin Todd Jealous. "We cannot in good moral conscience separate the struggle for diverse and superior education from the struggle for jobs and economic solutions. We have to fight for our children, for good schools, for good jobs, and for a prosperous future for all people in our nation."

Next steps for the People's Movement include a March 9 return to the legislature in the state to directly engage with lawmakers against the re-segregation proposals. Student groups are being urged to participate. Should the proposed policies pass, parents of affected children would also be eligible to file claims based the Civil Rights Act of 1964's Title VI, which prohibits discrimination in federally assisted entities, such as public schools.

Led by a coalition of activists from the NAACP and

more than 100 social justice and civil rights groups, thousands gathered for the "People's Movement" and march to the North Carolina State Legislature building Feb. 12. The blended crowd of nearly two thousand supporters met for the fifth annual HKonJ (Historic Thousands on Jones Street) and People's Assembly Mass Demonstration and March.

The rally advanced behind a clarion call of "Forward Together, Not One Step Back" and promoted a 14-point agenda of progressive causes, including the need for better jobs and more education spending. Leaders of local chapters of larger national organizations, such as AFL-CIO, spoke to issues of economic justice, voter empowerment and immigration.

But many said they were there to say no to attempts to return to the days before the landmark *Brown v. Board* Supreme Court decision that ruled separate schools unconstitutional.

"Our fight in Wake County against re-segregation should be our fight throughout the nation," stated Reverend Dr. William J. Barber II, head of the North Carolina State Conference of the NAACP. "We will never back away from our struggle to ensure that every child has access to a high quality, constitutional, well-funded and diverse public education. We must also never retreat from our struggle for labor rights and a nation that keeps its commitment to the poor, two fundamental pillars of democracy."

Wake County is not alone in advancing backward-looking policies. School boards in New Hanover County (North

Carolina) and Manatee County (Florida) have been criticized for promoting re-segregation through neighborhood schooling. In Huntsville, Alabama, the local NAACP recently released a report that found a forty-point gap between white and black students on state-administered math and reading tests.

"The term 'neighborhood schools' when implemented usually means racially identifiable high poverty schools for some children and private schools with public dollars for those more affluent," Barber said. "When you want to dismantle (the current integration policy), based on political ideology, not on educational research, we have to challenge it."

The NAACP has pledged to mount opposition to any other re-segregation proposals in North Carolina and around the nation.

Marchers represented people from all walks of life with a heavy presence of younger activists. Besides news vans and traditional media sources, the crowd was flooded with camera phones and video cameras projecting their material to social media networks.

Barber also urges civic organizations to broadly spread voter registration appeals to their memberships before November 2012.

"The rally is over, but it has served many purposes for our larger goal," Barber said. "We were able to connect people across racial, age and gender lines for one cause: equality. They can share their stories with their networks and we can build a movement that is larger than any one organization."

Blacks Would Be Hit Hardest By Cuts, Alterations In Social Security

By Hazel Trice Edney

Trice Edney News Wire Editor-in-Chief

WASHINGTON (TriceEdneyWire.com) - African-Americans across the nation would be hit hardest if Congressional Republicans have their way in slashing Social Security as an affront to President Obama's recommended 2012 budget.

Therefore, Black organizations and constituents must assert their voices in current and upcoming debates, according to a report released by the Joint Center on Political and Economic Studies.

"African Americans benefit significantly from the Social Security program—as retirees, as disabled workers or their dependents, and as survivors of deceased workers. Although black Americans are more likely than white Americans to receive disability and survivor benefits and less likely to receive retirement benefits, their return from taxes paid into the Social Security system exceeds that of whites," says the report titled "African Americans and Social Security: A Primer".

The report, written by Dr. Wilhelmina A. Leigh of the Joint Center, continues: "In addition, older African Americans are more reliant on Social Security benefits than other groups. Thus, conversations about modifying the Social Security system must include voices of African Americans and other racial/ethnic subpopulations whose dependence on the system is great but whose patterns of usage may differ from the norm."

President Obama has recommended funding of at least \$12.5 billion for Social Security's administrative expenses in his fiscal year 2012 budget which starts in October. Republicans have threatened to cut \$1.7 billion of that even as Social Security Commissioner

Michael J. Astrue pleads for full funding in order to continue operating efficiently.

"The President's budget request of \$12.522 billion for Social Security's administrative expenses will allow us to maintain staffing in our front-line components, fund ongoing activities, and cover our inflationary increases. It will allow us to reduce our hearings and initial disability claims backlogs, and to continue to reverse the decline in our program integrity work. Program integrity work not only pays for itself, but also produces considerable savings to the taxpayers," Astrue said in a release.

He adds, "Full funding by Congress of the President's budget request is critical. This budget request is the minimum the agency needs to continue to reduce key backlogs and to increase deficit-reducing program integrity work. It will allow us to build on the considerable progress we have achieved, progress that is vital to the millions of people who depend on our services and to the American taxpayer."

According to the Joint Center, Blacks are far more likely than Whites to be hurt the most by cuts or Social Security alterations because they receive far more benefits for several key reasons.

"Among Social Security beneficiaries, African Americans are more likely than whites to receive both survivor benefits and disability benefits," the Center's report states. "Because African Americans are more likely than whites to work in hazardous jobs, the relative frequency with which black workers receive disability benefits and with which their spouses and children receive disability and survivor benefits is greater than for white workers."

"More than one of every

eight (13 percent) black Americans who receive Social Security benefits gets survivor benefits, in contrast to about one of every 10 white Americans (11 percent). The comparison for disabled beneficiaries is more striking, with African American Social Security beneficiaries (31 percent) more than twice as likely as white recipients (15 percent) to receive these benefits."

The report also states that for two of every five Black retiree households age 65 or older, Social Security benefits are the only source of support.

For more than 75 years, Social Security Social Security - formally called the Old Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance (OASDI) program - has provided hundreds of millions of people with funding for retirement, disability and survivor benefits for spouses and loved ones. Astrue said despite a huge increase in the demand for services during tough economic times, "we have reversed a trend of declining service and an increasing backlog in our disability workloads."

But this trend could end and even go backwards if cuts are made.

Ralph Everett, president and CEO of the Joint Center, says Social Security is an "integral part of the nation's social safety net." He states in the report's foreword that the Joint Center will remain engaged in debate and advocacy — alongside AARP — which partnered in the compilation of the report.

Everett concludes: "We at the Joint Center look forward to engaging in these deliberations to ensure that the Social Security system remains an unfrayed part of our social safety net and continues to help meet the needs of American workers and their dependents."