

# 'War' declared

## Backers of Pa. affirmative action law promise to fight threatened reversal

By Sherry Stone  
Tribune Staff

Local proponents of affirmative action view recent attacks against the policy as "war," and have launched a battle of their own. The most recent attack was from state Rep. Ron Gamble from Allegheny County who proposed an act (House Rule 363) to end statewide affirmative action in terms of hiring, public education, and state contracts.

In a rally planned for tomorrow at the Capitol Media Center in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus President state Rep. Harold James and a coalition of representatives will speak out against efforts to overturn affirmative action in Pennsylvania. The group will represent a cross-section of supporters of minority set-asides, he said.

"... to paraphrase Dr. King, affirmative action 'cannot make an employer love me, but it can keep him from refusing to hire me because of the color of my skin,'" said James.

He will also discuss affirmative action's protection of women from sexual harassment and discrimination on the basis of sex, of older workers against age discrimination in employment, and the policy's protection of handicapped persons and gays.

The Pennsylvania Legislative Black Conference press conference comes on the heels of a press conference held jointly yesterday by the Philadelphia Branch of the NAACP, members of the North Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce and state Rep. Curtis Thomas in the Municipal Services Building.

Gamble issued a statement in mid-February, saying it was time for the General Assembly to "abolish affirmative action and replace the divisiveness engendered by affirmative action with policies that are based solely on merit."

Gamble also received support from Northeast state Rep. Chris Gamble on House Bill No. 363. The act seeks to prohibit "discrimination or preferential

treatment of an individual or group in the operation of the Commonwealth's system of public employment, public education, or public contracting."

However, the various African-American leaders contend that too often, merit still isn't enough when African Americans and other non-

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whites seek jobs and contracts. According to the NAACP, Thomas and the North Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, even with affirmative action, women and non-whites still receive less than five percent of state contracting opportunities. Paired with the fact that women and minorities make up more than 51 percent of Pennsylvania's economy, the group said one reason for the discrepancy in numbers is "de facto discrimination."

"The North Philadelphia Chamber represents a number (400) of minority and women contractors, suppliers, and consultants who will be excluded from the opportunity to participate in the state contracting process," said Twanna Bivins, Chamber executive director. "We feel that it's ridiculous that with minorities and women comprising over 51 percent of Pennsylvania's population, they receive less than five percent of its contracting opportunities."

She added, "State Representative Gamble seems to conclude that affirmative action is, in fact, reverse discrimination rather than a remedy for historical discrimination, but the facts prove him wrong."

Affirmative action was formalized under Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency when he signed Executive Order 11246. The perception,

proponents say, has been that Blacks made overwhelming gains in the workplace as a result of the order, but they say statistics show that is just an illusion.

U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics printed in *Black Enterprise* magazine show that white males make up 91.7 percent of officers in corporate America and 88.1 percent of directors. Their share of managerial jobs declined from 55 percent to 47 percent between 1983 and 1993, at a time when white women saw their share of jobs increase from 37 percent to 42 percent. For Blacks, however, managerial and professional positions rose only from six percent to seven percent during the same 10-year span.

According to James, in Pennsylvania, "whites make up 86 percent of the state government workforce and white males hold 84 percent of top state jobs."

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