

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION?

If You're White, You're All Right ... But If You're Black, Stay Back

By SANDY HAMM
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In their haste to terminate affirmative action, white male politicians inadvertently gave their opponents a strong argument:

If affirmative action is unnecessary and leads to reverse discrimination, why are white males making the most money and 90 percent of the personnel and political decisions in America today?

White males are 33 percent of the U.S. population, but they are, according to the National Rainbow Coalition:

- 100 percent of U.S. presidents, 90 percent of U.S. Senate and 80 percent of U.S. House of Representatives;
- 97 percent of school superintendents and 80 percent of tenured college professors;
- 92 percent of Forbes 400 wealthiest individuals;
- 99.9 percent of professional sports team owners.

The numbers speak for themselves, say members of the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus, who are preparing for a private strategy session on the issue March 16 at Bethel AME

church in Harrisburg.

A fact sheet on affirmative action distributed by the Black Caucus packs a punch with statistics showing white dominance in state contracts, hiring and colleges—the same areas affirmative action policies would no longer apply under House Bill 360 proposed by Rep. Ron Gamble, D-Oakdale.

"These figures tell something," said Rep. Joseph Preston, D-Homewood, who attacked his fellow lawmakers for their own hiring practices. Few minorities hold legislative jobs, even though people of color represent 52 percent of the population in Harrisburg.

"We're talking about inequities, in business, employment and services," Preston said. "It's unfortunate that the only way most African-American employees in the House can get hired is that we have Black elected officials."

Caucus members know that intellectual discussion cannot sway opposition based on racism and bigotry. "If all unemployed African-Americans replaced white workers tomorrow, only 2 percent of the white workforce would be affected," says

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their fact sheet.

Rep. Bill Robinson, D-Schenley Heights, wants to focus instead on overhauling affirmative action policies, to shore up the programs that work and correct problem areas. Many were put in place 30 years ago.

"There is a presumption that if the laws in place provide opportunities for people of color and women, that it's going to work and that the people administering these programs have the capability of making it work. That's not always true," Robinson said.

There is also an assumption that Blacks should be limited to certain areas of government, such as welfare, education, human resources, labor and industry, Preston said. Even when affirmative action opens the door, Black applicants often

are not interviewed.

Affirmative action is a way to ensure that women, veterans, people with disabilities and all minority groups are in the pool of job applicants, the Black Caucus argues.

Their research shows:

- Whites are 90 percent of the administrators, 87 percent of professionals/technicians and 86 percent of other occupations with state agencies and commissions;

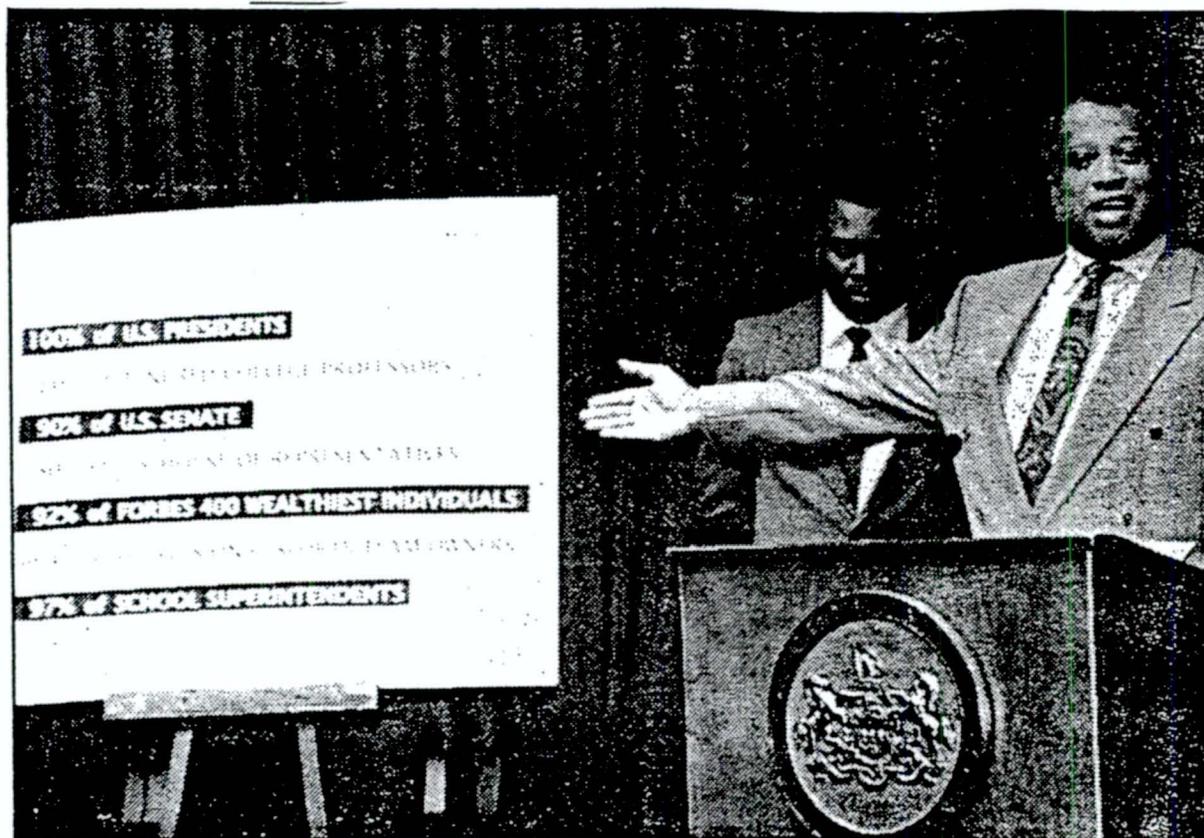
- 86 percent of all commonwealth employees are white;

- 92 percent of students in the state system of education are white;

- Whites are awarded 95.2 percent of state construction contracts;

- Unemployment among Blacks is triple that among whites in Pittsburgh, Harrisburg and Philadelphia.

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITY—State Rep. Joseph Preston refers to a chart illustrating the disproportionate success of white males, at a news conference held by the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus to rebuff critics of affirmative action.