



Gingrich, Sharpton Still Odd Couple

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, often talked about as a possible Republican candidate for President in 2012, should cut his ties to controversial civil rights activist Al Sharpton, National Legal and Policy Center President Peter Flaherty said. As reported on the Internet news magazine Newsmax, Flaherty has called on Gingrich to terminate his association with the fiery black preacher after Sharpton had spoken out against conservative talk-show host Rush Limbaugh's involvement with a group seeking to buy the St. Louis Rams of the National Football League.



Sharpton, whom Flaherty called a "despicable figure" engaged in racial "antagonism," accused Limbaugh of racism and urged the NFL to refuse approval of the sale of the team to any organization of which Limbaugh was a part. Limbaugh was later dropped from the group seeking to purchase the Rams. Flaherty also called on several large corporations in America to terminate their funding of Sharpton's organization, the National Action Network.

"Most people are familiar with Al Sharpton, but what's less known is that his organization, the National Action Network, is bankrolled by corporate America," Flaherty told Kathleen Walker of Newsmax.TV. "Those include companies that we patronize all the time, like Anheuser-Busch, Wal-Mart, Colgate-Palmolive." Flaherty also named Home Depot among the companies contributing to Sharpton's organization. "We are asking these companies to end their support for Sharpton. We feel that it's inappropriate for these businesses to be supporting someone who is engaged in the promotion of hate crimes over the years and who has sought to increase antagonism between whites and blacks in this country." The national Legal and Policy Center bills itself as a non-profit foundation "promoting ethics in public life." Flaherty was co-founder of the organization in 1991 and has been its president ever since. From 1984 to 1988 he was chairman of the lobbying group Citizens for Reagan.

Flaherty reports on his organization's website that people sending e-mails to Wal-Mart asking that company to stop its funding of Sharpton's organization have received the following reply:

Walmart supports the National Action Network (NAN) as part of an ongoing effort to partner with national organizations that support issues and initiatives of importance to our customers, and the communities we serve.

Our support for NAN is focused on addressing health and wellness issues and other issues important to our customers and associates. Our company will continue to support organizations that can further our mission to help people live better.

PepsiCo, meanwhile, has responded to e-mailers with this message: "As a global consumer products company that serves all people, we support many not-for-profit organizations with a variety of missions.

The leaders of these organizations may at times have points of view that do not necessarily represent



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those of PepsiCo." E-mailers got a partial denial from Colgate-Palmolive. "We did not participated in the 2009 NAN Conference in New York City," the company said.

"That's interesting," Flaherty wrote, "because the conference program lists Colgate-Palmolive as a 'sponsor.'" A company ad in a separate program from the same event, Flaherty noted, said "Colgate-Palmolive is honored to be named Corporation of the Year by the National Action Network...." The corporation acknowledged it was among 40 corporate sponsors of a multi-day conference in Memphis in April, 2008 organized by NAN to commemorate Martin Luther King, Jr. and celebrate his legacy. King was assassinated in Memphis 40 years earlier after he had come to that city in support of a strike by sanitation workers.

Sharpton, meanwhile, is threatening to sue Limbaugh, claiming he had nothing to do with the Crown Heights riots or the Freddie's Fashion Mart massacre, as Limbaugh claimed in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed that appeared over the past weekend.

Sharpton, a Baptist minister, has often been accused of inflaming passions in racially charged confrontations. The incident for which he is probably most famous is the 1987 Tawana Brawley case, in which a 15-year-old African American girl claimed to have been raped and beaten by six white men, some of them police officers in Wappinger, New York. When a grand jury concluded Brawley's story was a hoax, Sharpton and two attorneys accused Dutchess County prosecutor Steven Pagonos of racism and of being one of the perpetrators of the alleged abduction and rape. The three were sued for slander and ordered to pay \$345,000 in damages. Sharpton refused to pay his share of the damages, which was later paid by a number of black business leaders.

During the Crown Heights riot in 1991, when black residents clashed with groups of Jews, Sharpton reportedly said: "If the Jews want to get it on, tell them to pin their yarmulkes back and come over to my house."

In 1995, when a black record store owner was about to be evicted from his place of business in Harlem by the owner of Freddie's Fashion Mart, Sharpton led a protest and said: "We will not stand by and allow them to move this brother so that some white interloper can expand his business." One of the protestors entered Freddie's Fashion Mart, shot several customers and set the store on fire. Sharpton later expressed regret for his "white interloper" comment, but denied responsibility for inflaming or provoking the violence.

In 2007, New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo began investigating the National Action Network for allegedly failing to make the financial reports required of nonprofits. According to a report in the *New York Post*, several major corporations, including Anheuser-Busch and Colgate-Palmolive, had donated thousands of dollars to Sharpton's organization. Donations were made to prevent boycotts or rallies, the Post said.

In the latest controversy, Sharpton, who hosts a radio talk-show in New York, lashed out at Limbaugh after the talk-show emcee announced he was part of a group seeking to buy the Rams. Sharpton sent a letter to NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell claiming Limbaugh has a bad track record on race, and is divisive and "anti-NFL." Flaherty suggested that companies funding Sharpton's organization might suffer from the publicity surrounding Sharpton's attack on Limbaugh.

"These companies claim they are supporting diversity by bankrolling the National Action Network. They could not have foreseen that Sharpton would take one such a popular and high-profile personality like Rush Limbaugh," Flaherty said. "I think these companies are continuing to support Sharpton at their



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own risk. Rush has a lot more listeners and followers than Sharpton does. That's for sure."

Gingrich, the former Georgia congressman who became the Speaker of the House after Republicans won control in the 1994 elections, joined with Sharpton earlier this year in a program called the Education Equality Project, aimed at improving education achievement for all, particularly blacks and Latinos, two groups that lag behind whites and Asian students in reading ability and in testing scores. Gingrich, a high-profile neoconservative, referred to Sharpton and himself as a "the original odd couple" when the two appeared together to launch the project at a rally in front of the White House on May 17, the anniversary of the 1954 Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision forbidding segregation in public schools.

Sharpton and Gingrich have since been appearing together promoting the project at events around the country, and the National Legal and Policy Center has been calling on Gingrich to end that relationship.

"We've argued for years that it's inappropriate for liberal politicians to associate with Sharpton. We believe the same thing is true for Newt Gingrich," Flaherty said. "Regardless of the merits of education reform, which they have supposedly teamed up on, it is simply inappropriate for a legitimate thinker like Gingrich to have this relationship with someone like Sharpton, who has promoted fakery of hate crimes against blacks and has sought to antagonize racial relations in this country.

"Newt has made a bad decision, and we believe he should end his relationship with Sharpton," Flaherty said.

Photo of Al Sharpton with Newt Gingrich: AP Images



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