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Opinion

The RNC Is Suing Me, a Loyal Black Republican

With less than seven weeks to go before one of the most historic elections in our nation's history, and when the GOP needs all the help it can get reaching Black voters, the Republican National Committee (RNC) is suing me, a Black Republican, over an event I created. You can't make this stuff up.

A few facts. I created and hosted the first "Black Republican Trailblazer Awards Luncheon" in February 2013 in the wake of former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney's loss to then-Senator Barack Obama in the 2012 presidential election. Romney received just 4 percent of the Black vote. The event was designed to recognize and honor Black Republicans who have made significant contributions to both America and the Republican Party.

As I have written previously, the head of the RNC, Reince Preibus, immediately saw the value in the luncheon and insisted that his organization pay for it.

I coordinated and executed that 2013 luncheon, despite the fact that RNC staffers, unbeknownst to Preibus at the time, attempted to sabotage my efforts at every turn.

More than 250 people at-

Raynard
JacksonNNPA
Columnist

tended the inaugural luncheon and I estimate that about 40 percent of them were Democrats.

That first year we honored William T. Coleman and Robert J. Brown. David L. Steward was the keynote speaker. Coleman's work was critical

“This is the thanks I get for being a loyal Republican for more than 30 years?”

in the United States Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Coleman also served as Secretary of Transportation during the Ford Administration.

Bob Brown was the highest-ranking Black staffer in the Nixon Administration. As I've said before, Coleman and Brown were both civil rights icons, who never forgot their obligation to fight on behalf of Black community.

Preibus joined me and Dave Steward, the head of World Wide Technology in St. Lou-

is, Mo., who operates one of the largest Black-owned businesses in the U.S., on the stage to talk about politics and the party. RNC staffers later edited me out of the video that was recorded of our conversation.

Despite the behind-the-scenes turmoil, that first event was the gold standard. By 2014, Black staffers at the RNC decided they no longer needed my leadership. My original vision for the event was watered down. By the time NewsOneNow managing editor and noted liberal Rol-

and Martin hosted the event in 2015, I had completely divorced myself from that RNC-sponsored minstrel show. Even one of the honorees, Senator Tim Scott (R-S.C.) declared: "I'm not a trailblazer. My father is the trailblazer."

I went my own way and sought to trademark the event through my political action committee (PAC) Black Americans for a Better Future. BABF is the first and only Black Super PAC established to get more Blacks involved in the Republican Party.

Last November, I filed for

and received provisional trademark approval by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) for the name, "Black Republican Trailblazer Awards Luncheon."

I emailed invitations to my 2016 event in early January for the upcoming February luncheon in Washington, D.C. What did the RNC do? The organization sent out an invitation for an event using the same name as my event, but in Jacksonville, Fla., scheduled a week before mine. In a conversation in January 2016, Preibus claimed that the RNC owned the name to my event. During a heated, hour-long conversation, the chair of the RNC, the national committee leader of my party, threatened to destroy me. He said that he would make it impossible for me to raise money through my PAC.

Recently, I received notification from the USPTO that my trademark application was in dispute and officially being opposed by the RNC.

This is the thanks I get for being a loyal Republican for more than 30 years?

Well, if they want a fight, that's exactly what I'm going to give them.

Read the rest of this commentary at
TheSkanner.com

Airbnb Is Making Real Progress for Travelers of Color

When I was asked by Airbnb to lead their effort to fight discrimination and bias, I was skeptical. After spending decades fighting for the protection and advancement civil rights and civil liberties, I've seen many companies merely pay lip service to addressing these issues.

I also wondered how one single company could have a real impact on racial discrimination. The sad truth is that bias is deeply embedded in our culture, especially in the area of housing and public accommodations. Laws designed to prevent housing discrimination are unevenly enforced, and it remains a persistent civil rights challenge in many communities.

My time serving as the District of Columbia's first Director of Tourism left me all too familiar with the tactics used by hotels, restaurants and tour companies to ignore or even facilitate racial discrimination. And as an African American woman, I also grew up feeling the sting of racial bias. I still remember my parents' stories about "The Negro Motorist Green Book" and how Black families had to stay with other Black families when Jim Crow laws encouraged most hotels to deny ac-

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MurphyLaura
Murphy &
Associates

commodations to Black travelers.

What initially persuaded me that change is possible at Airbnb was my first conversation with Airbnb's CEO Brian Chesky. "Airbnb will never be

“Everyone who uses Airbnb will be subject to a more robust and stringent non-discrimination policy and will have to commit to treat fellow users with respect.

able to fulfill its mission without seriously combating discrimination on its platform. We must solve this," he said.

Brian was also forthright in admitting that his company was slow to address these problems. He and his cofounders, Joe Gebbia and Nate Blecharczyk, started Airbnb with the best of intentions, but he agreed that there was an unacceptable lack of urgency to his previous attempts to address it, and vowed that such unconscious-

ness will not happen again.

So I, along with key senior leaders at Airbnb began a process designed to be as rigorous, comprehensive and inclusive as possible. In addition to Airbnb's management team, I held conversations with employees at every level of the company. We also held consultations with hosts and victims of discrimination. Nearly all of them wanted to use the site again, and for many, Airbnb remains an important source of supplement-

tal income.

The thing that struck me the most was that employees recognized this as a problem they had to solve across the whole of Airbnb, rather than putting the full responsibility on users to self-police or raise it to their attention.

As part of this journey I brought in experts including former Attorney General Eric Holder and Harvard professor Dr. Robert Livingston to get their input, as well as over 20 civil rights organiza-

tions and leaders who have thoroughly explored the advancement of civil rights in the sharing economy. Airbnb also engaged with federal and state regulatory agencies, who encouraged them to be proactive. They worked with elected officials who have been fighting for civil rights in this country for decades, and who act as an important barometer of consumer concern when they hear from constituents about incidents of discrimination or bias.

These individuals and organizations provided invaluable input that formed the basis for my report, Airbnb's Work to Fight Discrimination and Build Inclusion, and the aggressive policy and platform changes Airbnb will adopt.

Everyone who uses Airbnb will be subject to a more robust and stringent non-discrimination policy and will have to commit to treat fellow users with respect. They have also hired a full-time team of engineers, designers, data scientists and more whose sole job is to work on rooting out discrimination where it happens, and preventing it from happening again.

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