



NEW JERSEY NAACP YOUTH & COLLEGE CONFERENCE

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NJ Youth and College Division President's report 2015

Submitted by Ivan Wei, President

When I appeared before the plenary at last year's closing session to present my annual YC President report as scheduled, adult State Conference Pres. Smith did not allow me to present it and instead, publicly attacked me. This year I was not listed on the convention agenda to present my report (on the grounds that the adult State Executive Board considered me to no longer be YC President). Consequently, I have prepared a written report, as follows:

- My Executive team established the 1st ever youth conference track created by and for youth at the 2014 NJ State Convention. The 2nd annual youth-led conference track is being presented this year.
- In 2014, I obtained the first ever NJ Youth & College Div. grant, awarded by the NJEA.
- Along with 3 other New Jersey college students, I represented New Jersey youth at the National Convention in Philadelphia this summer.
- I helped Seton Hall Preparatory School work through their unit's start-up challenges and become chartered.
- I continue to mentor as Immediate Past President, the Bergen Community College chapter I founded, which is enjoying its 4th year as a compliant unit.
- NJ Youth & College Division officers selected Mr. James E. Harris as advisor to replace our former advisor, Ms. Carolyn Ann Powell, who withdrew mid-term.
- I established a website for the YC Division and procured a sponsor for the site's design and hosting <http://njnaacpyc.org>.
- I worked with the National NAACP office to resolve the NJ Youth and College Division's long-standing non-compliance issues and have resolved them. Once we raise money to pay our 2015 fees, the NJ YC Division will become compliant for the first time since 2011. The Division was non-compliant for two years before my team took office in 2014.
- My team organized a NJ NAACP youth contingent to march in the Sept. 2014 People's Climate March in New York City. Youth were joined by Ms. Jacqui Patterson, NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program Director; and Pres. Keith Bodden and his wife. My family secured a coach bus that included 2 meals for a ticket price of \$15 (or \$5 with no meals).
 - My family also secured buses to the march for the Gloucester County youth chapter, which canceled its booking at the last moment and for the Fairleigh

Dickinson University Morristown chapter, which canceled due to insufficient participation.

- I have represented NJ NAACP youth at three national NAACP conventions and have led a youth contingent at four state conventions. I have paid a substantial portion of expenses for attendance, out of my own pocket since the adult NJ State Conference has declined to aid me with the cost of convention expenses.

Challenges my team and I have faced

- When I became YC president, no list of New Jersey youth and college chapters was made available to my team. We were told by Pres. Smith and our former advisor that there was no list, and also that there was also no need for us to be in contact with the chapters. We team disagreed and after several months of outreach, we were able to identify most of the active chapters and contact their leadership. Carolyn Ann Powell asked us to share our list with her, for the benefit of the adult conference leadership.
- At several state-wide adult conference meetings, attempts have been made to block our youth delegation from entering because we lacked money to pay the meeting fees. Fortunately, other adult chapter attendees present have offered to pay the fees.
- Although we have asked many times that the adult State Conference help to pay Youth and College Division members' travel expenses to statewide NAACP meetings and trainings and meeting fees, our requests have been either denied or ignored by Pres. Smith and his team.
- Pres. Smith's team continues to hold onto funds which the Youth & College Division received last year as a grant from the NJEA, and will not release those funds nor allow them to be used for our expenses. The adult division received a check from the NJEA sent on our behalf but has refused to release to us the unrestricted funds that remained after paying for our hotel rooms at the convention and the luncheon tickets we gifted to YC speakers. Pres. Smith's team has also refused to reimburse our treasurer, Mr. Ari Lopez Wei, out of these funds for his out of pocket meal and printing expenses incurred during the 2014 conference, totalling about \$340, despite Ari's repeated requests.
- The NJ Youth and College Division has not received financial support of any type from the NJ State adult Conference leadership. We did not receive the \$10,000 which the first state treasurer, Tom Reynolds, told us had been set aside for us; nor did we receive the \$5,000 which the second state treasurer (who was also our advisor, Carolyn Ann Powell) told us was the reduced amount that had become the YC set-aside after Mr. Reynolds stepped down from office.
- YC executive team members have not received any help from the NJ adult State Conference to pay for national or NJ State NAACP conference expenses, travel expenses, meeting fees or national NAACP conventions. It is a hardship for most YC members to take time away from classes, work and schoolwork to travel several hours to and from meetings as well as foot the cost of doing so. And, most of us do not drive.

- Pres. Smith has demanded the attendance of NJ Youth and College Division leaders at long emergency meetings that have required youth to either leave functions taking place at our schools or to miss preparation time for exams.
- Pres. Smith organized a meeting last year during which he called on his Executive Board members and our former advisor, Carolyn Ann Powell, to join him in demanding that I step down as NJ Youth and College President. That meeting was called on an impromptu basis after a conference planning session in Trenton which my leadership team attended, and it lasted for 2 hours. They spent 98% of the 2 hours berating me, accusing me of doing a poor job, demanding my resignation and holding a vote to vote me out of office. My mother, who had driven down to Trenton with us, was present. I had informed Secretary Darkes by email before the planning meeting that my team had to leave the planning meeting early because it was midterm exam time and my team members needed to study. Rather than be permitted to leave early, we were detained for 2 extra hours after the planning meeting.
- At most of the state-wide meetings and trainings I have attended during the past year, Rev. Kenneth Scott has felt it necessary to remain at my side at all times. Disturbingly, Rev. Scott has not only closely followed me in a stalking manner – remaining at my side or a step behind me whenever I move around in a room or in the building in which a meeting we are both attending is being held; and, Scott has also interjected himself into individual conversations which I have attempted to hold with other meeting participants.
- Pres. Smith attempted to block our division from selecting a new advisor of our choosing, although bylaws clearly give us the right to elect our own advisor. And, he has ignored our choice by refusing to acknowledge Pres. Harris as our advisor.
- Rev. Ford of the national NAACP office refused to provide me with written corroboration that the YC Division has the right to select a replacement advisor.
- Despite repeated pleas for help over the course of my Executive Committee's term, Pres. Smith and his Executive Board have declined to help us communicate with our YC Secretary Dominique Banks, whose mother is a member of Loretta Winters' Gloucester County chapter. Ms. Winters is a member of Pres. Smith's Executive Board. Eventually, Pres. Harris facilitated a phone conference with both Ms. Banks. But after Pres. Smith became overtly hostile towards me in Fall of 2014, Dominique again declined to communicate with us. Her mother also canceled the bus she and Dominique had requested my family to book for mobilizing Gloucester and Camden area youth and supporters to the People's Climate March. The bus had been booked for the Banks without them needing to make a deposit, seats were available for just a minimal fee and an online payment portal was set up to make booking tickets easy: so there was no apparent justification for the Banks to deny the opportunity to area members to participate in the historic march other than to demonstrate an unwillingness to participate in any action that I was involved in coordinating.
- At last year's conference, I was not given advance instructions by the YC Advisor or Executive Board to prepare a president's report, but Pres. Harris alerted me that I would be called upon to deliver it, so I had my report ready. When I began to make my report to the plenary with about 150 members present, Pres. Smith interrupted me and

demanded my resignation, saying that I had not fulfilled my duties as president and should be removed if I would not resign.

- When my little brother came to show solidarity with me by standing next to me, Pres. Smith demanded that he sit back down.
- Members of the plenary proposed that an investigation into Pres. Smith's allegations be held.
- As the "investigation", Rev Scott led a conference call during which he read out a list of allegations against me which Pres. Smith's team had cobbled together, to a group of participants. Scott did not allow me to respond to any of them and in fact, did not let me speak.
- After the "investigation", the adult Executive Board presented a report at a state level meeting in Morristown saying that the investigation committee had concluded that I was guilty on all counts and should be removed from office, but two of the "investigation" participants who were present, demurred. Mr. Jesse Butler and Ms. June Dungee asserted that the participants of the "investigation" had not reached that consensus as a group; and that they did not personally agree with those findings; consequently, the report was not accepted.
- I would like to note that at no time has Pres. Smith provided guidance on actions he would like the NJ YC Div to undertake; however, he has asked us to share the list of youth and college units we identified through expending much effort and team, after his team failed to provide us with this information despite repeated requests. And, after asking me to submit my plan for leading the state NAACP youth he has used different mechanisms to block me from carrying out this work myself and assigned the Youth Works committee to do it instead.

Additional Notes

I would like to note that this year (2015), the two members of the compliant Bergen Community College chapter who accompanied me to the conference were both blocked from voting. I have been informed that before the conference took place, there was a conference call between Rev. Scott, Pres. Smith and Rev. Ford about voting at the conference, but neither myself nor the YC Div Advisor, Mr. James E. Harris, were invited to participate in that discussion.

Preceding the 2014 conference, state adult Executive Board members attempted to plan the youth track programming without Youth and College Division input or participating, by the simple expedient of excluding our Executive Committee members from invitations to conference planning sessions. When we were advised by some planning committee members of our exclusion, we began to show up at convention planning meetings and also formed a planning committee of our own and offered the first youth planned and youth led conference track at a NJ State NAACP Convention. Our speakers included internationally renowned small business specialist, Dr. Jeffrey Robinson and a member of the Climate Nexus team.

This year in 2015, YC Executive Division members were once again excluded from conference planning sessions; invitations to planning sessions were not issued to us by the adult State Conference Executive Board or planning committee and we were not advised when meetings were taking place. I headed a committee that planned a youth track of our own but when we arrived at the convention, we learned that the adult Executive Board and Youth Works Committee had worked with youth branches of their selection to formulate a different agenda. We were fortunately able to contact our speakers and cancel their appearances.

Shortly after Luis Ariel Lopez Wei became State Youth and College Treasurer, Richard Smith's Executive Board declared that he could not serve in that position because he is my brother.

My mother was physically removed from last year's state convention by a security team member at the direction of Ms. Crystal Darkes and Rev. Kenneth Scott, in the presence of Dr. Jeffrey Robinson and his two young sons, and several Youth and College members. This seemed to have been a traumatic event for Dr. Robinson's sons, who are just little boys and for our members as well.

My mother had generously helped by donating the design of the YC conference track's flyers and program, and our team knew several of our speakers through my mother's connection with them. When Mom arrived at the conference to bring us the programs she had picked up from the printer that morning, she found our youth contingent leaders highly demoralized and disorganized, so she decided to stay with us to make sure that our speakers were adequately greeted and given the assistance they needed to set up their presentations, as well as to offer us moral support to help us get through our youth track program. She also helped us figure out how to set up the a/v the speakers needed to make their presentations and arranged for water to be provided for the speakers. The adult State Conference E-Board and Youth Works Committee members' primary concern regarding the Youth Conference seemed to be watching out in case my mother appeared to help us – because they went into a flurry of action when she did arrive, all aimed towards making her feel unwelcome.

My team had gotten shaken up when we first arrived at the convention because when Pres. Smith arrived, he was openly hostile to us. He refused to acknowledge the YC contingent's presence in any way and would not even look at me, my brother or other youth members who had accompanied me, when we attempted to greet him. Then we looked at the general conference program and learned that our Youth and College track workshops were not listed, although we had complied with the deadline for submitting our scheduled events. We had also been given a room away from all other conference activities, with no water for our speakers and no laptop for the projector that was supplied – so no way to load speakers' presentations.

My mother did not originally intend to stay with us. She planned to drop off our printed programs and sign-in sheets and leave, because she had told by state E-Board members before the conference that even if she bought a ticket for the day of the YC track presentations on Saturday, that they (the E-Board members) would not allow her to attend the youth track presentations. Our family's household income is very low and conference fees are have become expensive, so the only reason my mother would have spent the money to attend the conference was to support us on the Saturday when our workshops took place. The adults gave as the

reason Mom would be barred from attending our track, that she is not a youth; however, several other adults were present at our presentations – all of them observed by the same adults who eventually removed my mother – and they did not attempt to remove those other adults from the room. Finding us all shook up upon her arrival and not at all prepared to begin leading our workshops, Mom stayed on site to make sure our group was able to pull ourselves together and that our speakers felt welcomed. She planned to leave after the last of the speakers, her friend Dr. Robinson, arrived right after lunch and began his presentation. Mom spent most of the time she was in the building in our hotel rooms which were down the hall from our workshop room.

While Mom was helping Dr. Robinson get set up – watching his sons while he retrieved something from his car – and requesting that water be delivered to the room – she was approached by Ms. Crystal Darkes, Kenneth Scott and a conference security officer and asked to leave. She agreed to leave as soon as Dr. Robinson was settled in and began speaking, but the three people repeatedly urged her to leave sooner. It was demeaning to her, and intimidating and threatening to all of us who witnessed them harassing her. After Mom did leave the workshop room, she realized that she'd forgotten her jacket but was not allowed to re-enter the room to look for it. Fortunately, my brother quickly found it for her and then Mom was escorted out of the hotel building by the man who had identified himself as the event's onsite security officer.

At this year's state convention (2015), some Youth and College members felt intimidated by the many armed police and prison security guards who were present.

Respectfully submitted,

Jorge Ivan Gomez Wei