

Wealthy taxpayers exhale

By **HERB BOYD**

Special to the AmNews

All the talk about taxing the rich may be academic since Senate Majority Leader Malcolm Smith does not believe he has votes to make the tax hike law.

"I am not a proponent of raising taxes to close the budget gap until all other options have been explored," Smith (D-Queens) told the Associated Press.

Nor apparently is Assembly Speaker Sheldon Smith, though he is willing, like Smith, to wait and see what his colleagues in the Legislature have to say about the proposal advanced by State Sen. Eric Schneiderman (D-Manhattan).

Schneiderman's plan would increase the current 6.85 percent income tax to 8.25 percent for those making more than

\$250,000; 8.97 percent for those making more than \$500,000; and 10.3 percent for those earning more than \$1 million a year.

Gov. David Paterson expressed some reservations about the proposal, telling the press, "We're trying to do what American households are doing: save, save, save. Everybody is trying to find a way

that they can keep spending. If people think they can create a false economy here by raising taxes ...I am not going to support this."

Support for the plan has been voiced by the Working Families Party, whose proposal resembles the one put forward by Schneiderman.

The WFP is asking for an increased income tax on house-

holds making at least \$250,000 a year. If adopted, this move could generate \$6 billion for the cash-strapped state, the party said.

"We want to get a dialogue about progressive taxes into the mix as we work to solve the budget crisis," Schneiderman concluded. "I predict in the end the wealthy will kick something in along with everyone else."

Move may signal a revamped M/WBE program in store at the agency

By **GLENN TOWNES**

Special to the AmNews

The former head of one of the most successful mentoring programs in the city for minority- and women-owned business enterprises (M/WBEs) has been appointed chief diversity officer of the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), officials at the agency announced earlier this month. The move marks the first time in recent memory that an African-American will have major input on how contracts are awarded to vendors by an agency with one of the largest operating budgets in the city and, perhaps, the state.

Michael Garner, who was the senior director of the

School Construction Authority (SCA) and spent more than 15 years at the agency, joined the senior executive ranks at the MTA in early February. In his new position, Garner will oversee the development, implementation and expansion of the MTA's Minority, Women and Disadvantaged Business Enterprise program.

In addition, Garner will monitor how contracts with the MTA are awarded to various contractors and vendors. He will report directly to MTA Executive Director and CEO Elliot Sander.

"I'm excited about this new and exciting opportunity with the MTA," Garner said. "There

are plenty of business opportunities for M/WBEs with the MTA."

Garner is a vocal advocate and supporter of various city and state initiatives that foster and promote the active inclusion of M/WBEs in virtually all aspects of doing business with the city. He also has close business ties to Gov. David Paterson.

During his term at the SCA, Garner was instrumental in developing one of the most successful and comprehensive business mentoring programs in the state. The innovative, inclusive and revered mentoring program has been pivotal in increasing the number of M/WBEs that do business with the city—specifically the SCA. Under Garner's niche marketing strategy and direct approach, the SCA Mentor Program actively recruited M/WBEs across the city for the

program and guided these businesses through the often arduous and cumbersome processes of training, certification, funding and bonding issues that frequently plague M/WBEs. The program has been so successful that it has garnered national praise, and various aspects of it are being emulated by other agencies. The SCA regularly awards millions of dollars in contracts to SCA-certified and qualified M/WBEs throughout New York.

"Tangible results were realized based upon the amount of construction contract opportunities—the time for opportunities for M/WBEs is now," he said.

There is wide speculation by many observers that Garner will overhaul the current M/WBE program at the MTA and implement a mentor program comparable to his highly

successful program at the SCA. In the past, the MTA was criticized for, among other things, making it extremely difficult, if not nearly impossible, for M/WBEs to tap into its multimillion-dollar service and/or product contract pool—particularly for the mega Second Avenue subway project. Others contend that the appointment of Garner will have an enormous impact on Gov. Paterson's long-proposed and highly touted initiative of awarding state contracts to M/WBEs.

"Mike joining the MTA is like a free agent signing on as a marquee player," said Michael Jones-Bey, executive director of the Empire State Development Corporation Division of Minority and Women's Development. "For those of us who are pushing Gov. Paterson's M/WBE agen-

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Malaga Island holds Freedom Trail legacy

By ESMÉ E. DEPRez

Special to the AmNews

A small, wooded island off the coast of northern New England retains the memories of a state's shameful past.

For over half a century, Malaga Island, located some 25 miles north of Portland, was home to a peaceful community of free Black, white and mixed-race families. At the turn of the 20th century, however, as Maine was growing into its "vacationland" nickname, tourism increased and shame did too, brought on the mainland residents by the island's multiethnic (and therefore degenerate, according to the thinking of the time) population. In 1912, state officials evicted Malaga's 45 residents and threw most into a nearby mental hospital, tore down their homes and exhumed bones from the cemetery.

Like much of the state's Black history, Malaga's legacy in the minds of most Mainers has since remained as vacant as the island itself—but a new initiative is ensuring that it will not be forgotten again. Maine Freedom Trails, together with the NAACP's Portland chapter, will kick off a four-part series in February geared towards educators to further explore the history of Malaga Island.

"I think the story of Malaga

lets us examine how we as communities, city-states and the country treat the least amongst us," said Dawud Ummah, cofounder of Maine Freedom Trails and the first Muslim chaplain at the University of Maine. "It's a clear example of how, if you're in the disadvantage, it doesn't really matter about your race or about your background. You could be dispossessed, taken out, moved and considered crazy."

The series will include an update of the latest archeological research on Malaga's families and unveiling of a new oral history project on the social and cultural accounts collected from their descendents, followed by a visit to the former mental hospital and island itself.

Ummah described the revival of Maine's forgotten history as a human rights movement, "one that includes all members of the human family in a greater movement towards freedom. We wanted to be much more inclusive in telling that history," he said. "I don't think you could look at [Malaga] and take a slant—look at just the African-Americans or the people of color in that story. You have to include everybody."

The Malaga Island series is Maine Freedom Trails' second project after establishing the Portland Freedom Trail in 2006.

Sixteen granite and bronze markers dot the downtown waterfront area of Maine's largest city, highlighting such landmarks as the third-oldest African meeting house in the country and a church from where William Lloyd Garrison once spoke. The state's connection to the sea, border with Canada and relative proximity to England made it a promising destination for enslaved Blacks attempting the path towards freedom, and 75 possible Underground Railroad sites have been identified statewide.

While Malaga Island probably held no direct connection to Maine's Underground Railroad activities, said Rachel Talbot Ross, president of the NAACP's Portland branch and cofounder of Maine Freedom Trails, the launch of a new trail on the island in August will continue the historical revival's journey up the coast. She hopes it will one day be just a part of a network throughout the state.

Ross, whose father, Gerald E. Talbot, became the first African-American elected to the Maine State Legislature in 1972, also explained the challenges and opportunity of reviving the state's African-American history while it becomes increasingly populated with immigrants



Dawud Ummah and State Rep. Herbert Adams stand at the Portland Freedom Trail marker for the First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church, where William Lloyd Garrison spoke in 1832. Maine's constitution was also written here the year before it became the 23rd state admitted to the union on March 3, 1820, when Missouri was also admitted as a slave state.

(Esmé E. Deprez photos)

directly from Africa. Still the whitest state in the nation, the face of Maine is changing—at least in the more urban parts—as hundreds of African refugees hailing from countries such as Sudan and Somalia resettle here. U.S. Census statistics show that the Black population has nearly doubled since 2000.

"We don't have a deep understanding of where they come from, nor do they have an under-

standing of African-Americans on this soil," Ross said. "So we have to take every opportunity to educate one another on our histories."

"In a way, we're all seeking refuge," she continued, describing the shared bond between African immigrants and African-Americans. "Until institutionalized racism can be deconstructed, we're all still in the quest for freedom in this country."

www.portlandfreedomtrail.org

Africa

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superiority: white, Indian, colored, and Black.

It was also this Defiance Campaign which led to closer cooperation between the ANC and the SA Indian Congress, the SA Coloured People's Congress (SACPCO), and the Congress of Democrats, a white liberal organization made up primarily of communists. This alliance paved the way for the now famous 1955 ANC Freedom Charter, which spelled out a clear way to South African democracy and included in it rights and obligations of the people.

Many within the Youth League were unhappy with the new alliance, as they saw it dominated primarily by the white liberals and also opposed the charter's refusal to recognize South Africa as primarily an African country and instead chose to declare it a country belonging to all who lived in it. This group was called the Africanists, as they advocated for a return to the Program of Action. In 1959, the Africanists formed the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC). Both the PAC and the ANC continued on the Defiance Campaign, with

the PAC in 1960 launching an Anti-Pass Campaign against an ID document, "the Pass," that Africans were required to carry at all times, providing proof that their limited movements were authorized. The campaign called for Africans to leave their passes at home and surrender themselves for arrest at the nearest police stations. In the African townships of Sharville and Langa, where masses had gathered, police opened fire on the unarmed, killing 69 instantly and wounding over 200.

As a result of this action by the white government, both the ANC and the PAC realized that peaceful resistance was met with violence and formed underground armed guerrilla structures. They were both banned, and many of their leaders were arrested and given lengthy sentences.

The unbanning of these organizations in 1990, the release of political prisoners and the return of all exiled freedom fighters ushered in a democracy that led to the first historic elections in 1994 and the election of Nelson Mandela as the first democratically elected president of South Africa.

The ANC has held a strong parliamentary majority, as well as majorities in most of the

provincial legislatures and many local governments. With Thabo Mbeki succeeding Mandela for two successive terms, the South African reconstruction and development program took on a new focus, as the ANC introduced the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR), committing the country to open markets and privatization, as well as increasing trade liberalization.

COPE is expected to compete against the next elections scheduled for 2009 between April and June. Many polls inside South Africa still have the ANC leading the run, followed a distant second by the Democratic Alliance, made up of the former white parties of Afrikaner nationalists and liberal democrats.

In a classified letter to the ANC president, Jacob Zuma, Mbeki denied any active support for COPE, saying that the ANC president should remember that they have worked together longer, even though he does not condone the personal attacks on "Terror" Lekota. He also refused to have his name used by the ANC to campaign for the elections, saying that if the ANC was disenchanted with him, it did not make sense why they would want to consider him a dependable cadre.

Jersey

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da, this is welcomed news."

Most area minority business-owners laud Garner's new appointment and believe he will continue to be a vocal and proactive advocate for the rights of M/WBEs.

"We finally have someone in place that will consistently fight to see that M/WBEs get a fair share of all of the contracts being awarded by the MTA," said Robert Parchment, president and owner of Parchment Heating and Plumbing in Harlem. "I think questions and other issues that may have plagued the agency in the past in regards to how and to whom most contracts are awarded to will no longer exist with Mike in charge."

Parchment was certified with the SCA and recently became MTA-certified, making his small business eligible for contracts with the agency.

William Parrish, president of Noble Strategy, a construction management firm based in South Orange, N.J., said despite the sour economy, for M/WBEs in the metro area have usually managed to secure business opportunities with the SCA, often under the guidance of Garner. For example, in late 2005, Noble Strategy landed its first major multi-million contract with the agency.

"That deal with the SCA put my company on solid financial ground and helped me expand the business," he said. "We continue to have a great business relationship with the SCA and now anticipate a similar one with the MTA."

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