

Williams axed from another outlet

By Aisha I. Jefferson

Controversy has stirred regarding the Bush administration paying conservative commentator and syndicated radio, print, and television personality Armstrong Williams, 45, \$240,000 to promote the No Child Left Behind Act. The Department of Education arranged a contract with Williams's company, The Graham Williams Group, that for two, one-minute advertisements during his syndicated television show, *The Right Side*, featuring Education Secretary Rod Paige.

On Tuesday, *America's Black Forum*, a nationally syndicated TV program, terminated its contract with Williams, 45, following the Tribune Media Services decision to discontinue William's weekly column.

Williams talks openly about the scandal with **BLACK ENTERPRISE**:

Q: What influence do you think your involvement has had on the black community's interpretation of No Child Left Behind?

A: That's a very difficult question for me to answer because in the advertising campaign that we were engaged in with Ketchum, with the Department of Education, we were running two, one-minute commercials where the Secretary [of Education] explained No Child Left Behind and the different components of it. I do know that after six months of the advertising campaign, which the campaign was to only last six months, that when they looked at the number of hits on the Website as a result of advertising exclusively on our show, they had 15 million hits.

Q: Is it necessary to promote No Child Left Behind in the black community?

A: It's necessary to promote options in terms of education. Parents need more options in educating their kids. Whether it's charter schools, whether it's public schools, whether it's school vouchers, they need to have those options available to them. Competition is good. They need to compete to make these children the best and the brightest.

Q: Do you regret doing the two, one-minute advertisement commercials?

A: I did not regret my business decision because we sell advertising. That's how we survive and that's how we take care of our employees. We sell ad time. We are a media company that owns a product and part of our revenue comes from ad buys.

However, I saw it, which I did not see it then, that it was bad judgment on my part too. When I would go out and was invited to do shows where No Child Left Behind was the subject matter I should have disclosed the fact that they were an advertiser on my daily television show. I just did not think about it and I did not realize that I was blurring the lines of ethics. And so, therefore, my regret is that if I had to make the decision all over again, I would rather lose the contract instead of compromise people losing respect and trust in what I say and what I advocate because there's this perception that I'm being paid for it.

This is the only instance, ever in the history of our media, that I've ever been involved in any kind of issue where there was paid advertising. And I feel bad about this because I've lost credibility over it and people are questioning it. And you know your credibility is all that you have. So if I had to do it all over again, I would not weigh on the side of business. I would weigh commentary, punditry, media, and journalism.

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TV One - TV show *On Point* produced by Williams now on hold

America's Black Forum - Contract terminated
CNN - Although there is no contract, the network is evaluating its future with Williams

Sinclair Broadcast Group - Investigating reports while Williams was under contract with them last year - evaluating their future with Williams.

*Williams says he will continue to syndicate *The Right Side* to network affiliates in the Southeast, Christian Television Network, Liberty Television and Angel Sky.

Q: How do you think this will affect or has affected your credibility?

A: Well, Tribune Media has cancelled my column. There were some television stations that put my show on hold pending further investigation. So you know I paid a price for my bad judgment and obviously I take full responsibility because I am the owner, the CEO, and I do make the decisions. So there are consequences whether your judgment is bad or not and you [have] to pay those consequences. And still, we don't know how deep those consequences will be because the jury is still out.

Q: Do you think others may have received gifts to promote NCLB as well?

A: No, I actually think that we're in a very unique position. I don't think that there are many individuals that are on television and in print as consistently as I am. And yet they own a media company where they sell advertisement sales. And, I do think that Ketchum was looking for someone who was conservative and who was favorable to No Child Left Behind and who had been favorable to the issue for a long time [and someone] who had credibility. And I do think the uniqueness to my position was an easy decision for them to make, to say that I was the person that they were looking for.

Q: Has the Education Department contacted you since the news broke?

A: I've had no contact with them since the story broke.

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