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Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity

SEIZING THE MOMENT AND THE MANTLE:
The Leadership Role of Sigma Pi Phi in the 21st Century

A Proposal by the Public Policy Discussion Group to Create a Standing Grand Boulé Public Policy Committee

INTRODUCTION

On June 2, 1997, Grand Sire Archon Anthony W. Hall, Jr. appointed a Public Policy Discussion Group, chaired by Grand Sire Archon-elect Eddie N. Williams, to determine the desirability and feasibility of creating a standing Public Policy Committee of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity and to formulate a proposal for consideration by the Executive Committee and the Grand Boulé. In his challenge, the Grand Sire Archon said:

> *"As we approach our Centennial Anniversary, our ultimate challenge is to assure that American society and African Americans are better off because Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity exists. A central question for this time is the appropriate positioning of our Fraternity for collective impact on public policy."*

In addition to Grand Sire Archon-elect Williams (Epsilon), the members of the Public Policy Discussion Group, and the architects of this proposal, were: James Lowell Gibbs, Jr. (Beta Upsilon) who served as Vice Chair; Grand Grapter Matthew G. Carter (Gamma Xi); John Hope Franklin (Alpha Tau); Past Grand Sire Archon Robert V. Franklin (Alpha Phi); Past Grand Sire Archon Richard I. McKinney (Gamma); Northeast Regional Sire Archon-elect Ackneil M. Muldrow, II (Gamma); Thomas B. Shropshire, Past Sire Archon of Xi Boule; H. LeBaron Taylor (Delta Epsilon); and H. Ron White (Alpha Epsilon). Grand Sire Archon Hall was an ex-officio member of the Discussion Group, and Grand Grammateus Calvin Pressley and Grand Thesauristes Manford Byrd participated in two meetings of the Discussion Group as invited guests.

The Public Policy Discussion Group met in Washington, D.C., on September 11-12, 1997, and in Orlando, Florida, on January 27-28, 1998. Since its creation, the Discussion Group has exchanged several communications via mail and teleconference.

In response to the challenge of Grand Sire Archon Anthony W. Hall and in light of its deliberations, the Public Policy Discussion Group unanimously recommends to the Executive Committee that Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity undertake a public policy initiative which encourages its members to become better informed on major public policy issues of concern to them and their communities and, when appropriate, to seek to influence the direction and outcome of those issues of commanding importance to the Fraternity.

Toward this end, the Public Policy Discussion Group recommends the establishment of a standing Public Policy Committee of Sigma Pi Phi.

The principal purpose of the Public Policy Committee would be to formulate, for approval by the Executive Committee and the Grand Boulé, appropriate positions on public policy issues for the general edification of Archons and, when appropriate, for action by the Fraternity and its Subordinate Boulés.

This proposal provides the rationale for this new Committee and a detailed description of its role and responsibilities.

INCREASING SIGNIFICANCE OF PUBLIC POLICY IN THE LIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICANS

Public Policy is the generic name for a variety of domestic and international issues, such as health care, social welfare, human resources development, environmental concerns, taxation, civil rights, and defense, which not only affect the nation as a whole but the lives and livelihood of individuals as well.

Public policy is an increasingly important influence in people's lives. It is the array of government decisions and acts, born of private and public sector interaction, that shapes a nation's political, economic and moral structures, and, consequently, its citizens' private lives.

More than ever, African Americans must pursue their hopes and aspirations in the complex arena of public policy and in the marketplace of ideas. This conclusion is underscored by the U.S. Supreme Court's recent decision to let California's Proposition 209 stand. In the social, economic, and international

arenas, African Americans are major stakeholders, and they must become major players — better informed and more influential — in helping to formulate policies that are in their best interests. Leadership is critical to this effort. Not just the traditional leadership of elected officials, civil rights figures and the clergy, although they are vital. We need more vigorous leadership from our growing middle class of talented and successful individuals. Sigma Pi Phi can, and must, be at the forefront of that leadership.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON SIGMA PI PHI'S PUBLIC PRESENCE

The best articulated and most enduring mission statement of Sigma Pi Phi came from Founder Grand-Sire Archon Henry M. Minton:

> ***"This organization should be a fraternity in the true sense of the word, one whose chief thought should (be) ... to bind men of like qualities, tastes, and attainment into a close sacred union, that they might know the best of one another."***

This mission statement has stood the test of time. Yet, from its very beginning the Fraternity asserted its flexibility in determining the goals and objectives which it would pursue to achieve its mission. For example, the Fraternity has always valued public or community service by its Archons and Archousai. And with the creation of the Boulé Foundation and the establishment of the Social Action Committee, Sigma Pi Phi turned formally outward. As a body it assumed a public presence and a public commitment to our community's welfare.

This evolution in the life of Sigma Pi Phi has been occurring since the 1960's. In 1964 Archon Percy Julian's memorial address launched a "renaissance" in which "the scholar must become the voice and the conscience of the people." Many Grand Sire Archons have pushed the Fraternity's thinking about public involvement, including Robert V. Franklin, Harvey Russell, J. Ernest Wilkins, Leon Higginbotham, Ted Jones, Richard McKinney, Ben Major, Sam Massie, Huel Perkins, and Hargrove Wooten.

With the establishment of the proposed Public Policy Committee, the Fraternity once gain has an opportunity to assert its flexibility in making its goals and objectives relevant to the times and our circumstances. Archons can continue to "know the best of one another" while pursuing the best for our people. They can promote the greatest good for themselves as well as their communities.

A public policy initiative would be a welcome further step in the Fraternity's movement toward a more public presence and more visible community service.

HOW A PUBLIC POLICY INITIATIVE WOULD BENEFIT SIGMA PI PHI

A public policy initiative would:

- Enable the Fraternity to work for the advancement of others and give expression to its commitment to raise the quality of life of African Americans;
- Enhance the knowledge and capacity of individual Archons who desire to use their intellect and experience to shape and influence selected public policies;
- Capture the intellect and energy of nearly four thousand Archons and the bottled up reservoir of their collective influence. It would also draw upon the expertise of other members of the African American community;
- Provide leadership to the African American community, both locally and nationally;
- Stimulate individual action by many Archons whose cumulative impact could indeed affect public policy. If individual Archons become better informed about public policy issues, they can be more effective in other organizations to which they belong and as citizens.

ISSUES FOR THE PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE

The Public Policy Committee, with input from the Executive Committee and Subordinate Boulés, would determine which issues deserve attention at any given time. It would place a high priority on those policy issues which affect enduring problems faced by the African American community and, thus far, have not been resolved. The following issues are illustrative:

1. ***Expanding employment opportunity and equity***, including the resurrection or reforming of affirmative action, the development of

alternatives to affirmative action, and eliminating policies and practices in both the private and public sectors that permit the persistence of the "glass ceiling" in the work place.

2. ***Expanding educational opportunity and identifying alternative ways of improving educational achievement.***

3. ***Improving economic status and enhancing economic power.*** A host of public policy issues affect the economic status of individuals. The Public Policy Committee would address those with the greatest salience for Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity. For example, it could examine corporate policies and practices that adversely affect the black community. Besides employment-related issues, mentioned above, other subjects might include where businesses locate their plants and other facilities, how and where they dispose of their wastes, and what banks and investment firms they select. These so-called "private" actions have enormous public policy implications.

   Related is the matter of economic empowerment. In what ways can individual Archons and the Fraternity itself use their income, their purchasing power, and their investments to influence corporate decision makers (including money managers) and their policies? The Fraternity's decision to move the 1998 Grand Boulé from San Diego to Seattle as a protest against the California electorate's enactment of Proposition 209, ending affirmative action in that state's public sector, is an example of using economic power to influence public policy.

4. ***The status of young black men and the various structural crises they face, which have caused them to be labeled "an endangered species."*** Numerous areas of public policy affect them. Besides employment opportunity and education opportunity, other salient areas of public policy are inequities in the criminal justice system (including those that sustain the torrent of violence engulfing young black males), welfare policy, several aspects of health care policy and delivery, and other policies that adversely affect their ability to be effective fathers.

5. ***The impact of the media in shaping perceptions of African Americans and of the public toward them.*** Increasing concentrations of media in the hands of conglomerates have decreased the number of black-owned and operated media and are diminishing their role. Relevant here, for example, is public policy concerning the way the Federal Communications Commission allocates broadcasting licenses.

6. ***Health care and the health care delivery system.*** Statistics document the fact that the health status of African Americans is considerably poorer than for Americans as a group. Public policies concerning matters like managed care significantly impact our community. For example, any rationing of medical benefits undoubtedly would fall disproportionately on African Americans.

7. ***Increasing the social, political, and economic power of African Americans by building coalitions with other people, especially alliances with people of color.*** The Public Policy Committee might address the advantages of building coalitions with other people of color and consider ways for doing this. Changing demographics predicted for the 21st century make this both strategic and timely. In constructing such coalitions, we would be maintaining the tradition of black causes and black leadership by being in the vanguard of America's movement toward justice for all.

Each of these illustrative public policy issues represents a myriad of problems that have been with us for a long time. It is unlikely that any of them will be resolved by a quick fix in either the public or private sectors. Therefore, Sigma Pi Phi's public policy initiative can make valuable contributions to the evolving public policy picture. A unique aspect of the proposed Public Policy Committee would be its research and information gathering, intense reflection and discussion, and, when appropriate, action recommendations.

ESTABLISHING A PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE IN SIGMA PI PHI

The first step in creating a standing Public Policy Committee would be to amend the Fraternity's Constitution and By-Laws to expand its mission. Thus, it is proposed that the last sentence in **Article III (Objective), Section 1** be amended to read as follows:

> "By concerted action, they shall seek and establish those goals which will promote the greatest good for the entire membership *and for their communities*." (New language is italicized.)

It is proposed that **Article XII (Standing Committees)** be amended to create a standing Public Policy Committee whose role would be stated as follows:

> "The Public Policy Committee formulates, for approval by three-fourths vote of the Executive Committee or the Grand Boulé, appropriate positions on public policy issues for the general edification of Archons and, when appropriate, for actions by the Fraternity and its Subordinate Boulés."

To avoid confusion between the role of the Social Action Committee and the role of the Public Policy Committee, it is proposed that Article XII, Section 2 (Social Action Committee) be amended to add the word "action" between the words "social" and "policy."

To form the Public Policy Committee, the Grand Sire Archon would appoint 15 Archons from the five regions, who represent various disciplines and fields and a range of points of view. Members would be appointed for staggered terms of two and four years, so that only half of the membership turns over at the end of each biennium. A Chair and Vice Chair would be appointed by the Grand Sire Archon for two-year terms.

At the call of the Chair, the Public Policy Committee would meet at least twice a year to conduct work in pursuit of its mission.

DELIBERATIONS

The deliberations of the Public Policy Committee would be influenced by three factors:

1. Recommendations/requests from the Executive Committee.

2. Development of its own work agenda.

3. Proposals from Subordinate Boulés and outside organizations, such as the National Urban League and the Congress of National Black Churches, which seek the Fraternity's participation in an activity relating to relevant public policy issues.

In the beginning, the Public Policy Committee's scope of engagement would be limited as the Committee works up its corpus of issues, develops its procedures, and gains experience in public policy analysis and advocacy. Initially, it will handle only a limited number of policy issues.

In examining each issue that comes before it, the Public Policy Committee will apply five tests:

1. Is this an issue on which most Archons need more background information for their edification?

2. Is this an issue on which the Fraternity should communicate its views to other organizations, African American leaders, and/or the public at large?

3. Is this an issue on which the Fraternity might wish to take some form of direct action (all consistent with the Fraternity's Constitution and By-Laws and its tax exempt status): such as writing letters and making public commentaries, coalescing with other groups, protesting or boycotting?

4. Will there be a tangible product or result that will benefit most Archons, reflect creditably on the Fraternity, and enhance its visibility?

5. Is this an issue or an action which will command the support of an overwhelming majority of Archons?

The Public Policy Committee would report its findings and recommendations to the Executive Committee and make biennial reports to the Grand Boulé.

In its first few years of operation the Public Policy Committee would deliberate and advise the Executive Committee on whether and to what extent Regional and Subordinate Boulés should be authorized to create Public Policy Committees and how such committees should relate to the Grand Boulé Public Policy Committee. (See discussion below.)

CORE STRATEGIES

To achieve the mission and objectives of the Public Policy Committee, three core strategies should be pursued:

1. The work of the Committee will be guided by the By-Laws of Sigma Pi Phi and any other guidance developed by the Executive Committee and the Grand Boulé. It would be strictly non-partisan in outlook.

   Its work would not intrude on the responsibilities of the Social Action Committee. (The Public Policy Discussion Group interprets social action as "direct engagement with the community and its institutions including providing financial support and service to the community and/or its institutions." The mission of the Public Policy Committee is to "comprehend, analyze and influence national and international policy issues which affect the nation as a whole and the lives and livelihood of individuals as well.") Given the complementary nature of their respective missions, the Social Action Committee and the Public Policy Committee

should find many opportunities to be mutually supportive.

2. The Public Policy Committee should be product and action-oriented. Its deliberations will result in documents which can be shared with others, used for larger discussions, and/or published in *The Boulé Journal*.

   Toward this end, the Committee might create several Policy Task Forces to produce documents on specific issues. For example, separate Task Forces (three to five members) might be created to focus on discrete subjects such as African Americans in the criminal justice system, expanding educational opportunities and raising African Americans' level of aspiration for educational achievement, and equity in the work place.

3. A three-fourths vote will be required for the Public Policy Committee to recommend a Sigma Pi Phi policy position or action to the Executive Committee and for the Executive Committee to approve such a recommendation.

4. In the interest of time and economy, both the Public Policy Committee and the Executive Committee may employ teleconferencing and communication via the Fraternity's Internet website.

STAFFING AND FUNDING

The office the Grand Grammateus/Executive Secretary will handle the logistics of Public Policy Committee meetings. Other tasks, such as the gathering of data and the issuing of reports, may require hiring additional staff on a part-time, contractual basis. The Committee also may call upon Archons who volunteer their assistance and upon college student interns. Initial funding of about $50,000 for the biennium will be provided by the Executive Committee from the Grand Boulé budget. ***There will not be a special assessment or additional dues as a source of funding the Public Policy Committee***, although voluntary contributions are welcome at any time. For the longer term, possible sources of funding include the Boulé Foundation and public and selected corporate foundations.

The budget of the Public Policy Committee would be used to cover four major program areas:

- Meetings: transportation, food and lodging for Committee members and any invited public policy experts.

- Personnel: consultant/scholars, administrative support, editors.

- Materials: acquisition, reproduction, and distribution of relevant policy papers, articles, and other materials that provide background for Committee members.

- Products: Since the Public Policy Committee is product-oriented, much of its deliberations will be captured in discussion papers, reports, and articles, most of which will be disseminated to Archons and others in *The Boulé Journal*.

THE PUBLIC POLICY INITIATIVE ON THE REGIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS

The Fraternity is organized on three levels — national, regional, and local — and a Public Policy Committee ultimately should operate on all three levels. However, the Public Policy Discussion Group recommends that the new standing Public Policy Committee begin as a program operating only on the national level, and serving as a model for potential parallel committees at the regional and local levels.

Because local and regional public policy issues are best addressed at those levels, ultimately, it is desirable for there to be public policy committees established by Regional and Subordinate Boulés. However, because these Boulés cannot speak in the corporate name of the Fraternity, the scope of action of local committees would have to be more limited than that of the Grand Committee. At a minimum a local level public policy program might involve discussing public policy issues and urging Archons to take action on them as individuals.

However, the question of a formal public policy program at every level of the Boulé must be addressed. The Public Policy Committee will advise the Executive Committee on whether and to what extent Regional and Subordinate Boulés should create public policy committees and how such committees should relate to the Grand Public Policy Committee. One issue that must be resolved is what Regional and Subordinate Boulé committees might and might not do in the name of the Fraternity and in light of its non-profit tax-exempt status and its Constitution and By-Laws. At present, only the Executive Committee or the Grand Boulé can take policy positions and/or actions in the name of Sigma Pi Phi.

Both before and after these critical issues are resolved, the Grand Public Policy Committee will be open to ideas, suggestions, and other input from Regional and Subordinate Boulés as well as from individual Archons.

CONCLUSION

The Public Policy Discussion Group enthusiastically endorses the view that Sigma Pi Phi should use its collective intellectual and economic power to help enhance the lives of African Americans. The vehicle for achieving this goal is a Public Policy Committee that encourages Archons to become more active in understanding critical policy issues and in influencing the outcome of those issues that have major implications for the African American community.

The Discussion Group views such a program as the continuation of the historical concern of the Fraternity with leadership and its movement over the years toward a more public thrust to influence the destiny of African Americans. Thus, the Public Policy Committee would be an outlet for this aspiration and a complement to the Social Action Committee and the Boulé Foundation.

The Public Policy Discussion Group sees the proposed Public Policy Committee as a vigorous response to the challenge to Archons to seize this moment of opportunity and the mantle of leadership by using their intellect and experience to help rethink political strategies, to chart better courses for our socio-economic development, and to energize our people to want to do for themselves what others will not or cannot do for them.

Archon Charles W. Wesley's *History of Sigma Pi Phi* contains these lines which eloquently reflect the origin and thrust of this proposal:

> *Sigma Pi Phi does not fiddle while Rome burns.*
> *The fraternity is an altar with the eternal flame and*
> *from its flame the Archons light their torches to*
> *bring light and warmth to others.*

Unanimously Adopted by the Executive Committee on
March 7, 1998