

PRESS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR MIKIE SHERRILL: LET ACCOUNTABILITY SERVE THE MISSION

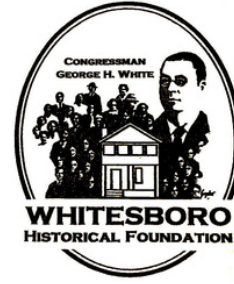
Written by Rev. Elorm Ocansey

WHITESBORO, N.J. — Governor Sherrill, there are moments in public life when controversy becomes a test of something larger than the people within it. New Jersey has arrived at such a moment.

The findings concerning Lieutenant Governor Dale Caldwell are serious. The investigation commissioned by your administration substantiated sexual harassment and ethics violations, including advocacy concerning a state employee with whom he previously had a romantic relationship without disclosing it. Lieutenant Governor Caldwell, through counsel, disputes those findings. Where wrongdoing occurred, he should acknowledge it, seek forgiveness from those harmed, accept meaningful consequences, and demonstrate through changed conduct that repentance is more than something ministers preach to others.

As an ordained United Methodist pastor, he should know that authority is stewardship. Jesus Christ did not teach His disciples to use proximity to power for personal advantage; He taught that whoever would be great must become a servant. To use public authority unrighteously betrays both the public trust and the servant leadership demanded by the Gospel.

Yet our Christian Gospel does not end at the place of failure. Scripture declares that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The Cross teaches neither cheap grace nor endless condemnation. Wrongdoing carries consequences, but human beings remain capable of repentance, transformation, and redemption.



Accountability worthy of a just society must therefore do more than punish yesterday's wrong; wherever possible, it should help produce tomorrow's better servant.

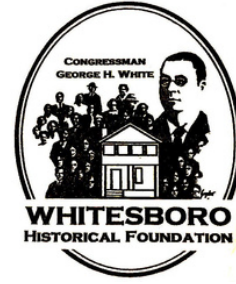
It is in that spirit, Governor, that I appeal to you to hold in abeyance your call for Lieutenant Governor Caldwell to relinquish his offices as Lieutenant Governor and Secretary of State, while he pursues legal dispute of these findings. Your administration's conclusions deserve to be taken seriously, but justice loses nothing by allowing Dr. Caldwell's due process to run its course. That is not a call to ignore wrongdoing. It is a call to let accountability serve justice before punishment becomes judgment.

There is a moral distinction between imposing consequences and concluding that a person's capacity for public service has been exhausted altogether. Grace does not mean pretending nothing happened, nor does due process mean indifference toward those reporting harm. We can protect those who came forward, safeguard state employees, and demand the highest ethical standards while allowing contested findings to withstand fuller scrutiny.

Neither should Caldwell's misconduct erase every good work, every person served, or every possibility of transformed leadership, including his establishment of the Faith Action Center. A society that professes rehabilitation cannot reserve redemption only for people without titles.

And this is no ordinary hour. New Jersey is confronting a federal administration whose actions are testing our institutions and raising consequential questions concerning our economy, military, national security, immigration system, and democratic life. As Secretary of State, Caldwell is himself a named defendant in federal litigation over the federal government's demand for New Jersey voter-registration information. The challenges before us are not theoretical; they are already at our doorstep.

Governor, you have spoken about putting the mission first. On that principle, there should be common ground. The mission is greater than any Governor or Lieutenant Governor.



Yes, it is the employee who deserves a workplace free from harassment. It is also the struggling family, the veteran and service member, the senior, the child, the refugee, the poor, and forgotten communities like Whitesboro that need their government to focus on protecting their lives, livelihoods, rights, and future.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s beloved community was never a community of flawless people. It was a community courageous enough to confront injustice without surrendering its faith in human transformation. We cannot preach redemption in our churches, rehabilitation in our prisons, restorative justice in our communities, and second chances in our public policy, only to discover that our belief in redemption disappears when failure reaches the halls of power.

Our state has too much work before it to allow this controversy to become the mission itself. In an age offering far too much vengeance and far too little grace, New Jersey can demonstrate something harder: we can confront wrongdoing without abandoning due process, demand accountability without forsaking redemption, and protect the integrity of government without destroying the humanity of those who serve within it.

That is the beloved community Jesus Christ called me toward, and the one Dr. King gave his life pursuing, a community where wrongdoing is confronted, dignity is protected, truth survives scrutiny, repentance bears fruit, and those who are accused are still allowed to defend their honor. Governor Sherrill, let due process have its day. Let those who have spoken be protected. Let Lieutenant Governor Caldwell answer for himself.

The hour is too consequential, the threats before our state too serious, and the needs of our people too urgent for punishment itself to become the mission. Let accountability serve the mission, and let the mission remain the People of New Jersey.

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