

Economy and equality among Specter's priorities

by Sonya M. Toler

Courier Staff Writer

Fresh off a narrow win for the GOP nomination in the state primary election, U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter laid out his agenda for the African American Chamber of Commerce of Western Pennsylvania.

The Republican senator defeated challenger Pat Toomey, a Lehigh Valley congressman, last month garnering 48 percent of the votes to Toomey's 42.

Specter took the opportunity—delivering the keynote speech during the chamber's annual meeting and luncheon May 10 at the Westin Convention Center hotel, Downtown—to offer what may be his first campaign speech leading into the November election.

He told approximately 300 people who attended the luncheon that he is focused on the economy and equality.

Though the economy has been lagging, Specter said.

economic indicators are showing that jobs are beginning to be created. In March, he said, the economy grew by 308,000 jobs and 288,000 in April.

"We have to be sure that these job opportunities come to all sectors of our society," he said.

"The issue of quality of op-

portunities and the issue of civil rights is, very frankly, never far from the table," he said. "There needs to be an awareness that discrimination is just barely below the surface in our society."

Among his concerns are

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THANK YOU—Senator Arlen Specter thanks chamber President and CEO Doris Carson Williams for the opportunity to address the nonprofit organization's members.

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5-12-04

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racial profiling of African-Americans and Muslims and the disparity in unemployment rates between Blacks

and whites.

Citing unemployment figures, Specter said January's national unemployment rate was 5.6 percent, but for Afri-

can-American workers it was 10.5 percent. In December 2003, the unemployment rate for white college graduates was 2.6 percent, and the

rate for their Black counterparts was 4.1 percent.

Specter said the lack of African-Americans in managerial positions in corporations has a "profound effect" on the number of African-American new hires.

He also expressed concern about the judicial selection process.

After the speech, chamber President and CEO Doris Carson Williams and board Chairman Robert Agbede presented Specter with a Waterford crystal clock.

After seven years as chairman, Agbede announced he was stepping down. He has been replaced by Greg Spencer, a retired Equitable

Resources executive and entrepreneur.

The chairman-elect said he couldn't refuse Agbede's offer to take over the leadership of the chamber's board.

Spencer said he is pleased that some younger and diverse members have been added to the board, including Marimba Milliones, entrepreneur and head of the Onyx Alliance, a young Black professional's organization.

Chief among his priorities will be "growing the chambers members because as these companies grow, Black employment will grow."

(Send comments to stoler@new-pittsburghcourier.com.)

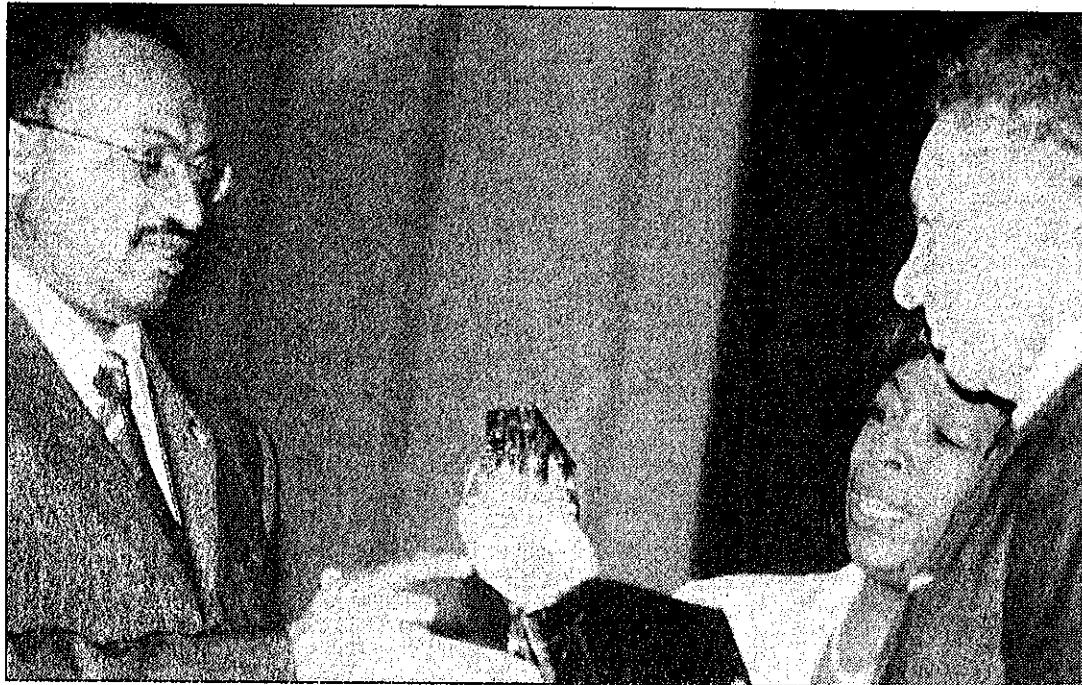


PHOTO BY SONYA M. TOLER

TIMEPIECE—Out going chamber Chairman Robert Agbede and President and CEO Doris Carson Williams present Sen. Arlen Specter with a Waterford crystal clock.

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