



Ex-Officers Back Mich. Affirmative Action

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By DEE-ANN DURBIN, Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON - Some of the nation's best known retired military officers and former top Pentagon (news - web sites) officials will file a Supreme Court brief supporting affirmative action admissions at the University of Michigan. Former Army undersecretary Joe Reeder, announcing the legal action, said Monday that service academies and ROTC programs need affirmative action to maintain a highly diversified officer corps. "It is absolutely essential to our fighting force," Reeder said.

"You can't get there yet without taking race into consideration." More than two dozen officials will support the brief including Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf, the commander in the first Persian Gulf War (news - web sites); Adm. William Crowe, Gen. Hugh Shelton and Gen. John M. Shalikashvili, all former chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Gen. Anthony Zinni, former head of the U.S. Central Command.

Also joining the brief, Reeder said, are former Defense Secretaries William Perry and William Cohen. Tuesday is the deadline for briefs in the Michigan case, which will be argued before the Supreme Court on April 1. The University of Michigan expects more than 60 briefs will be filed to support its affirmative action admissions policies. So far, 15 briefs have been filed by opponents of the university's policies, which consider minority status as a factor in deciding which students to pick. President Bush (news - web sites) said on Jan. 15 that he supports diversity in higher education, but that Michigan's program "unfairly rewards or penalizes students based solely on their race."

Applicants for Michigan's undergraduate classes are scored by points, with minorities or some poor applicants receiving a boost of 20 points on a scale of 150. At the law school, admissions officers use a looser formula that tries to ensure each class has a "critical mass" of about 10 percent or 12 percent minority enrollment. The administration says the point system is skewed toward minorities, noting that a perfect SAT score is worth just 12 points, and an outstanding essay gets three points.

Reeder, an attorney, said, "Nothing that the president has done or said speaks to the cohesiveness of the fighting force. ... It is absolutely critical to have African-American leadership to work with." Many large companies have also broken with Bush on the affirmative

action case, including General Motors Corp., Microsoft, Steelcase, Procter & Gamble, Intel and Banc One. Those companies have filed supporting briefs. More than 100 U.S. House Democrats filed a supporting brief Feb. 13.

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