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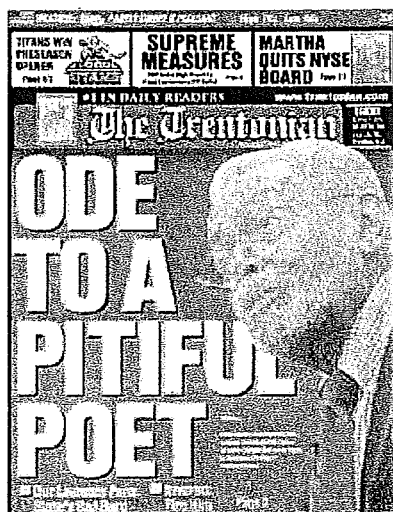
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VERSE PERVERSE

DAVE SOMMERS, Staff Writer 10/04/2002

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With outrage mounting over anti-Jewish poems penned by New Jersey's poet laureate Amiri Baraka, state Sen. Peter Inverso unveiled plans yesterday to introduce a bill that would allow Gov. Jim McGreevey to fire the writer "at any time."

The move to oust 68-year-old Baraka, of Newark, began gathering steam only recently when Garden State residents began scrutinizing the laureate's October 2001 poem, "Somebody Blew Up America," in which he claims Israelis had advance knowledge of the attacks.

Baraka so far has refused at least one demand by McGreevey to resign and has even launched a media campaign to defend his poem and other writings, which are laced with racial epithets and animosity toward Jews and America.

When pressed during a recent TV interview for proof that Israel knew of the pending attacks, Baraka said information was available on the Internet and in Arab newspapers.

Baraka went on to claim that President George W. Bush, the FBI, Russia and France, all knew about the pending attacks but let them happen anyway.

With that type of invective, Inverso yesterday said many lawmakers have concluded that New Jersey cannot have someone representing the state who makes such offensive comments.

"Unfortunately, given the current state law, Mr. Baraka cannot be fired from his position," Inverso said.

"We cannot have a person who is supposed to represent our great state making such offensive, unfounded comments."

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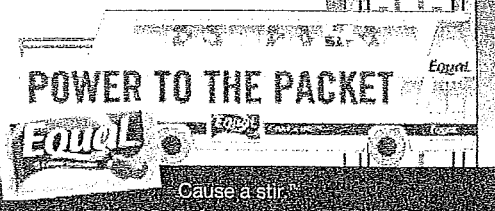


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In one poem entitled "Black Art," which Baraka reportedly rewrote from previous works, he talks of "dope-selling wops or slick halfwhite politicians."

"Setting fire and death to whities ass. Look at the Liberal Spokesman for the jews clutch his throat ..." the poem says.

In the controversial poem "Somebody blew up America," penned several weeks after the Sept. 11 attacks, Baraka claimed that 4,000 Israelis were told to stay home from work from the World Trade Center the day of the terrorist attacks.

McGreevey has asked Baraka to resign although he acknowledged he does not have the power to compel him to do so.

Baraka was appointed poet laureate over the summer by a six-member selection committee with the New Jersey Council for the Humanities and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and will apparently serve for two years.

"Unfortunately, our political hands are tied on this one," Kevin Davitt, McGreevey's press secretary, told The New York Times.

"The most we can do is continue to urge Mr. Baraka to resign and to explore any legislative possibilities to prevent any such future misfortunes like this."

Inverso's legislation, however, which he plans to introduce at the State House on Monday, would have the state's poet laureate serve "at the pleasure of the Governor," which means Baraka could be fired.

The bill would also introduce performance guidelines, to be issued by the Council for Humanities and Council for Arts, and would change the way a poet laureate is chosen.

For example, the legislation suggests that two names be submitted for the governor's consideration.

If passed in its current form, Inverso's legislation would take effect immediately and would be retroactive to Oct. 4, 1999.

"This provides the Governor with the necessary tools to ensure the Governor ... selects a poet laureate who can serve this state in a civil and positive manner, and gives the Governor the ability to remove a poet laureate when that person brings shame upon the government and the people of this state," Inverso said.

Anti-Defamation League spokesman Shai Goldstein said Baraka's poems and statements reveal a clear animosity, and are a disgrace both to America and to New Jersey.

Goldstein called on religious leaders and people of all races to speak out and to reflect the mosaic of life that is represented in New Jersey.

"(Baraka) perpetrates the big lie, the Israelis were somehow aware of the bombings," he said.

Baraka began writing with his first wife back in the 1960s after attending Rutgers University and Howard University.

He founded the beat literary journal, "Yugen," and wrote the off-Broadway play "Dutchman."

After being noticed by other artists, he started the Black Arts Repertory Theatre in 1964, which was credited with bringing art, poetry and drama to street corners in Harlem.

When Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965, he reportedly changed his name and became involved in black nationalist and cultural movements.

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