

Written by Hazel Trice Edney  
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(TriceEdneyWire.com) - Benjamin Todd Jealous, the former NAACP president, who has weaved a career through politics, the Black press and civil rights, has now announced his next course of action in pursuit of racial equality and economic justice in America.

Jealous and the Oakland, Calif.-based Kapor Center for Social Impact, located in the billionaire-Silicon Valley announced this week that he has joined the Center as its first venture partner. The center's co-founders and co-chairs Mitchell Kapor and Freada Kapor Klein are bringing Jealous on to find tech-savvy entrepreneurs and inventors with ideas for using technology for social impact, mainly to fill racial and economic gaps in America.

Jealous will help find the entrepreneurs, help them shape their tech visions; plus establish the selection criteria for possible seed money. He will also help lead the center's effort to make investments in non-profit organizations that are about closing social gaps and will join the board of the Kapor Center-funded Level Playing Field Institute, a non-profit organization dedicated to ending racial barriers in science, technology, engineering and math.

"I've always been interested in technology. I've always been interested in [deepening] the social impact. And I've always been very curious about ways to use technology to advance the social

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impact," Jealous said in an interview this week. "When Mitch and Frieda came forth and offered me the opportunity to join the Kapor Center for Social Impact and start trying new things every day...while still staying focused on achieving my life's mission of leveling the playing field and closing gaps to access and opportunity in our community and the country as a whole, I leapt at it because it had been a long time since I'd tried something new that had the potential to level the playing field for hundreds of thousands and millions of people."

Jealous says one of his first stops will be a learning tour of Silicon Valley, the South Bay portion of San Francisco, which leads the nation in cutting edge technology. The Kapor Center has a program for underrepresented college students to get paid internships in Silicon Valley companies.

Jealous, who dates his keen interest in technology back to a fourth and fifth grade computer science program, served as president/CEO of the NAACP for five years until his resignation late last year. There, his leadership in technology grew NAACP's mobile messaging base from 5,000 activists to 423,000 and from 175,000 email activists to 1.3 million.

Jealous' technological skills also harken back to when he started as executive director of the 200-member National Newspaper Publishers Association in 2000 with a vision of bringing the Black Press on line with websites and a full-service news service for its members. Before his departure almost half of NNPA's newspapers were on line and the wire service continues to thrive.

Jealous' record of using technology to fight for racial justice is what established the mutual attraction between him and the Kapor Center.

"Ben has spent his career working to end racial and economic gaps in society, from the criminal justice system to education to health care," said co-founder Freeda Kapor Klein in a statement. "We are tremendously pleased that he will bring his vast experience, strategy and energy to the tech sector as the next frontier in his life's work for justice and inclusion."

Jealous' civil rights career is just as important as his tech interest said co-founder Mitchell Kapor, one of the first Silicon Valley billionaires. "As an entrepreneur and an investor, I've built my career on seeing the possibilities of good ideas and the right team, and then bringing that vision to life. By bringing Ben to the Kapor team, we are making a bet that someone who has succeeded in changing the broader world in so many ways will do the same in our world."

When Jealous left the NAACP last year, he said he would spend more time with his growing family and would also work to start a political action committee (PAC) for transformative Democratic and Republican candidates. He said this week that he will continue to do it all.

"I will reserve a portion of my time continuing my work in politics. This will be 80 percent of my time and 20 percent will be continuing to build the PAC," he said. "It'll be separate and ongoing work."

As for his family, Jealous says he will remain bi-coastal, primarily living in Maryland with his

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family even as he travels for the Kapor Center.

The Center has already made major strides in its quest for social justice. Jealous ticked off a list of ideas, apps and inventions as examples that have already received funding. They include technology that lowers the astronomical cost of telephone calls from inmates to their families; a blue tooth hearing aid that costs only \$75 instead of the normal \$3,000-\$5,000; technology that helps parents and children with bi-lingual education; a way to send money home to another country without paying a 30 percent remittance fee; and a way to make college education available for the cost of a Pell grant.

"So, that's what we're talking about here...Very similar to my work at the NAACP. We're working on multiple gaps simultaneously," Jealous said. "It's impossible not to be excited."