

Blacks have stake in Clinton impeachment trial

Special to Sentinel-Voice

At Martin Luther King Day parades and prayer breakfasts, in their offices and in homes, many blacks said Monday they have a particular stake in the impeachment trial of President Clinton — a man described as “the best thing that has happened for blacks in a long time.”

“If Clinton is removed from office, that’s a slap in the face for black America,” said Mikel Holt, editor of the *Milwaukee Community Journal*, a black newspaper. “That’s in essence, derailing the civil rights freedom train.”

Clinton has long enjoyed black support, both from the public and in Congress, because he socializes and prays with black people, appoints them to high positions and

understands the struggle of racism, black leaders said.

As the trial entered its second week, some summoned the name and message of the slain civil rights leader in Clinton’s defense — saying the two men shared a common dream of equality.

“Dr. King would be suspect of the impeachment process because he would be suspect of the impeachers,” the Rev. Jesse Jackson said after a breakfast honoring King in Chicago.

Jackson specifically mentioned Senate Majority leader Trent Lott, who was recently linked by his uncle to an ultraconservative group accused of promoting white supremacy. Lott denied last week that he was affiliated with the group and said he is opposed to

racism and white supremacy.

Richard Bailey a historian and author from Montgomery, Ala., said he too was suspect of some of Clinton’s critics.

“I think (blacks) are most uncomfortable with the way matters are being handled and with the key players,” he said.

“If the conservative people who are trying to impeach the president come into power, it will be a turnback of the clock for Afro-Americans,” said Edward Lewis Jr., president of the NAACP for Idaho, Nevada and Utah.

Any current alternative to Clinton could be worse, said Vicki Washington, director of Equal Opportunity and Diversity at the University of Wisconsin-Extension in Madison, Wis.

“Of all of our presidents in the recent past,

Clinton seems to be more in tune with the impact of historic discrimination and how it continues to have both a political and economic impact on African-Americans and other people of color today,” Washington said.

To some, the impeachment itself is being driven by fear of minority power.

“My question is, are they really hounding him for his personal transgressions, or (to punish) him for making his administration the most diverse that the country’s ever known? That, to me, seems the undertone,” said Victoria Mares Hershey, first vice president of the NAACP in Portland, Maine.

Nan Stovall, another NAACP member from Portland, said Clinton is “the best thing that has happened for blacks in a long time.”

Texas leads nation in environmental racism complaints

By Simeon Booker Muhammad
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission has been charged with civil rights violations by Texans United and the Sierra Club for failing to protect minorities and the poor from pollution.

The groups recently filed a complaint with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency charging the TNRCC with “concerted and systematic discriminatory conduct to deny minorities, including people of color and low-income citizens, equal protection of the law ...”

The environmental groups say that the TNRCC’s actions violate an executive order on environmental justice which requires that federal programs and federally funded projects not be allowed to increase “the disproportionate burdens of environmental hazards in communities of color and low-income neighborhoods.”

“EPA will investigate and make a determination on the complaint. We don’t believe we did anything to discriminate against anyone,” said TNRCC spokesman Patrick

“The disproportionate burdens of environmental hazards in communities of color and low-income neighborhoods.”

— Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission

Shaughnessy.

The complaint focuses on the TNRCC’s alleged failure to prevent the illegal pollution at Crown Central Petroleum’s Pasadena, Texas refinery. It charges the agency with a pattern of skewed practices and lax enforcement in pursuing violations at industrial plants across the state.

Activists contend that neighborhoods near refineries and chemical plants are predominately Black, Latino and low income.

“Everyone knows that company and government officials would never tolerate the same pollution in their own neighborhoods,” said Texans United director, Rick Abraham. “These neighborhoods have been abandoned as sacrifice zones because residents don’t have money or political influence,” he added.

According to the complaint, the TNRCC

compromised its enforcement process at the expense of public health and the environment, and did so in order to protect Crown’s financial interests.

“The TNRCC’s handling of Crown is another example that Governor George Bush Jr.’s environmental justice program at TNRCC is a complete sham,” said Neil Carman, a former state air pollution official and the clean air director of the Texas chapter of the Sierra Club.

Crown’s violations of federal Clean Air Act standards total more than 15,000 operating hours in the last six years. In just 1996 and 1997 alone, Crown emitted nearly 1,000 tons of excess sulfur dioxide into the community, according to Texans United. Environmentalists report that the EPA has found that sulfur dioxide is acutely toxic and can cause impairment of breathing, respiratory

illness and aggravation of existing cardiovascular disease.

Texas leads the nation in civil rights complaints filed against a state environmental agency. At least nine such complaints have been filed against the TNRCC with the EPA’s civil rights office since 1994.

“Contrary to what Bush appointee and TNRCC Commissioner Barry McBee represented to Congress in his testimony of August 1998, the TNRCC has no meaningful environmental justice program to protect low-income citizens and people of color from toxic pollution across the state,” said Carman.

Scores of civil rights, labor and religious groups, including the NAACP, the National Baptist Convention and the AFL-CIO, have criticized the Baltimore-based Crown Central Petroleum for its treatment of minorities, women and workers.

According to the EPA, since 1993 when the first Title VI civil rights complaint was filed, only one case has been investigated and was decided in favor of the state. In fact, the complaint filed in 1993 still has not been closed.

King

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“We believed in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King,” Hume said.

“We believed that true unity among all Irish people was unity of the heart, not unity of the soil.”

Elsewhere, President Clinton marked the day by visiting a retirement home in Washington as part of an Americorps service project.

In South Carolina, Gov. Jim Hodges, newly sworn in as the state’s first Democratic governor in 12 years, said at a breakfast honoring King that he wants to make King Day a permanent state holiday. It is currently an optional day off for state workers and state offices are not closed.

New Hampshire is the only state that does not recognize the holiday, although legislation is pending to change the state’s Civil Rights Day to a holiday specifically recognizing

King.

In Wallingford, Conn., St. Paul’s Episcopal Church was crammed with 500 people who arrived to sing King’s praises. Until this year, the town was the only

Connecticut municipality that failed to recognize the holiday.

In Maryland, more than 500 people attended a breakfast in King’s honor in Annapolis, where attendees

were urged to rededicate themselves to carry on King’s work.

In Atlanta, Ebenezer churchgoers were reminded that discrimination persists, although perhaps not in the

ways of the past.

“Discrimination with a smile is when a banker looks at you and says, ‘I’m sorry you don’t qualify for the loan,’” said Andrew Cuomo, secretary of Housing and

Urban Development.

“Discrimination with a smile is when the employment officer says, ‘You don’t qualify for this job,’ but really he is only looking at the color of your skin.”

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