



Selma Mayor James Perkins Jr., left, shares a big smile with his father, James Perkins Sr., Tuesday night as the two celebrated the mayor's re-election. Perkins was the first Black to be elected mayor of Selma.

## Selma's Black mayor wins

SELMA, Ala. (AP)—James Perkins Jr., who became Selma's first Black mayor four years ago, was re-elected Tuesday, holding off three challengers who had questioned whether he did enough to unify Blacks and Whites.

In unofficial vote totals, which did not include absentee ballots, Perkins had 4,215 votes, or 57 percent, to 1,729 votes, or 24 percent, for his closest challenger, state Rep. Yusuf Salaam.

The absentee ballots,

which were still being counted Tuesday night, were not expected to change the outcome of the race. Businessman Gene Hisel, the only White candidate, received 1,267 votes, or 17 percent. The final challenger, a radio station owner and former auto worker, trailed far behind.

When it became apparent that Perkins had won re-election, an impromptu parade broke out in downtown Selma with Perkins supporters blowing car horns and shouting victory chants.

"The people really got the message. They heard about the progress we've made," Perkins said. "I think the voters saw the inconsistencies in what people were saying about me."

Perkins had said a victory in his bid for a second term would be as significant as his 2000 election, when he defeated former segregationist Joe Smitherman, who had been mayor since voting rights marchers were beaten at Selma in 1965.

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## Crematory operator set for trial

ROME, Ga. (AP) - Nearly 1,700 relatives of people whose bodies were found scattered across a crematory's property are suing the owner for all he's worth — but that may not be much.

The lawsuit against Brent Marsh and the estate of his father, former owner Ray Brent Marsh, goes to trial Monday, 2 1/2 years after the remains of 334 people were discovered at the Tri-State Crematory in Noble, Ga., near the Tennessee line.

Investigators found heaps of decaying bodies from Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee that were supposed to have been cremated. Complete and partial human remains were found in storage buildings, in burial vaults, in pits and the surrounding forest.

Tests revealed the crematory gave some families cement dust instead of their loved one's ashes.

One of the plaintiffs, Anthony Schuchman, said he's seeking about \$1,500 for the cost of cremating his son and the cost of digging up his son's grave in an unsuccessful attempt to find a body part large enough to be identified. The son, Gilbert Schuchman, died Dec. 29, 1992, and was supposedly cremated at Tri-State.

"We don't know if that's him or not," said Schuchman, 85.

Attorneys for the 1,671 plaintiffs say it will be more difficult to collect money from Marsh than to convince a jury of his guilt. A judge ruled Brent Marsh was too poor to afford his own lawyer in the criminal case, but he's being represented in the civil case by attorneys paid for by his insurance company.

"It's probably about as strong a case against Brent Marsh as you can possibly have," said

Robert Darroch, an attorney for the families. "Most of them are still incredibly emotional about what happened. This ruined the memory about the passing of one of their loved ones."

A separate lawsuit went to trial last spring. It lasted about two weeks before all 58 funeral homes named as defendants for sending bodies to the crematory during 1988-2002 reached settlements totaling \$36 million.

The lawsuit doesn't specify what amount of money the families are seeking from Marsh. This trial will only determine liability. If guilty, a second trial a few months later would award damages.

Marsh's defense attorneys say they will concentrate on trying to show that the estate of Ray Brent Marsh should not bear any responsibility. They say there's no proof of negligence before Jan. 11, 1997, the earliest date of death for any of the identified bodies recovered from the property — the younger Marsh ran the crematory after that date.

"We're really trying to show Ray Brent Marsh did the cremations the way he was supposed to," said defense attorney Frank Jenkins. "But it's not like we're in any way pointing the finger at Brent Marsh."

If the families get a guilty verdict, they will then likely try to get the Marshes' insurance company, Georgia Farm Bureau, to pay.

Georgia Farm Bureau agreed to pay for the Marshes' defense but not assume liability.

At least two lawsuits are pending over the existence of insurance and whether Georgia Farm Bureau would bear any responsibility.

Marsh faces 787 charges in a criminal trial set for Oct. 11. If convicted, he could be sentenced to more than 8,000 years in prison.

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