

House moves to reward aviators

WASHINGTON (AP)- The Tuskegee Airmen, the first group of Black American fighter pilots, will receive the Congressional Gold Medal under a bill passed in the House on Tuesday.

The bill, which passed 400-0, would be the airmen's second congressional recognition. Both chambers passed a resolution honoring the pilots last year.

"They have fought not really just for Black folks. They fought for a better America. They fought for a better world," said Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.), the sponsor of the bill. "They were pioneers not only in fighting the war but showing and giving self-esteem to so many younger people."

About 1,000 Black pilots were trained to fly and maintain combat airplanes at the Tuskegee, Ala., air base during World War II. Facing strong discrimination in the segregated military, the airmen flew bomber escorts. They were credited with never losing a bomber and with shooting down more than 100 enemy aircraft. Military officials estimate about 200 of the Tuskegee Airmen are alive today.

The bill requires House and Senate leaders to present a Congressional Gold Medal, the highest award of the House, collectively to the Tuskegee Airmen. About 300 individuals and groups, including civil rights activist Rosa Parks and Olympian Jesse Owens, have received the honor since 1776.

A similar bill passed in the Senate last October.

Last year the House voted to tighten rules on such congressional awards — specifically eliminating the ability of groups to win the Gold Medal. That bill died in the Senate.

Is riff between King clan over?

By Stan Washington
Special to Sentinel-Voice

ATLANTA (NNPA) - The dispute between the King family siblings on the direction and future of the King Center is close to being resolved, according to King Center president and CEO Isaac Farris Jr.

Following a program sponsored recently by the History Makers, Farris told the *Atlanta Voice* that there were a few issues left to be settled between the children of Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King, but he is positive those issues will be worked out in the foreseeable future.

"It's been pretty much resolved. We all want the same thing. We all want the King Center to be here long after we are all gone. Everything will be worked out," he said.

The four children are split down the middle on who should have control of the King Center. Dexter — who succeeded his mother as chair — and the oldest daughter, Yolanda, favor turning over the maintenance and control of the buildings

and grounds to the National Park Service. That course of action is shared by Farris, board member Andrew Young and U.S. Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.).

The Park Service reportedly already contributes \$1 million a year towards the King Center. Martin III and Bernice King have publicly expressed their fear that the King Center would lose its independence if the Park Service assumes full control of the facilities.

The group favoring the transfer contends that the King Center would remain independent and the board would still be in control of the King Papers and the programming. They contend that the federal government would not be dictating what types of programming they would initiate.

"Why not turn it over to the Parks Service?" Farris asked. "Nearly 1 million people come through the King Center each year. That's a lot of people to have to clean up after and maintain the facilities for. They take care of the presidential libraries. There is no other Black institution like this one

in the country."

"When we moved to this location, we moved in debt-free. We will maintain our independence. If we didn't think we could, we wouldn't even consider it," Farris added.

Farris said he wanted to also clear up the belief perpetrated by the media that the King family lives off of funds raised by the King Center.

"We're not trying to raise money to support the King family," Farris said. "None of the money we raise goes to the King family. Only Dexter and I get a salary because we are on staff working. But, it's not like that's a whole lot of money."

News reports place both salaries in the mid-\$100,000 range.

With the recent death of founder Coretta Scott King, the board and the children are faced with the task of capitalizing off of the public's monumental outpouring of sympathy and respect.

Tens of thousands waited in line at times up to three hours to pay their last respects to the woman often referred to as the "First Lady" of the Civil Rights Movement in the three days prior to her funeral. Many traveled from around the country and from abroad to do so.

Longtime board member and former Atlanta mayor Young, who had tried to quietly negotiate an agreement between the differing siblings, strongly supports the park service assuming control of the grounds and buildings.

"It would be no different than it is here," Young told the *Atlanta Voice* following a news conference at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum. "The

Carter Center runs the programs, and the parks service maintains the grounds and the buildings."

The children will go through a grieving period and then later get with the board of directors to settle the matter, Young said.

The board doesn't have a meeting scheduled, but they last met in December. Mrs. King was not able to participate because of her illness, he said.

"See, for good or bad, before when we [the board] met, we just did whatever Coretta wanted us to do," Young said.

Another major bone of contention expressed by Martin III and Bernice is how they felt Dexter abused his power as chair and appointed several members to the board without the current board even having the opportunity to vote on them.

With Mrs. King's blessings in 1994, the board voted Dexter as president/CEO of the King Center. Under his leadership, Dexter cut programs and staffing. The center's physical structure fell into disrepair.

In February of 2005, the National Park Service released a report saying the center needed \$11 million in structural and mechanical repairs. "I doubt if the figure is that high," Martin III said during an Atlanta radio interview.

On Aug. 22, Dexter was voted out by the board and Martin III was elevated to chairman of the board. But one month later, Dexter appointed eight new board members who voted him back in and replaced Martin III with their cousin, Isaac Farris.

Stan Washington writes for the *Atlanta Voice*.

Smiley

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This early commitment by the Democrats and the Republicans is unprecedented. Black America deserves to know where all the candidates stand on the critical issues facing our community. We deserve to know that these issues are a part of their campaign, and more importantly, a part of their consciousness.

This is a major commitment and we are pleased that both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party understand clearly that we will no longer sit back and allow our votes to be taken for granted or ignored. And moreover, we hope this will reinforce their understanding of the fact that when you make Black America better, you make all of America better," Smiley said.

Each audience member received a free copy of "The Covenant," a 254-page text which is comprised of ten chapters on the most important issues facing Black Americans as identified by the public at the 2005 symposium. Experts in each field provide a synopsis of the problem and offers suggested solutions.

Panelists included: Actor/activist Harry Belafonte; Rev. Al Sharpton; the Hon-



Tavis Smiley held a forum discussing the current state of affairs throughout Black America.

orable Minister Louis Farrakhan; Marc H. Morial, President, National Urban League; economist Julianne Malveaux; Dr. Ian Smith; State Senator Jackie Winters; U.S. Congressman Melvin Watt, Chair, Congressional Black Caucus; Princeton University professor Dr. Cornel West, and others.

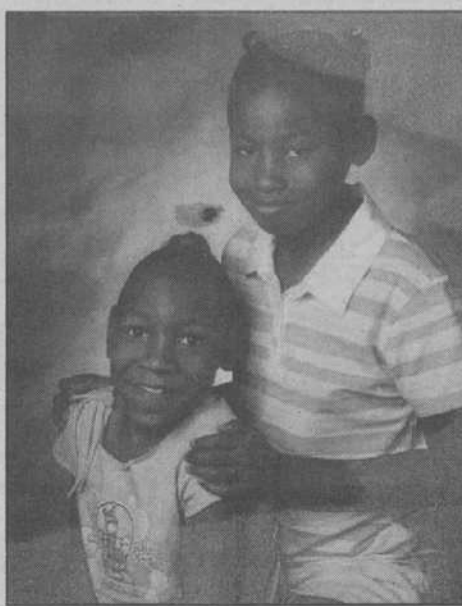
Smiley will take The Covenant conversation on the road via a seven-city tour which kicked off Monday in St. Louis, followed by New York, Atlanta, Memphis, Los Angeles, Oakland and San Francisco, with local community leaders and policy makers joining the discussion in each city.

All town hall discussions are free and open to the public, with the first 200 attendees receiving a free copy of the non-partisan "Covenant with Black America" and all attendees will receive a Covenant card.

If you are looking for a reason to adopt foster children, here are two wonderful reasons.



For more information on adoption or foster care call Clark County Department of Family Services at 1-888-4-A-FAMILY. If you are interested in adopting this sibling group, please contact Wendy's Wonder Kids Recruiter Collette Smith at (702) 455-7286



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