



# Activists: Reform coroner's inquest

By Debbie Hall  
Sentinel-Voice

The number of officer-involved shootings from January 2006 to June 2006 has surpassed the total number of officer-involved shootings in 2005. The rapid increase in fatal shootings has many citizens, community groups and families of the survivors alarmed.

Increasingly, questions are being raised by local groups and even federal agencies about the effectiveness and fairness of the coroner's inquest — the process of investigating any officer-involved shootings resulting in a fatality or the death of an inmate in custody. There has been a growing protest over many years, but now there is growing support for a full investigation into the process and identifying problems.

One recent fatal shooting case in particular has sparked controversy: the death of Swave Lopez, the 17-year-

old who was shot twice in the back by police while handcuffed and running away from police custody in May 2006.

A press conference involving members of several community action organizations was held Tuesday on the steps of the Regional Justice Center downtown at 200 Lewis Ave. Among the local groups attending were: NAACP, ACLU of Nevada, Nevada ACORN, Nevada Attorneys for Criminal Justice, National Alliance Against Racism and Political Oppression, National Hip-Hop Political Convention, Mexican American Political Association, and the Committee to Prevent Erosion of Human Rights.

Elected officials and candidates in current races were among more than 100 people in attendance.

ACLU of Nevada Executive Director Gary Peck made opening remarks about (See Inquest, Page 3)



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

Officials from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the American Civil Liberties Union of Nevada rallied to highlight problems with the coroner's inquest and to probe the recent spate of cop-involved shootings.

## Racial economic gap widening

By Lorinda M. Bullock  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - A weak U.S. economy and a low unemployment rate over the last couple of years has started to erode the progress Black Americans have gained in income, and has further widened the income gap between Blacks and Whites, says a new report from a Washington, D.C., think tank.

The Economic Policy Institute's "The State of Working America 2006/2007" says that in 2000, a Black family's median income was 63.5 percent of the earnings of their White counterparts. Figures show that the number dropped to 62 percent in 2004.

Jared Bernstein, an economist and author of the report, said, "That's basically \$37,000 versus \$58,000, so it's a significant gap."

Bernstein said the late 1990s, with its robust job

market, was an economically promising time for African-Americans, but that has since changed.

"Even in the best of times, I think the racial gaps — whether we're looking at income, wages or wealth — are unacceptably high, so I would think that an economic agenda to improve the living standards of Black Americans ought to be at the top of anyone's list be they policy maker or voter... The Black-White ratio got up to 64 percent in 2000 and that was the highest on record (since 1947) — and that's still a huge gap," he said.

The fact that the minimum wage hasn't been increased since 1997 hasn't helped the plight of Blacks.

"Since African-American workers, especially women, are disproportionately paid wages at or near the minimum, it (a minimum wage increase) is definitely going to help them both in absolute

and relative terms. Meaning in absolute terms, they're going to make more, and they're going to make more relative to folks who earn higher than the minimum wage who don't necessarily get a boost when the minimum goes up," he said.

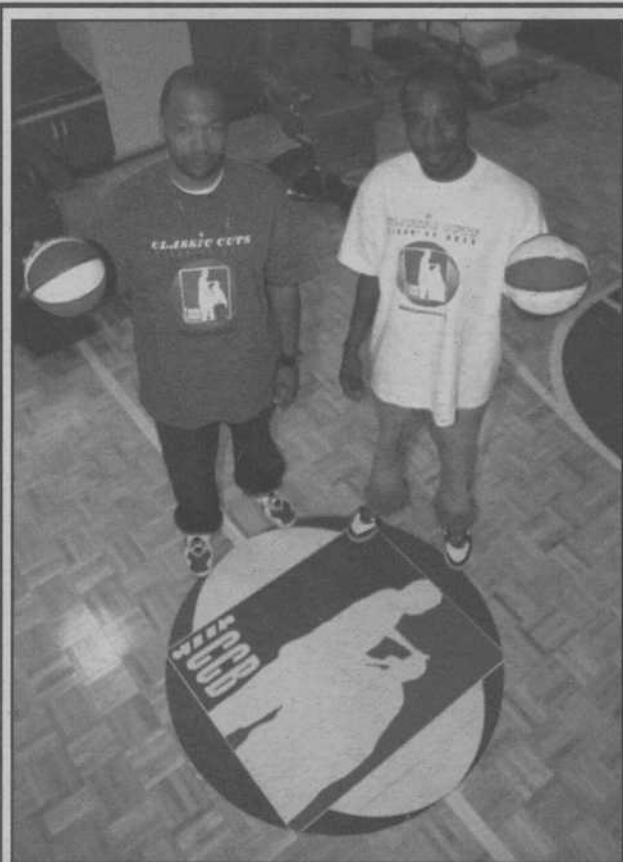
Although a proposal led by Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) to increase the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour by January 2009 failed last month, the debate to increase the national minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour is far from over as campaigning lawmakers on Capitol Hill fight to keep their congressional seats in the fall.

Shortly after the defeat of the bill that included the minimum wage increase, Congressional Black Caucus member Congresswoman Barbara Lee (D-Calif.), expressed her disappointment.

"It is unacceptable that the Republican Majority in the House will vote today to give

a tax cut to the heirs of millionaires while blocking an increase in the minimum wage for millions of hardworking Americans," said Lee. "This Republican-controlled Congress already approved an average tax cut of \$42,000 this year to those making more than a million dollars annually. Instead of rewarding the hard work of Americans struggling to make ends meet, Republicans are hard at work making sure the heirs of the wealthy few get an enormous tax break."

House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said in a statement last week, "At the same time as energy prices are going up, the minimum wage has not been increased in nine years; it is still \$5.15 an hour. People can hardly afford to fill up their car to get to work at \$5.15 an hour. In our discussion on this issue in the last (See Gap, Page 4)



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

### CUTS AND RUNS

Calvin "Tito" Hudson, left, owner of Classic Cuts — King of Cuts, and barbershop manager Ezekiel Conner, palm basketballs inside the newly opened business on 1445 W. Alexander. A sports-themed barbershop, Classic Cuts has a functional hoops court. (See Story Page 6)