

Leaders wary of assaults on schools

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Although the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of affirmative action in the University of Michigan Law School case three years ago and Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, Black leaders say affirmative action and school desegregation are among the most important issues facing Black America in 2007 — both being at risk.

“The Supreme Court is likely to issue a devastating opinion in the Seattle cases [this] year and it will possibly set back the premise of Brown v. Board of Education to provide quality education for all children,” said Harvard University law professor Charles Ogletree. “And I think that it will unsettle plans by conscientious

school districts, surveyors and educators.”

The two cases heard by the Supreme Court recently, Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District and Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education (Kentucky), could end voluntary programs that use race in order to maintain racial integration in public schools.

“I was at the argument and I heard the questions,” Ogletree said. “And there was little enthusiasm among the majority of the justices to support a voluntary integration plan that both Louisville, Kentucky and Seattle, Wash. had devised to protect the interest of children.”

Successful campaigns to end affirmative action in Michigan, California and Washington state will likely

spread, civil rights advocates say. Conservative activist Ward Connerly is researching possible ballot initiatives against affirmative action in at least nine more states.

From academia to activism, Black leaders fear 2007 could bring an end to affirmative action, causing a reversal in decades-old policies established for racial and economic justice.

If it happens, activist Rev. Al Sharpton says the same way that Blacks got equal justice programs, they will have to fight for it again.

“We got it through mass mobilization and putting pressure on the Senate and the Congress to enact legislation that would offset it. And that’s the only way we’re going to do it this time,” Sharpton said. “The minute we start deluding our-

selves that we don’t need a movement, Whites will use that as a license to stop dealing with us in ways that are adverse to our progress because they feel that they can.”

What the new Democratic-majority Congress will do on behalf of Black people is yet another major issue facing Black America, political observers say.

“The 2006 midterm election was the most important story of last year and the high water mark for all Americans, especially people of color,” said Democratic strategist Donna Brazile. “Voters went to the poll to challenge its leaders to move in a new direction... Starting in January, African-Americans will hold key committee assignments and will be in a position to chart that new direction.”

Jesse Jackson Sr. is optimistic that the progress will begin this year.

“Blacks have the power right now to help determine the agenda of the U.S. Congress. We’ve never had that power before,” he said. He cited Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) as chair of the House Judiciary Committee and

Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) as chair of the Ways and Means Committee as potential powerbrokers on behalf of the socially, politically and economically disadvantaged.

“We were completely locked out of power... Now, our point of view matters (See Ruling, Page 10)

James Brown

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sparked a roar from the crowd, stood before the casket and shared a hug with the Rev. Al Sharpton just as Brown’s latest backup band, the Soul Generals, started to play.

Fans had started lining up in the rain before dawn. Many gathered on the streets outside to listen to the service over a public address system.

Brown died of heart failure on Christmas morning in Atlanta while hospitalized for treatment of pneumonia. He was 73.

Saturday’s public funeral was the third memorial event held in as many days for Brown, whose hits like “I Got You (I Feel Good)” and “Papa’s Got A Brand New Bag” inspired generations of soul, funk, disco, rock and rap artists.

“When I was little, our family tradition during the holiday was young folks would do their routine — I was always James Brown,” said Richard Clayton, one of about 20 Atlantans who headed to Augusta on a bus early Saturday.

For Maynard Eaton, who helped organize the bus group, Brown was a political figure above all.

“I’m Black and I’m Proud” was the most influential Black slogan of the 1960s,” he said, referring to the chorus of the Brown standard “Say It Loud.”

On Friday, in a small brick church in nearby North Augusta, S.C., about 300 family members and close



Singer Michael Jackson, middle, stands with Rev. Al Sharpton, right, and Rev. Jesse Jackson. Each looks at the coffin of legendary singer James Brown during his public funeral in Augusta, Ga., on Saturday.

friends — including boxing promoter Don King and comedian Dick Gregory — heard Sharpton deliver the eulogy at a 90-minute service.

“When he started singing, we were sitting in the back of the bus. When he stopped singing we were flying Lear jets,” said Sharpton, who toured with Brown in the 1970s and remained a close friend.

A day earlier, thousands of fans poured into the Apollo in Harlem for a sometimes raucous celebration of Brown at the venue where one of his trademark high-energy concerts launched him into the international spotlight in 1956.

“He was a God-sent person — almost like an angel,” said Vickie Greene, who said she saw her first Brown show more than 30 years ago. “He was so inspirational to people about sharing and helping

and giving.”

Even when he became an international superstar, Brown considered Augusta his home. It was a place for highs, like his annual tradition of handing out Thanksgiving turkeys to needy families, and lows — such as the drug-fueled police chase that landed him a 15-month stint in prison.

Brown was born in Barnwell, S.C., in 1933 and spent much of his childhood in Augusta singing and dancing for change on street corners. At times, he committed petty crimes that landed him in reform school.

Far from the typical low promise of a youth spent in what he once described as an “ill-repute” area of the city, Brown’s mark on his hometown was indelible.

Three days before his death, Brown hosted his annual Christmas toy drive for needy children.

The city named a street James Brown Boulevard a decade ago and last year erected a statue of him in a downtown park. Earlier this year, the city’s main auditorium was named in his honor.

Mayor’s death ruled suicide

WESTLAKE, La. (AP) — The first Black mayor-elect in a largely White Louisiana town committed suicide days before he was to take office, the coroner said Tuesday.

The body of Gerald “Wash” Washington, 57, was found Saturday night in the parking lot of a former high school with a pistol nearby. He had been shot once in the chest, investigators said.

The death was ruled a suicide Tuesday, the same day Washington was to take office. The Calcasieu Parish Sheriff’s Office said it was asking Louisiana State Police to investigate the death, and a motivation wasn’t immediately known.

The mayor-elect’s family did not accept the coroner’s ruling and has asked for a state police investigation, Sheriff Tony Mancuso said.

A message was left Tuesday at a listing for a Gerald (See Mayor, Page 4)

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