

# Boycott looms over Black fire chief's dismissal

*By Alvin A. Reid*  
*Special to Sentinel-Voice*  
ST. LOUIS (NNPA) - An old, yet new, powerful force in the Black community is now fully committed to challenging Mayor Francis Slay's continuing disrespect of the city's African-American population.

About 1,000 people met peacefully but boisterously in the City Hall rotunda as the Community Concerned Clergy for the Betterment of St. Louis challenged Slay to bring "justice to Sherman George," a former fire chief, and improve deteriorating race relations in the city.

The backlash from Slay's

unprecedented demotion of George that showed total disregard for the African-American community is now threatening the city on several fronts.

A pending full-fledged economic boycott of the city of St. Louis is looming.

The hospitality industry is staring at the possibility that more than 11,000 visitors might go elsewhere for the 2011 National Society of Black Engineers national convention.

More conventions and conferences are being targeted and other cities are recruiting these events and are using the boycott and St.

Louis' roiled racial climate against this region.

More than 30 African-American pastors from various denominations lined the steps that lead to the mayor's office as Concerned Clergy announced it would lead an effort to defeat a pending sales tax proposal that could be on the Feb. 5 ballot.

"There are actions we must take. We will defeat Mayor Slay's tax proposal," said Rev. Douglas Parham, chair of the new clergy organization.

Bishop Alfonso Scott of Lively Stone Church of God said campaigning against that proposal is one way

clergy and congregation members "will be a fly in [Slay's] buttermilk."

"We're not going to take this anymore," Scott thundered as hundreds in the crowd applauded.

"The preacher knows how to cause some agitation. We are going to turn loose the locusts to eat up your hatred."

There is also a continuing effort to unseat Slay through a recall petition drive. A major date in that ongoing effort is Feb. 5 — Missouri Primary Day and also the possible date of a proposal to increase the city sales tax to increase Public Safety Department revenues.

Public Safety Director Charles Bryson was hastily promoted before he "officially" demoted George. That led to Dennis Jenkerson, a White firefighter and friend of the mayor's, being named chief. Jenkerson is considered by many a less qualified candidate than Black fire chief candidate Charles Coyle. All that transpired was to the delight of Local 73, the predominantly White union with a history of antagonism toward George and Black firefighters.

Eric Vickers, a spokesperson for Citizens to Support Chief George and the pro-

posed boycott said Community Concerned Clergy "emphatically let it be known that the Black clergy is stepping forward to join ranks with others in their opposition to Mayor Slay. ...This unprecedented action by the ministers marks the latest unveiling of a broad spectrum of opposition that was triggered two months ago when the mayor humiliatingly ousted the city's first and only Black fire chief, Sherman George."

Scott said, "there is a new order of the day. We want you to step out, join the preachers and say, 'Let my people go.'"

Rev. Anthony Witherspoon of Washington A.M.E Church said, "our race has always had to deal with urgent matters. ...It is urgent that we do something and we do it right now. We cannot sit idly by and let our government do whatever it wants to do. [Slay] and [Chief of Staff] Jeff Rainford have their agenda. But God's agenda is the most important."

Parham warned the crowd that the mayor and his political backers are resorting to a divide-and-conquer strategy using Black cronies. Several of Slay's Black agents are carrying the message that the

Clergy Coalition of Metropolitan St. Louis, Gateway Classic Foundation and NAACP are in danger of losing not-for-profit status because individuals have taken a stance of opposition to the mayor.

"Our voices must rise above the effort to silence us. There are already attempts to turn one against another and to buy us out. We will not accept so-called progress that is based on the abandonment of Black people and the protection (from the mayor's office) of any job considered to be 'a White man's job.'"

Parham said the new clergy organization could work with activists and other members of the community in calling for "justice for Chief George."

Parham said Concerned Clergy is monitoring the recall effort and proposed economic boycott "and will evaluate our position." He said that his organization would soon be calling on all Black elected officials, all activists and others to come together to take on the powerful Slay administration.

He said, "We must fight and we must fight with strong determination."

*Alvin A. Reid writes for the St. Louis American.*

## Residents concerned about police-community relations

*By Chris Levister*  
*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

SAN BERNADINO (NNPA) - On the eve of a U.S. Justice Department report showing police brutality cases rising 25 percent nationally since 2002, residents of San Bernardino's predominately Black Westside neighborhood packed into a standing-room-only meeting to air their grievances against police and work toward improving police/community relations.

"Seething" is how Mardla McKenzie, described the crowd gathered at the New Hope Family Center on Highland.

"They either don't know or they don't care," said McKenzie, one of about 80 Westside residents who took part in a no holds barred, often emotionally charged discussion recently aimed at finding solutions to what many in the city's Westside describe as "dangerously explosive" relations between police and the city's Black community.

"Everybody in this room has a voice," Elisa Makunga, a federal mediator from the U.S. Department of Justice told the crowd. She got an earful.

"They patrol our neighborhoods looking for trouble. They crash our peaceful vigils; stalk and harass our children and our grandmothers. In their eyes, every young Black male is a gang member; every luxury car is stolen, and every house is a crack-house; every resident on the street after dark is a prostitute or a drug dealer," McKenzie told listeners.

The 22-year-old claims she and other residents were pepper sprayed and roughed up in the summer when police crashed a curbside candlelight vigil for a 22-year-old man slain the night before.

"When we call 911 to report gunfire, they don't respond. Or worse, they say, we'll send someone to collect the bodies after the shooting stops," said resident Pam Elliott.

"I'm afraid to go out at night. I fear for my life," said 14-year-old Chris Johnson. Johnson recalled a police incident while hanging out with friends on a neighborhood street corner recently.

"The police drove up — for no apparent reason. They said, 'What are you doing?' I said just hanging out with my friends. They asked me, 'Are you a gangbanger?' I told them no. They said, 'What do you have in your pockets?' I said I don't have pockets. They kept saying 'show some ID.' I told them I'm only 14. I don't have ID. They threw me in the back of the police car and drove me home. The next day I was in foster care," Johnson told stunned listeners.

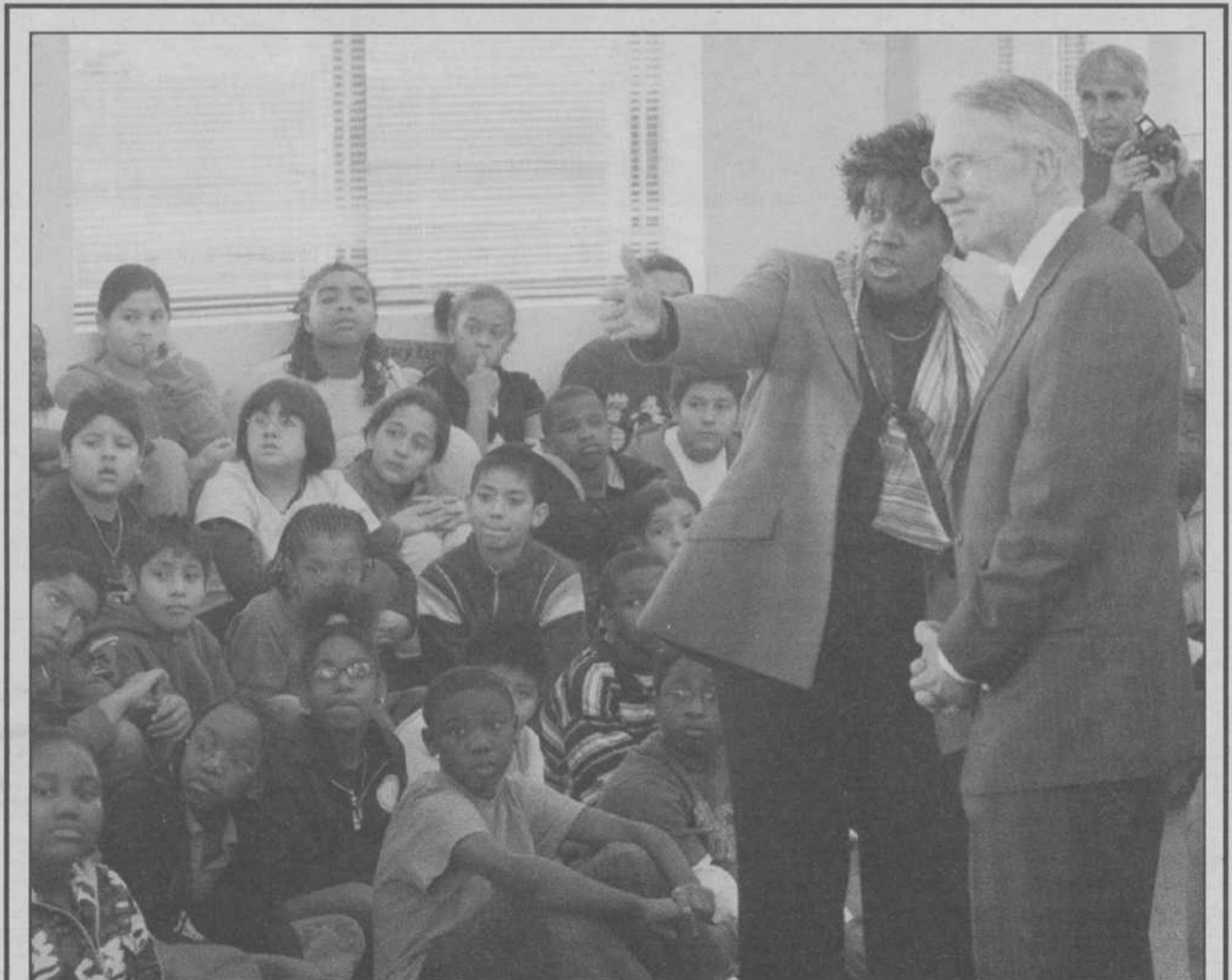
"If I run a traffic light, ticket me, but don't shoot me. [Not] every Black child who congregates on a street corner is a criminal. [Not] Every Black man wearing a do-rag and a gold chain is a gang member," lamented Tommy Nelson, 52.

"They don't respect us. They don't know us," said Ruby Brown, who told listeners an officer pulled her over and questioned her

about what she was doing as she drove to work before dawn recently.

The meeting comes on the heels of the Justice Department's investigation into excessive force by San Bernardino police officers as the city gears up to expand its crime-fighting Operation Phoenix program to the Westside.

*Chris Levister writes for BlackVoiceNews.com.*



### REID ALL ABOUT IT

*Dr. Beverly Mathis, principal of Kermit E. Booker Sr. Elementary School welcomes U.S. Sen. Harry Reid to her school on Monday. The Senate Majority Leader dropped in to speak with the students and answer questions. On Tuesday, Reid joined other prominent Democrats in the audience at a presidential debate at Cashman Center.*

*Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy*