

Bass first Black woman speaker

By Jason Lewis

Special to Sentinel-Voice

LOS ANGELES (NNPA)

— The Inaugural Ceremony for the Honorable Karen R. Bass looked like a Hollywood event, as many big names in California politics were on hand to celebrate Bass' appointment as the 67th Speaker of the California State Assembly.

After a lengthy introduction of the politicians on hand, four-time Emmy award winning actress Alfre Woodard opened the ceremony at the California State Capitol Building in Sacramento with a poem dedicated to Speaker Bass, who is the first African-American woman in the nation to serve in this powerful, state-elected role.

Congresswoman Diane Watson, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, and 66th Speaker of the California State Assembly Fabian Núñez gave speeches praising Bass' hard work and dedication.

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, former San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown, and Los Angeles City Councilman Herb Wesson escorted Speaker Bass to the podium.

After being sworn in, Bass gave a very moving



Karen Bass is sworn in as America's first Black female Assembly speaker. She's in the California State Assembly.

speech.

"Members, as Mr. Speaker (Núñez) pointed out, I do feel the weight of history on my shoulders today—as the first African-American woman in U.S. history elected to head a state legislative body," Speaker Bass said.

"If we could only harness the power of our common humanity, I don't think there's anything we couldn't do for the people of this state. And members, they truly do need us now. People are losing their homes. People are losing their jobs. People are scared about the future in a state that should be all about hope for the future."

Speaker Bass pointed out the positives and negatives in California.

"We represent California, the 8th largest economy on the planet. If California is our own nation, we would be better off than Russia or India or Spain.

"More than 50,000 companies in our districts export products around the globe. 20 percent of all U.S. trade, about a half a trillion dollars, passes in some way through California. Workers at our ports handle more than 40 percent of the nation's container cargo.

"We are a \$94 billion tourism industry and the nation's top travel destination. Mil-

lions of visitors come here every year to enjoy 1,100 miles of coast and 300-foot redwood trees.

"The laptops on our desk should remind all of us that the California visionaries, who founded Silicon Valley in a garage, have changed the way the world lives, learns, and leads. Thanks to California, you can find anything you could possibly want on Google... and then when you get tired of it, you can turn around and sell it on Ebay.

"Our 80,000 farms and ranches produce more than \$30 billion worth of goods. We export more than \$10 billion of those goods, 350 commodities in all, everything from almonds and artichokes to turkeys and tangerines.

"California is a giant of a state, but we are a giant in crisis. Over the last two months, I have visited with business leaders in the Silicon Valley who are relocating overseas, I've met with farmers in the Central Valley who cannot afford to plant crops, resulting in the abandonment of the workforce in nearby small towns. I have visited schools and met with teachers and school board members in San Diego and Norwalk where teachers received layoff notices. I have met with stu-

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Henry Baul was one of America's first Black Marines.

Black marine to get recognition

By Cornelius Fortune
Special to Sentinel-Voice

DETROIT (NNPA) — The world has come a long way since 1942, but Henry Baul remembers the old days.

He was 19 years old when he enlisted in service of his country, a country that still separated Black from White. Baul was one of the first Black Marines to serve in the U.S. Military.

This group of World War II vets became known as the Montford Point Marines. Named for the training camp Montford Point, Camp Lejeune, in North Carolina, the group broke the 167-year color barrier after President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802, allowing Blacks the opportunity to serve.

This often came in the form of a draft, and Baul, being in good health, knew his number would be called. His choice was the Marines.

"I wanted to be in the fighting union," he said.

"I felt if a man is going to throw something harmful at me, I wanted to be able to throw it back. That's why I wanted the Marine Corp."

Now 85, the former gunnery sergeant looks back on those days with fondness, despite the segregation.

"It's pretty hard to go to a little town that's segregated and to go around to the other side of the bus and wait for a truck from the camp to pick you up," he recalled. "To go through all of that to go to the service, to fight for your country, to die for your country."

There would be fights occasionally when the group would go into segregated towns. He was very good with his fists, so he rarely lost, if ever. It almost always had something to do with race.

"It was like a dream, that people were so ignorant," Baul said. "To see how it is now, it's a great difference, but it was rigidly segregated then. That's the way it was."

He even recalls seeing a "Whites Only" sign on the door of a hamburger restaurant in Washington, D.C., before the war, a few blocks from the White House.

"It was completely segregated, just like in the South," he said. "When the war was coming up they started to

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Audit: USDA lags on bias complaints

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Agriculture Department has issued misleading and inaccurate reports about discrimination complaints and still can't say how many minority applicants are getting federal farm assistance, according to a federal audit.

Suggesting that some of the misinformation was intentional, the report said the department's civil rights office claimed last July that it had cut a 2004 backlog of nearly 700 unresolved complaints when officials "were well aware" that the caseload would actually grow to nearly 900. The agency's failure to manage the complaints — despite similar findings in previous audits — raises questions about whether USDA takes them seriously, the report said.

"For decades, USDA has been the focus of federal inquiries into allegations of discrimination against minorities and women," the Government Accountability Office's director of natural resources and environment, Lisa Shames, told a House Oversight subcommittee

Wednesday. "Such resistance to improve its management system calls into question USDA's commitment to more efficiently and effectively address discrimination complaints."

The report notes that one class-action lawsuit has already cost taxpayers nearly \$1 billion and that an assistant secretary for civil rights office was established in 2003 to better handle complaints. The office had a budget of \$24 million in 2007.

Yet USDA has no standardized method for tracking minority participation in programs such as government loans and disaster assistance, despite a law requiring such data.

The GAO, the investigative arm of Congress, also noted unusual difficulties in getting information for the audit, citing repeated delays and incomplete information.

Most notably, the GAO earlier this year received reports that USDA civil rights officials were possibly destroying documents and manipulating data. In February, when auditors tried to ques-

tion staffers about those reports, USDA manager told employees not to speak with them and ordered the auditors to leave USDA offices.

The GAO said it ultimately did not find evidence that its work was intentionally undermined. But the complaints did turn up other problems, including several unrelated allegations that GAO said it would refer to the Justice Department and to the USDA inspector general.

Black farmers have long complained that they have been consistently denied loans, grants and other assistance by a "good old boy" network of local USDA field offices.

In 1999, the government settled a class-action lawsuit from Black farmers, agreeing to pay \$50,000 plus tax benefits to those who could show they faced discrimination. About 15,400 claims were awarded damages, and the government has paid \$972 million in compensation.

The farm bill that Congress is voting on this week would reopen the case and allow thousands more farm-

ers who missed a filing deadline to seek compensation.

Margo McKay, an assistant secretary for civil rights at USDA, disputed the findings at Wednesday's hearing and said the office has made significant progress in addressing complaints.

"The problems of backlog case inventory and case processing times have been many years in the making," she said. "The system we have now is a vast improvement over anything we've ever had in the past."

Barkley

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idea — not his family's and not TNT's — to go on the air Monday night and say, "I've got to stop gambling."

"This has nothing to do with TNT," he said Tuesday. "This was me seeing it's stupid to lose a lot of money. It gives my critics a great opportunity to jump on me."

This public embarrassment has Barkley re-thinking the possibility of running for mayor of Leeds this summer. "This is the reason I'm leery of going into politics," he said.

He's concerned that, as mayor, his personal life would overshadow his efforts "to save Leeds." Imagine the publicity "if I get a speeding ticket, if I get a DUI, if I get in a

fight."

"I don't need that distraction," he said. "I've decided, if I don't do the mayor thing, I've got to take a hands-on approach in Leeds."

Toward that end, he said, he's talked to reps from Publix and Gold's Gym about building a supermarket and a health club in his hometown.

At day's end, though, giving up gambling isn't a political decision. It's a practical one, to prevent future stories like the debt at the Wynn, which "gave people the hammer to hit me with. I don't think I have a (gambling) problem," he said. "I just have to eliminate the bull."