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"THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE"

Jackson: USA at crossroad

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"While we are politically at high noon, we are economically at midnight," said Rev. Jesse Jackson. The renowned minister was recently in town to promote his upcoming 12th annual Wall Street Project Economic Summit and to share some of his views on the disparity between the current economic and political issues. "As President Barack is rising," Jackson continued, "our economy is falling. The economic downturn is double trouble for us." The "us," Rev. Jackson, founder and president of RainbowPUSH, was referring to is Black Americans. "In the best of times, we are number one in mortalities." His misery index included infant mortality, life expectancy, homicide — and you

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— Rev. Jesse Jackson



know the drill.

But most of his comments were keyed to the dismal economic picture, and at the top of his agenda was the credit crisis.

"Over half of our small businesses depend on credit, and when they are unable to get credit and loans, their businesses suffer, and many of them are forced to lay off workers and eventually close," Jackson began, as he sat in the Harlem office of the

AmNewson. "Then came the sub-prime crisis," he continued. "We were clustered and targeted in the sense that we have to pay more for less," Jackson explained. "Unfortunately," he said, "the combined credit crisis and home foreclosures did not come with a bailout."

On top of these problems, the nation was confronted with an automobile crisis, Jackson said. "What this means is the loss of a whole

generation of Black workers, including dealers and suppliers," he lamented.

"The bailout gave a cushion to the wealthy, but did not include a restructuring plan for those at the bottom of the economy.

"Add to this the ongoing outsourcing of jobs and services to India and China, and that compounds the joblessness for Black and Brown people in America," Jackson said. Even the churches — Black America's most dependable institution — are in trouble, he said. "When the members of the church are facing foreclosures, then the church is not in a position to sustain itself."

The historic Black colleges, he said, were in equally desperate straits since so many of the students depend on loans that are less and less available.

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Court to review voting rights law

WASHINGTON (AP) — Days before the first Black president takes office, the Supreme Court agreed Friday to consider overturning a key feature of the main federal law that ensures access to the polls by minorities.

The justices said they will review a lower court ruling upholding a provision of the Voting Rights Act that requires all or parts of 16 states with a history of racial discrimination, most in the South, to get approval before implementing any changes in the way elections are held.

In 2006, Congress voted overwhelmingly to extend the measure for another 25 years. The 1965 law was designed to prevent governments from making it harder for minorities to vote.

The high court has upheld earlier extensions of the provision that calls for either the U.S. attorney general or a court to sign off in advance on changes to: requirements to hold office, polling places, and other issues involving

the conduct of elections.

The justices will hear the case in April and probably decide it by June, against the backdrop of a presidential election that was unimaginable when the law was enacted more than 40 years ago.

"The elephant in the room is what to make of the Obama election," said Nathaniel Persily, professor of law and political science at Columbia Law School, referring to the election of Barack Obama. "Does the election of the first African-American president undermine the central justification for parts of the Voting Rights Act?"

Under Chief Justice John Roberts, the court has looked skeptically at government efforts to take race into account in the assignment of students to public schools and the drawing of electoral districts.

A second case accepted for argument Friday looks at whether a decision by New Haven, Conn., to scrap a promotion exam after too few

minorities passed it, violates the civil rights of White and Hispanic firefighters who did well enough to advance.

The latest voting rights challenge comes from a local Texas government that says it was created in the 1980s, has no history of discrimination and shouldn't be subject to what it calls "the most federally invasive law in existence."

Northwest Austin Municipal Utility District Number One, a government board formed to provide local services to about 3,500 people, sued following the 2006 extension. The board asked the court to exempt it from the law and said Congress had not shown a link between the district's need to get advance approval and past racial discrimination.

A federal court in Washington ruled in May that the prior approval provision is constitutional.

The three-judge panel said that the utility board didn't qualify as a "political

subdivision" and could not be exempted from the law. It also ruled that racial discrimination in voting persists and that Congress acted appropriately when it extended the law.

Under the law, appeals go directly to the Supreme Court.

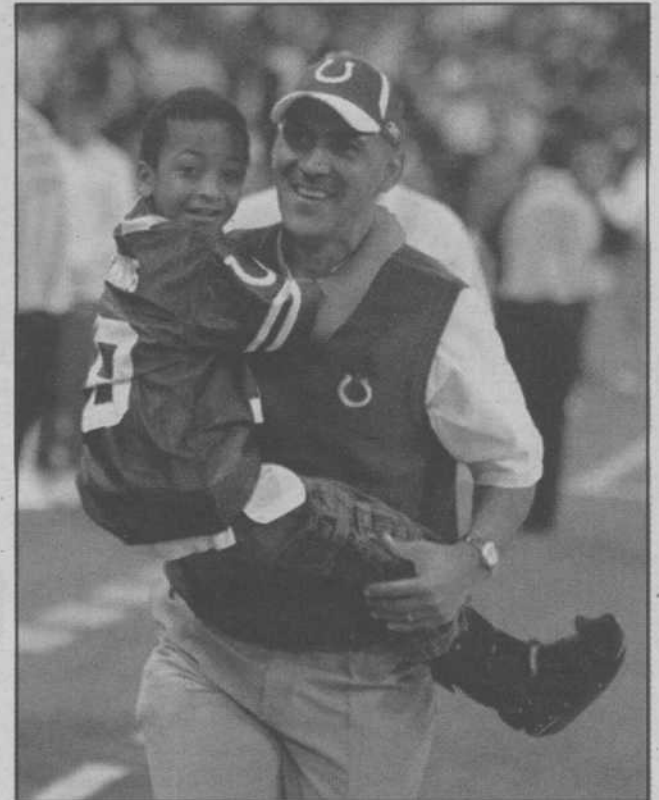
But the court could avoid the constitutional issue if it finds that the board has the right to bail out of the law.

Congress has extended the Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act four times: in 1970, 1975, 1982 and 2006.

An array of rights groups, including the NAACP, American Civil Liberties Union and Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, have intervened in the case in support of the law.

President George W. Bush signed the latest extension into law and his administration asked the high court to affirm the lower-court ruling.

The government noted in (See Voting, Page 2)



Indianapolis Colts coach Tony Dungy carrying off his son, Jordan, after a NFL football game in Indianapolis.

Dungy left mark

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Tony Dungy always considered football just a career path.

Not his life's mission.

On Monday, Dungy began the transition from head coach to full-time dad and devoted volunteer by announcing his retirement after seven years leading the Indianapolis Colts.

"We just felt this was the right time," Dungy said. "Don't shed any tears for me. I got to live a dream most people don't get to live."

The move triggered a succession plan Indianapolis put in place a year ago, making Jim Caldwell, the associate head coach, Dungy's replacement.

But the culmination of a 31-year NFL career, which started with Dungy winning a Super Bowl ring as a player in Pittsburgh and ended two years after he became the first Black coach to hoist the Lombardi Trophy, brought out some rare emotional moments from the usually stoic Dungy.

"My wife Lauren told me to bring some Kleenex. I thought I would make it a little farther than the first sentence," Dungy said, his voice cracking.

He told owner Jim Irsay of his decision Sunday.

"And we spent about 2-1/2 hours crying," Dungy said. "But I had a real peace about it."

The 53-year-old Dungy informed his staff of the decision Monday morning, then met with some players after the traditional one-week waiting period ended. Dungy and his wife, Lauren, spent the last five years discussing whether he should continue coaching.

Receivers coach Clyde Christensen, who served as Dungy's assistant the last 13 years, said he was 95 percent certain Dungy would return as recently as Friday. Others, like safety Melvin Bullitt, were still hopeful Monday afternoon that Dungy would change his mind.

Unlike the previous four years, when Dungy ultimately decided to continue coaching, he decided it was time to stay home and work in the community.

Perhaps for good.

"I think I've got a responsibility to be home a little bit more, be available to my family a little bit more and do some things to help make our country better," Dungy

(See Dungy, Page 11)