Black delegates buck committee system

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Black legislators scored a victory over the iron-clad committee system in Annapolis last week, when the legislators forced Del. Frederick C. Rummage, head of the House Economic Matters Committee, to release two bills which he had been holding in his committee.

The bills, both filed by Del. Frank Conaway, D-40, had been languishing in the committee for over 30 days, despite having received a favorable report by the committee.

Conaway and others felt that this was a violation of House rules, but Rummage still wouldn't budge.

One bill, H.B. 217, would have established an annual guarantee payment of $20 by home contractors in lieu of the current $350 bond. The annual $20 fee would have been used to create a floating pool of $250,000 for use by the contractors instead.

Conaway said that the bill would have benefitted small businessmen who could not afford to post the current $350 bond payment.

The other bill, H.B. 17, would have permitted small businessmen to use funds lent by the state's small business opportunity program to gain private contracts.

The first step on getting a bill passed is the submission of the bill to the committee which handles the subject matter of the proposed legislation. This is known as "first reader".

Following that, the bill is given either a favorable or unfavorable report by the committee and sent to the floor of the chamber where it originated, in this case the House.

This is known as "second reader".

The two bills were held up repeatedly by Rummage, although both had received favorable reports from his committee.

After conferring with House Speaker Benjamin Cardin, D—2, Conaway decided to invoke a House rule to pull the bills out of Rummage's hands.

In the event that a bill is delayed in committee, 15 or more legislators can petition the chairman and House leadership to release the bill.

Luckily, Cardin intervened, thus sparing Rummage an embarrassing floor fight.

Had he not moved, Rummage could have been petitioned on the floor of the House by Conaway and those delegates who signed the petition. (Conaway managed to get 25 signatures).

As it was, the bills were released by Rummage, and reached the floor. During the second reader of a bill, the legislation is open to amendments from the floor.

Several supporters of Rummage sought to wweigh the bills down with amendments, but delegates Howard "Pete" Rawlings, D-40, and Lena Lee and Larry Young of the 38th district all rose to defend the bills.

"Pete, Lena and Larry spoke up from the floor to push it through," said Conaway. "This was a significant victory over the committee system."

Rawlings, a long-time political foe of Conaway's said he came to his assistance because, "the man, (Rummage), was wrong. There was no reason for him to keep those bills that long."

H.B. 217 did reach the floor for a vote Tuesday, (a vote on a bill is considered the "third reader"), but was defeated.

New commission formed at MSU

Morgan State University and the city of Baltimore unveiled a new university urban development commission to bring together the elements of the urban population.

This process will involve the coordination of the efforts of the 30-member commission, which is headed by Leon Bridges, to address, study and offer suggested solutions to the most pressing urban problems facing Baltimore in the coming years.

Members of this commission will be representatives selected from all major areas of urban life. They will include representatives of city government, local and state elected officials, community and neighborhood organizations and Morgan.

Morgan, which was given a mandate by the legislature in 1978 to act as an urban university, will provide the commission with factual input, staff support and other functions.

It will also provide internships for students at the school.

This mandate has since been translated into several specific programs and structures at Morgan which all bear on the process of solving urban problems as they exist today.

What has been lacking to date, is the establishment of an appropriate coordinating body to focus the energy, knowledge and commitment of concerned citizens and civic leaders.

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State budget battle continues

Behind-the-scene efforts pay-off for state legislature

By James M. Abraham
AFRO Staff Writer

In the waning days of the legislature, it appears that several programs and insitutions deemed "high-priority" by members of the Legislative Black Caucus may be saved from the budget-cutting fever which has pervaded Annapolis.

Although the House passed a budget which cut almost $10 million from welfare and $15 million from the state Medicaid program, both of these measures have been rejected to date.

In the House, the Ways and Means Committee have signaled a preliminary halt to the planned welfare cuts, while in the Senate, the $15 million reduction in the state Medicaid program had been struck down by the full Senate Monday.

The three welfare programs currently awaiting approval or rejection by the House Ways and Means Committee include the $5 million AFDC coverage of 18-21-year-old students; $3,687,618 Public Assistance payments which House budget-makers say could be made up by the resources of stepparents; and $500,000 in money for General Public Assistance.

Without Ways and Means Committee approval of three House bills aimed at cutting the programs, they may survive. The three were given restored funding by the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee.

As for the Medicaid money, a six-member committee of three house members and three Senate representatives, the conference committee, must work out that and other differences between House and Senate action on the budget.

Black legislators such as Del. Howard "Pete" Rawlings, D-40, Joseph Chester, D-45, and John Douglass from the same district; along with Larry Young and Lena Lee of the 38th district and Walter Dean, D-41, have fought a behind-the scenes battle to preserve the aforementioned programs.

Rawlings, Chester and Douglass, all members of the House Appropriations Committee, fired off a message to House Speaker Benjamin Cardin a week after the three all voted for the House budget.

In the letter, they asked him to remember the priorities of the Caucus.

"We have made tough decisions as black legislators and we have veiwed the budget passed by the House in terms of half-empty, half-full cup principle. Accordingly, we have supported the budget because many of the programs vital to our constituents have been left intact."

The letter went on to refer to an "understanding" reached between the legislators and Cardin on their votes for the budget, and asked him in return to defeat three House bills aimed at dismantling the welfare programs.

The programs were all included in the list of high-priority items listed by the Caucus as those they would fight hardest to preserve.

Funding for Morgan State University, as well as University of Maryland, Eastern Shore, Bowie State College and Coppin State University was also restored by the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, of which Caucus members Clarence Blount, D-41, and Tommie Broadwater, D-Prince Georges Co-25, are committeemen. Blount is the vice-chair of that committee.

On the day the House budget reached the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee (March 18), Both Blount and Broadwater vowed to restore aid cut to the predominantly black institutions.

BUSY AT WORK — Other students at the Northwest Community Day Care Center work on letters to be sent to elected officials. Shown (L-R) are Damon Sheppard, April Bethea, Angela Campbell, Denise Paige and David Christi.

Photo by Roman Hankewycz

Council votes for lower street noise

Legislation to ban the playing of loud radios in public has met with city council approval, but police say they don't know how they will enforce the new law.

Mayor William Donald Schaefer signed a bill March 2 banning loud radio playing along with "unreasonably loud" car horns and yelling, shouting, hooting or whistling or singing at any time or place so as to annoy or disturb the quiet.

The law took effect this week, but police spokesman Dennis Hill said Monday his agency is still awaiting word from the city solicitors office on how best to enforce it.

Hill said police officials will then decide whether officers should confiscate radios, issue tickets to offenders or arrest them for disturbing the peace.

The ordinance, modeled after a New York City law, makes it a misdemeanor for persons to play radios or phonographs loud enough to be heard from more than 50 feet away.

Park Heights holds protest rally

The Park Heights Community Corporation will be sponsoring a rally on April 4 to protest the Reagan budget cuts, pay tribute to the slain children of Atlanta, and to honor the late Dr. Martin Luther King.

"We expect over 1,000 people to be present," said Rev. Elijah McDaniel, a member of the board of the PHCC. "We feel as though the rally will serve to accentuate the pressures coming from the people who are protesting the Reagan budget cuts."

Speakers at the rally will include state Department of Human Resources secretary Kaiman Hettleman, and city councilman Clarence "Du" Burns, Kweisi Mfume, Thomas Waxter, Rochelle Spector, Victorine Adams and Norman Reeves.

Also community activist Lucille Gorham, Metro Dem Democrats official Wes Ivey, and representatives from the city's Department of Sanitation.

Other speakers at the rally include Earlise Mitchell and Howard Young, of the PHCC board.

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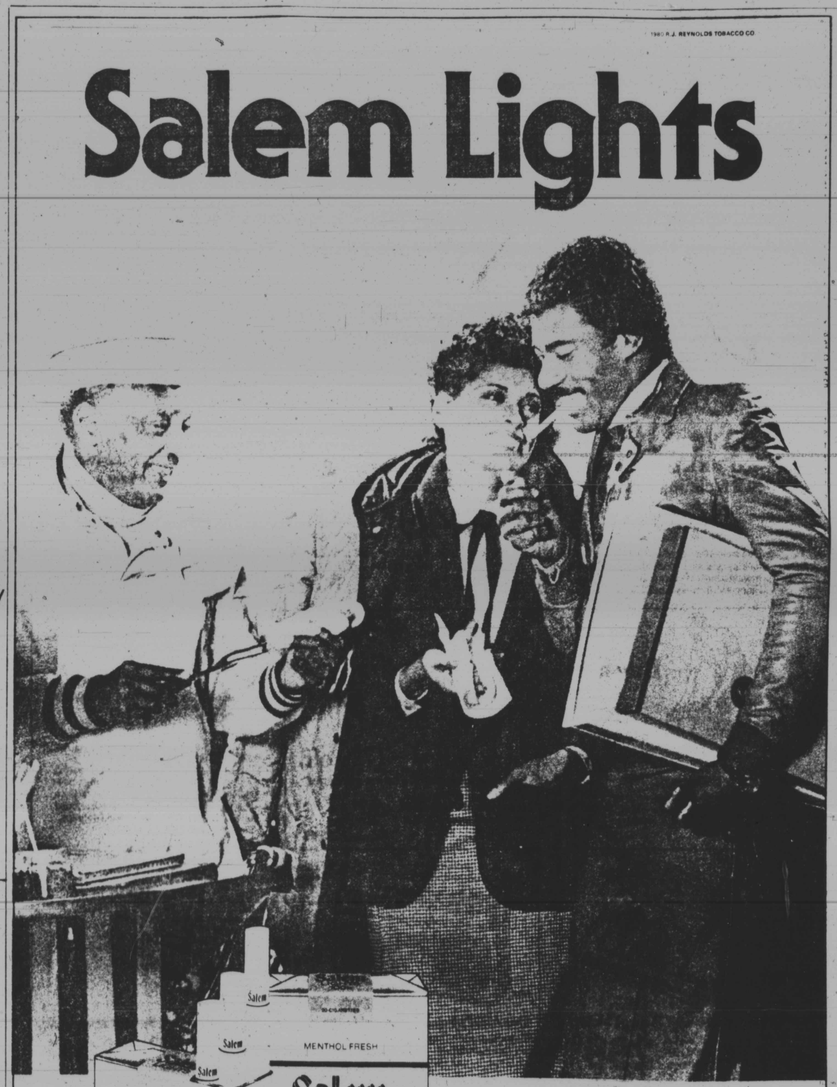

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