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Obama taps 2 more for federal appeals courts

By Larry Margasak
WASHINGTON (AP) - President Barack Obama on April 2 nominated a federal judge from Maryland and another from New York to serve on U.S. appeals courts, moving to change the political balance of both courts.

and six Republican-named judges, leaving three vacancies. The court has handled cases involving terrorism defendants or detainees.

Gerard Lynch would fill the only vacancy on the New York-centered 2nd Circuit, giving the court seven Democratic and six Republican judges. The court often presides over Wall Street-related financial cases.

"Judges Lynch and Davis are two jurists with exceptional records of integrity and fairness," Obama

said in a statement. "They will be voices of reason and evenhandedness on the Second and Fourth Circuits."

There currently are 15 vacancies in federal appeals courts covering 12 geographically based circuits. The courts often provide the last word on a variety of issues affecting Americans. Their decisions cover, among other matters, civil rights, searches and seizures, age and gender discrimination, religious liberty, capital punishment, abortion,

gay rights, corporate wrongdoing, review of federal regulations and terrorism.

In eight years, the Bush administration had the opportunity to tilt the courts to the right. Obama can now make them less conservative.

The 2nd Circuit covers Vermont and Connecticut as well as New York. The 4th has jurisdiction in West Virginia, Maryland and the Carolinas as well as Virginia.

Lynch, who was appointed to the federal bench in 2000 by President Bill Clinton, handled several high profile cases



Rev. Clifton Davis addresses NCCU's Executive Masters Of Public Administration (EMPA) Class on How Religion relates to Public Policy in the field of Public Administration. (Photo By Lawson)



First Calvary Baptist Church at the corner of Kent and Morehead Avenues taking shape. The new edifice will replace the old building. The church worships at 2000 Lakewood Avenue in Lakewood Shopping Center. (Photo By Lawson)

US high court lets Abu-Jamal's conviction stand

WASHINGTON (AP) - Mumia Abu-Jamal has lost his bid for a new trial in the killing of a police officer in 1981.

The U.S. Supreme Court said April 6 it will not take up Abu-Jamal's claims that prosecutors improperly excluded blacks from the jury that convicted him of murdering Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner.

Since Abu-Jamal's 1982 conviction, activists in the United States and Europe have rallied in support of his claims that he was the victim of a racist justice system. Abu-Jamal, 54, has kept his case in the spotlight through books and radio broadcasts.

The 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia upheld Abu-Jamal's conviction but held his death sentence invalid. The appeals court said it would not second-guess state court rulings rejecting Abu-Jamal's claims of bias in the composition of the jury.

The high court considered only the conviction. The state has separately asked the court to reinstate the death sentence, but the justices have not acted on that request.

A Philadelphia jury convicted Abu-Jamal, who is black, of killing Faulkner, who was white, in 1981 after the patrolman pulled over Abu-Jamal's brother in an overnight traffic stop.

Prosecutors say Faulkner, 25, managed to shoot Abu-Jamal during the confrontation. A wounded Abu-Jamal, his own gun lying nearby, was still at the scene when police arrived, and authorities consider the evidence against him overwhelming.

Michelle Obama Wows Londoners

By Dorothy Rowley
Special to the NNPA from the Afro-American Newspapers
(NNPA) - Stylish hair, clothes and shoes.. Buffed arms and an unmissable air of grace, beauty and poise.

They're all synonymous with first lady Michelle Obama who continues to wow crowds everywhere she goes - and her trip this week to the United Kingdom along with President Barack Obama has been no different.

While the president dove right into the serious business of the G20 economic summit, the first lady was becoming the toast of the town, cosying up with the Queen of England, sitting for tea, visiting an inner city all-girls school, and touring a cancer ward.

"She's a real breath of fresh air." CBS anchor Katie Couric was quoted as saying by phone on April 1 from London. Meredith Vieira from NBC's Today show gushed that "Everybody in Europe is enthralled with her."

Both women, no doubt, were echoing the sentiments of many who said Mrs. Obama had acquired a powerful presence in London.

During her visit to the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School which enrolls about 1,000 girls ages 11-17, the students were in awe.

"The amazement and adoration on the face of the girls and the authentic way Obama reacted to them was just wonderful thing to watch," London's Daily Mirror reported.

The paper also noted that about 300 students and residents had shrieked, "We love you!" as the first lady arrived at the school in Islington, North London.

Greeted by 100 students, Mrs. Obama applauded enthusiastically after they regaled her with a string of stirring performances, and in a show of the informal style that has endeared her to millions around the world, she high-fived one of the solo singers and hugged students, according to the Daily Mirror.

"Wow! I can't follow that. Thank you for that warm welcome. My husband is going to be very jealous of my afternoon because I am spending it with all of you," Obama said. "When I look at a performance like this, it reminds me that there are diamonds like this all over the world."

Obama's visit with the Queen went just as well.

However during the reception, it appeared that Obama momentarily breached a rigid ancient protocol when she reciprocated Her Majesty's openness by also gently draping her arm across the back of the Queen. In doing so, Obama was widely revered, prompting observers to say that she had merely exuded her usual warmth and that the Queen - who normally doesn't like to be touched - had very easily adapted.

Meanwhile, Obama who reportedly can be seen wearing the same outfit in public more than once, has been the talk of the fashion world for her simplistic yet sophisticated style.

NATO Allies Back President Obama's Afghan Initiative

Special to the NNPA from the St. Louis American
(NNPA) - President Obama has won commitments from NATO allies for an additional 5,000 troops, trainers and mentors in Afghanistan, according to wire reports.

The president expressed satisfaction with the result, even though the promises don't come close to matching the planned addition of 21,000 U.S. troops.

Obama also won a strong endorsement for his new policy in Afghanistan, which is focused on rooting out al-Qaeda from the border with Pakistan, stepping up training for Afghan military and police forces, and working closely with Afghanistan's neighbors, according to the Associated Press.

The president called pledges from Britain, France, Germany and others to help in Afghanistan "the kinds of commitments that historically you don't see at a conference like this," adding, "What was pledged here today was significant."

NATO officials said more than 10 countries had promised additional troops, trainers or money. "Many of us have stepped up to the plate this morning," said NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. "When it comes to Afghanistan, this summit and this alliance have delivered."

French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who co-hosted the conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, said Obama made a strong case for the assistance in outlining his new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The strategy focuses more resources than in the past on rooting out al-Qaeda havens between the two countries.

"It was so easy to work with him," Sarkozy said of Obama. "He showed his leadership. He showed how committed he was."

NATO countries currently have about 30,000 troops in Afghanistan. In contrast, U.S. forces number about 38,000, and Obama is adding 17,000 more combat troops and 4,000 trainers.

The president stressed that troops to train and mentor Afghan forces and police are needed just as much as combat troops in the country's dangerous south, where the Taliban is strongest. "The troops that we're sending in are no less important," he said.