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Black women seek rewards from Democrats after Alabama race

By Jesse J. Holland

WASHINGTON (AP) - Once again, black women showed up for Democrats, with nearly all of them voting in Alabama for new Sen. Doug Jones, just as they did for Democratic candidates up and down the ballot in other states over the last few months.

The same women, having proven their loyalty by voting 98 percent for Jones, now wonder whether the Democratic Party will return the favor by sharing some of the party's political power, handing over places at the negotiating table and pushing legislation that speaks to their unique issues.

"Black women showed up and showed out," said Kimberlè Crenshaw, co-founder of the African American Policy Forum. In "any other context, people who get it 98 percent right, they'd be at the head of the class. It's time for black women to be at the head of the political class."

Black turnout was also high, at around 30 percent, according to exit polls. That level of support mirrors what black women did in Virginia, where 91 percent of them voted for incoming Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam, and in New Jersey, where 94 percent voted for incoming Gov. Phil Murphy.

Those women also swept other candidates into office, including Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax, the first black candidate to be elected statewide in Virginia since Gov. Doug Wilder in 1989.

"Let me be clear: We won in Alabama and Virginia because (hash) BlackWomen led us to victory," said Tom Perez, chairman of the Democratic National Committee. "Black women are the backbone of the Democratic Party, and we can't take that for granted. Period."

In Montgomery, Alabama, 70-year-old Annette Brown said she sometimes considers voting Republican, but there was no way she was going to vote for firebrand Roy Moore.

"I've been a Democrat all my life, and I'm sure not going to switch for this election. Sometimes I feel like swinging, but not for Moore," she said.

Brown said allegations that Moore pursued teenage girls while in his 30s and his waving of a gun onstage to emphasize his views on the Second Amendment made her decision easy.

"I believe the ladies. And he's just off kilter anyway. When he pulled out that gun on stage, that was it for me," Brown said.

Black women have their own unique voting-mobilization strategy, said Barbara Arnwine, president of the Transformative Justice Coalition.

"That strategy is what I call 'my momma," Arnwine said. "You see, Vera Arnwine, when she knows an election is coming up, she gets on the phone. She calls everybody she knows. And she says. 'Are you voting? Are you registered? ... You better get out there and do it.' So this is what we do and it's just so powerful."

The recent election continued the trend of black women overperforming for Democratic candidates.

In the 2016 presidential race, 94 percent of black women voted for Democrat Hillary Clinton while 53 percent of white women voted for Donald Trump. In 2008 and 2012, black women voted at a higher rate than any racial or gender group, each time giving

President Barack Obama 96 percent of their vote.

While black men also turned out in high numbers for Democrats, black women historically have been the backbone of the vote-mobilization efforts, but they rarely get the credit, said LaTosha Brown, a Selma, Alabama, native and co-founder of the Black Voters Matter Fund. In Alabama, black women were on the ground working without much fanfare, just as they've done all the way back to the civil rights movement, she said.

"Black women stand and have continuously been standing in the gap, and been providing an enormous amount of leadership because we don't just bring our own issues. We bring our community with us," she said.

In addition to voting, black women are running for office, testing whether the Democratic Party will stand behind them in the 2018 elections and beyond. Stacey Abrams is running to be Georgia's first black governor. In Virginia, Vangie Williams hopes to become the state's first black congresswomen.

In 2017, black women held only two statewide offices - GOP Lt. Gov. Jenean Hampton of Kentucky and Connecticut state Treasurer Denise Nappier, a Democrat. Black women are mayors of seven of the nation's 100 largest cities and hold 271 state legislature seats, according to the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics.

Black women say they now need to be compensated for their devotion. Democrats also need to share some of their positions of

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power with black women on the ballot and inside political party machines on local, state and national levels.

Sen. Kamala Harris of California, who is the only black woman in the Senate and is already being mentioned as a 2020 presidential candidate, said Democrats and progressives need to go beyond just thanking black women.

"Let's address issues that disproportionately affect Black women - like pay disparity, housing & under-representation in elected office," she said recently on Twitter.

Rep. Shelia Jackson Lee, a Texas Democrat, said she and other black women Democrats plan to put together a package of legislation that will speak to black women's issues and present it to Democratic leadership with a message.

"You need to address those whose vote, not check, gave you an opportunity," Jackson Lee said, describing an initiative that might include major points such as education, the economy, health care and the criminal justice system. "You're bragging that you want us to be in the civic process. Now do something for that."

Associated Press Writer Bill Barrow in Montgomery, Alabama, contributed to this report.



SIMEON BOOKER

Pioneering black journalist Simeon Booker dies at age 99

WASHINGTON (AP) - Simeon Booker, a trail-blazing African-American journalist and the first full-time black reporter at The Washington Post, died at the age of 99.

Booker died at an assisted-living community in Solomons, Maryland, according to a Post obituary, citing his wife Carol. He had recently been hospitalized for pneumonia.

Booker served for decades as the Washington bureau chief for the iconic African-American publications Jet, a weekly, and Ebony, a monthly. He is credited with bringing to national prominence the 1955 death of Emmett Till, the 14-year old African-American boy whose brutal murder in Mississippi became a galvanizing point for the nascent civil rights movement. Booker's article included an open-casket picture of Till's mangled face that shocked the nation.

In a 2013 video tribute upon Booker's induction into the National Association for Black Journalists Hall of Fame, former Jet reporter Roy Betts said that Booker's coverage of the civil rights movement, "catapulted the movement onto the world stage."

His reporting from the Deep South placed him in near-constant danger. Tributes to him mention that he sometimes dressed as a minister (complete with Bible) or a farmer to escape detection and one frequently-told tale had Booker escaping from an angry mob in the back of a hearse. He rode in one of the buses to cover the 1961 Freedom Rides, when black activists rode from Washington to New Orleans to challenge a ban on segregated interstate transportation facilities.

Booker was born in Baltimore and raised in Youngstown, Ohio. He started his journalistic career working for a string of African-American publications. He joined the Post in 1952, but moved on two years later to found the Washington bureau for Johnson Publishing, the parent company for Jet and Ebony.

He served in that position for more than 50 years, authoring the widely-read Ticker Tape column, chronicling Washington's inner workings for a national black readership before retiring in 2007. He covered 10 different presidents and also traveled abroad to report on the Vietnam War.

Booker authored or co-authored four books, including a 2013 memoir co-written with his wife Carol McCabe Booker and entitled, "Shocking the Conscience: A Reporter's Account of the Civil Rights Movement."

Booker was inducted into the National Association of Black Journalists' Hall of Fame in 2013 and received a career George Polk Award for lifetime achievements in journalism and the National Press Club's Fourth Estate

He is survived by the wife Carol and three children.



Major Robert H. Lawrence, Jr.

NASA Celebrates Legacy of First Black American Astronaut on Anniversary of his Death

By Erick Johnson (Chicago Crusader/NNPA Member)

Fifty years ago, a tragic accident ended the groundbreaking career of Major Robert H. Lawrence, Jr., a Chicago native and stellar Air Force pilot who became America's first Black astronaut.

On December 8, 2the 50th anniversary of his death—NASA honored his often-ignored legacy and contributions to the agency.

Earlier this year, the Chicago Crusader reported about the lack of visibility of NASA's first Black American astronaut and helped to raise awareness about Lawrence's incredible journey.

In planning a story for its annual Black History Month edition,

Chicago Crusader staffers discovered that little was being done to honor Lawrence, while NASA held memorials to mark the 50th anniversary of three, White astronauts who perished in a fire aboard the Apollo 1 space module, during a preflight test.

The Crusader story lauding Lawrence's achievements was

published in dozens of Black newspapers after the National Newspapers Publishers Association (NNPA) carried it on its newswire.

Born in 1935 to the late Gwendolyn Duncan and Robert H. Lawrence, Sr., the future Air Force pilot was a man ahead of his time. Long before magnet and STEM programs were part of the high school curriculum, Lawrence excelled in math and science.

At 16, he graduated with honors from Englewood High School

and went on to earn a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Bradley University. He married the late Barbara Cress from the prominent Chicago Cress family and entered the Air Force at age 21 before earning a doctorate in physical chemistry from Ohio State University, becoming the first astronaut at NASA to earn a doctorate degree.

As a United States Air Force pilot, Lawrence accumulated over

As a United States Air Force pilot, Lawrence accumulated over 2,500 flight hours. In June 1967, Lawrence graduated from the U.S. Air Force Test Pilot School (Class '66B) at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif. In that same month, he was selected by the USAF as an astronaut for their Manned Orbital Laboratory (MOL) program, thus becoming the first Black astronaut.

Lawrence died while training another pilot, Maj. John Royer, to perform the "flare" maneuver—an operation that Lawrence had already mastered—in the F-104 Starfighter.

According to NBC News, "Lawrence's memory languished in obscurity" partly due to the fact that, the Pentagon only recognized someone as an "astronaut" if they actually flew to an altitude above 50 miles.

However, Rep. Bobby Rush (D-Va.) mounted a campaign that forced NASA to put Lawrence's name on the Space Mirror Memorial in 1997—thirty years after Lawrence's death.

"On Dec. 8, 1997, on the thirtieth anniversary of his death, Lawrence had his name unveiled on the Florida memorial," NBC News reported.

the ceremony recognizing Lawrence, earlier this month—although spirited, at times—was a somber one for the 300 guests that included decorated NASA astronauts, dignitaries, relatives, and friends, who had flown and driven miles across the country to honor Lawrence at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla.

Lawrence's older sister, Dr. Barbara Lawrence, attended and spoke; another prominent Chicago resident who was present was E. Dawn Griffin, the oldest daughter of Ernest Griffin, founder of Griffin Funeral Home in Bronzeville. The Griffin Funeral Home, which closed in 2012, handled the funeral arrangements for Lawrence.

Members from Lawrence's college fraternity, Omega Psi Phi, also attended to honor one of their own. On the sprawling grounds of the NASA facility, they participated in a two-and-a-half-hour ceremony that began at the Center for Space Education and culminated with an emotional wreath-laying ceremony at the base of the national Space Mirror Memorial, a massive black granite structure where Lawrence's name is among those of 20 astronauts who either died in flight or in training.