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Black women look to flex power in Georgia governor's race

By Errin Haines Whack

ATLANTA (AP) - This week's primary election in Georgia presents black women voters with a rare opportunity: To give a Democrat who looks like them a chance at occupying the governor's mansion in a Republican-controlled state.

A Democratic primary win Tuesday for Stacey Abrams or Stacey Evans - both lawyers and former state lawmakers - means Georgia could elect its first woman governor later this year.

If Abrams wins the primary and the general election, America would get its first black woman governor. Given that black women are Georgia's third largest voting bloc, many such voters are relishing the possibility of making history happen twice over.

"Everybody's saying no black woman could ever become governor," said Abrams supporter Mo Ivory, 48, a lawyer who, like Abrams, is a graduate of all-female, historically black Spelman College in Atlanta.

"We thought no black man could ever become president of the United States, but he did," Ivory said, referring to Barack Obama. "If we think so small, like it could never happen, we'll never have these historic moments in time."

The U.S. currently has six women governors - two Democrats and four Republicans - serving in Alabama, Iowa, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon and Rhode Island. With 2018 shaping up to be the biggest boon for women in American politics since a wave of female candidates were elected to Congress in 1992, the rising influence of black women at the polls is hard to ignore.

According to Higher Heights, a national organization focused on increasing black women's political participation, more than 70 percent of black women voters went to the polls when Obama was re-elected in 2012, outpacing turnout by white women (65.6 percent), white men (62.6 percent), and black men (61.4 percent).

In the 2016 presidential election, more than 90 percent of black women voters cast their ballots for Democrat Hillary Clinton; 53 percent of white women voters chose Republican Donald Trump.

Political observers cite the influence of black women in Alabama's 2017 U.S. Senate special election, when blacks cast ballots in greater numbers than their share of the population to lift Democrat Doug Jones over Republican Roy Moore. They point out the role black women played recently in electing black women mayors, most notably Keisha Lance Bottoms in Atlanta, whose white opponent, Mary Norwood, also enjoyed broad support in the black community.

Bottoms hasn't officially endorsed a candidate in the gubernatorial race but counted Evans among her supporters. She said she feels compelled to help empower other women, especially black women.

"As black women go, so go our communities," Bottoms said in an interview at Atlanta City Hall shortly after her January inauguration. "We may not have the titles or recognition, but we lead. We stand in the gap a lot of times when the rest of our community is falling short."

This makes black women a good return on investment for Democrats, said Higher Heights co-founder Glynda Carr.

"She doesn't go to the polls alone," Carr explained. "She brings her house, her church, her block, and her sorority. When you actually invest in us, we overperform."

Abrams, 44, is counting on that sense of sisterhood. Among those stumping for her this month were actress Tracee Ellis Ross and California Democratic Senator Kamala Harris, a potential 2020 presidential contender who also campaigned for Bottoms.

The "really strong margin" Abrams needs to secure the Democratic nomination makes black women's votes matter even more, said Emory University political scientist Andra Gillespie.

"While some black women will no doubt support Evans, others will no doubt be drawn to the historic nature of Abrams' candidacy," Gillespie said.

Evans, 40, who's white, is well aware of this. She's curried endorsements from several black elected officials and made a campaign theme out of Georgia's HOPE Scholarship, a popular college-aid program.

"That was number one for me," said Janean Lewis, 39, a black Atlanta educator who's backing Evans - a decision she says wasn't easy.

The struggle between the issues and race loyalty isn't lost on Abrams, the first woman party leader in the state General Assembly and the first African-American to lead its House of Representatives.

"It is sometimes our own communities that question ... how we see black women as part of the larger community," Abrams said in an interview at her campaign headquarters. "We have to imagine more for our politics and more for our people."

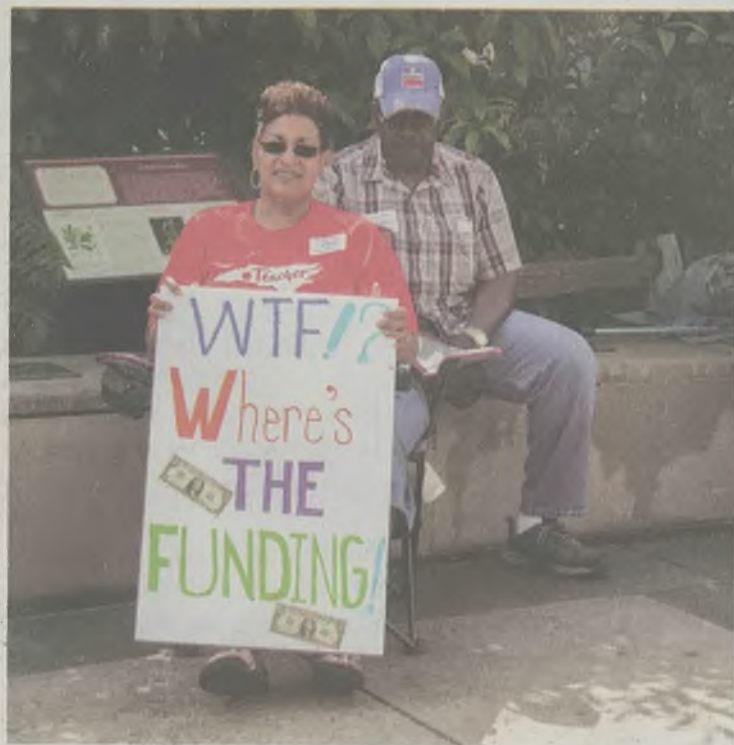
Ivory said she's heard "a surprising number of black

women" say they're supporting "the white Stacey," and she wonders how much this could hurt Abrams.

"We all lined up, no matter how we felt about Keisha," Ivory said, referring to Bottoms. "It doesn't seem like the same thing is applying here."

Last November, Lewis voted for Bottoms as mayor because she considered Bottoms' race and gender "icing on the cake." While she's now backing Evans, she can't bring herself to oppose Abrams publicly.

"At the end of the day, she is my sister," Lewis said. "I just don't know if she needs to be my governor. It's a hard pill to swallow."



Area teachers joined brethren at a demonstration in Raleigh for better funding in public schools. See related photos on page 3. Ronald Parker Artije Photography

After teachers leave, North Carolina session likely to be quick

By Gary D. Robertson
RALEIGH (AP) - A rally by thousands of teachers demonstrating for school funding could bring most other activities at the Legislative Building to a halt when the North Carolina General Assembly session began May 16, but activity should pick up after protesters leave town.

A slight revenue surplus again helps ease difficult fiscal choices while lawmakers make adjustments to the second year of the two-year budget - their chief job in a session unlikely to last past July 4.

Democrats are optimistic about gaining power after the November elections, but the GOP's current veto-proof majorities still keep Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper and his allies in weak positions now.

BUSTING ON THE BUDGET

Preliminary signs point to another showdown between Cooper and Republican legislative leaders, who last year overrode Cooper's veto of the General Assembly's two-year spending plan.

Releasing his proposed budget adjustments last week, Cooper again accused lawmakers of giving the best tax cuts to corporations and the highest wage-earners while failing to spend adequately on public schools.

The cuts take effect in 2019. Cooper wants to block the corporate cut and require individuals with six-figure incomes to pay taxes on eligible income at the current rate - with the resulting revenue going toward raises for teachers beyond what the current budget calls for.

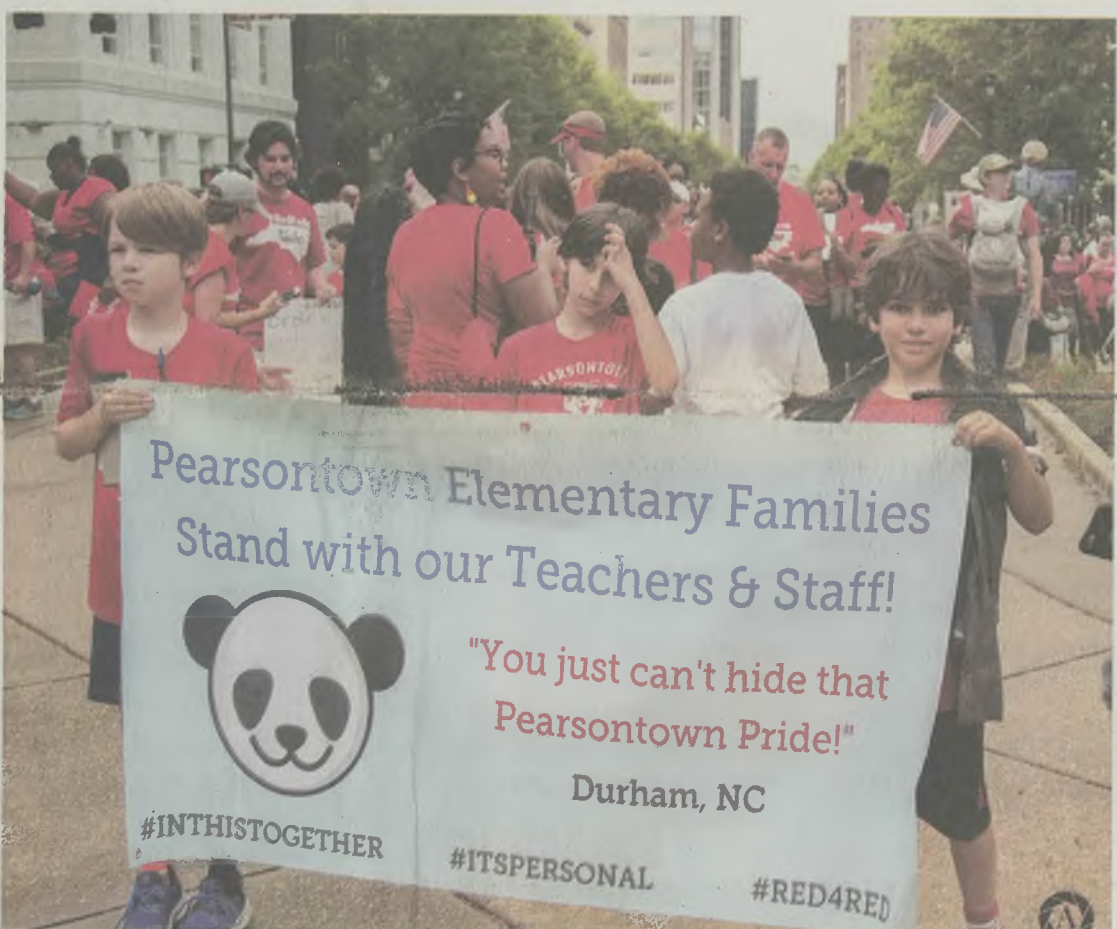
Republicans will have no part of that deal, saying Cooper would increase taxes. GOP leaders may even consider another tax break.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Cooper and GOP lawmakers may find agreement on public school safety and security improvements in response to the February school shooting in Florida that left 17 people dead.

It appears that legislators and the governor want more school counselors, psychologists, nurses and social workers to be hired, as well as campus-based police officers, although they differ on spending amounts. And improvements to school buildings or safety evaluations are possible.

(Continued On Page 12)



Hundreds turn up at 'BBQing While Black' event in Oakland

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) - Hundreds of people gathered for a weekend cookout in Oakland, California dubbed "BBQing While Black." It is the latest response to a white woman's now infamous call to police to report African Americans barbecuing at a public park.

The San Francisco Chronicle reports that the festival-like event May 20 on the shores of Lake Merritt was organized to rally against racism. Music played and vendors cooked up racks of ribs, sausages and chicken.

Three Sundays earlier at the same site, an unidentified woman called 911 to report a family using a charcoal barbecue.

A video posted on social media by an onlooker sparked a national conversation about racism.

The woman has been parodied on Saturday Night Live and the incident has become a social media meme with the hashtag (hash) BBQBecky.



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