

Amid turmoil, opponents of vote debate next step

By KEVIN WALKER
For THE CHRONICLE

Last Monday's Board of Aldermen meeting had all the elements of an intriguing novel.

The plot centered around Mayor Jack Cavanagh's controversial proposal to cut the city's Housing Authority Board of Commissioners by four members. The conflict arose when residents opposed to the measure came armed with picket signs, freedom chants and passionate orations. And the evening's climax came as the eight board members finally cast

their votes.

But for those residents hoping to keep the housing authority board intact, a happy ending was sorely missing.

The measure passed with a 5-3 vote. The once nine-member housing authority board had its membership dwindled to five members.

Cavanagh's proposal originally called for a



Terry



Malloy



Burke

public housing resident to sit on the board as a non-voting member. Amid the controversy, he altered his plan, vowing to appoint a public housing resident as a voting member as long as he is mayor.

The demonstration staged by public housing residents and other opponents of the proposal at the Board of

Aldermen meeting capped off a nearly month-long campaign by protesters to halt the measure.

In the past weeks, opponents carried picket signs and sang "We Shall Overcome" in front of the office of The Chronicle.

This, after The Chronicle publisher Ernie Pitt and former housing commission chairman William Andrews were appointed by Cavanagh to fill housing authority board seats once held by residents.

See Board on A11

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THURSDAY JULY 30, 1998

Summer Fun



Hot weather has once again returned to the Triad. A young girl keeps cool by splashing in the water at Bolton Swimming Pool. For more tips on keeping cool in hot weather, see page C3.

Photo by Bruce Chapman.

After lengthy trial and verdict, Bridges finally calls it quits

By DAMON FORD
THE CHRONICLE

James Bridges is disappointed and mad. "I got screwed twice and didn't like either one of them," he said. Bridges alleged racial discrimination drove him to step down as the county's assistant human resources director in January 1996.

Friday, after more than a year of legal wrangling, a judge ruled that race was not a factor in Bridges' decision to step down.

Guilford County Commissioner Warren Dorsett came to Bridges' aid. He said the decision wasn't surprising.

"When I got back I found out," he said. "(Bridges) was not going to get any consideration going to court. If you're not down here, you won't see (discriminatory acts) and so it seems so farfetched. He was telling the truth about not having access to the office. He wasn't being given duties in the office."

At the time of his hiring in 1994, Bridges was the only black man working in the department. He said constant criticism came with the job.

"I was the person hired but I wasn't the first choice of the director," Bridges said.

He also testified that he was not given a computer and was given an office the size of a closet and was not allowed to supervise subordinate employees. Bridges says he wasn't given keys to the department or access to personnel records either.

Ed Pons, the deputy county attorney who represented Guilford County in the dispute, said Bridges' position was new and that's why "no office was set up for him" in the beginning. He added that "no one down there had a good office."

Pons argued that Bridges' problems were not racial but personality conflicts. According to Pons, Bridges, who spent several years in the military, may have come off as harsh to employees.

"He apparently got off on a rocky start with his co-workers and then the subject of race came in," Pons said. "There was some fault on both sides in getting along but it had nothing to do with race."

Pons also said a little bragging on Bridges' part didn't help things either.

"He talked about his two masters degrees and how his department head only had a bachelors," Pons said. "That may have contributed to his problems also."

Bridges was fired in 1995 and then reinstated a few days later after Dorsett and others complained.

Dorsett then asked the county manager to investigate why Bridges had been fired.

Bridges said reinstatement did not solve his problems.

"After I was reinstated it seemed like everything was 10 times worse," he said. "I was blasted in public meetings ... I saw it was a 'no win' situation."

During the trial, Dorsett took the stand as a witness for Bridges. "There was discussion about why (Bridges) was treated in the manner he was being treated when he was supposed to be assistant director of the department," he said in testimony.

Bridges said for him the case is over. He doesn't have the money to appeal and he's already lost more than \$20,000 fighting his "voluntary dismissal."

"I can't understand for the life of me that eight jurors would not think that any reasonable person would not have been compelled to resign under these conditions," he said.

See Slain on A11

Thousands pay tribute to slain officers

By GABRIEL ESCOBAR AND HELEN DEWAR
THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Capitol Police Officer Jacob J. Chestnut and Detective John M. Gibson, their coffins draped with flags flown over the imposing building they died protecting, were venerated Tuesday by the words of the nation's leaders and by the silence of thousands of people who marched slowly and somberly into the Great Rotunda.

The daylong tribute at the august central hall of the U.S. Capitol was attended by President Clinton, Vice President Gore, members of the House and Senate and many other dignitaries. The Rotunda ceremony was a remarkable distinction for two officers who now join a select fraternity that includes nine presidents, among them Abraham Lincoln, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B.

Johnson.

The bodies of Chestnut and Gibson arrived at the Capitol at 7:05 a.m., 87 hours after the officers were mortally wounded by a gunman who shot his way into the building Friday afternoon. Throughout the day, a slow procession that at times stretched the equivalent of four city blocks filed into the Capitol, evidence of how profoundly people have been moved by the deaths of two men whose job was to protect the "People's House."

The mourning was, fittingly, democratic in its size and diversity. The coffins, placed on a north-south axis on either side of the geographic center of the Capitol, drew police cadets and police chiefs, congressional pages and members of Congress, and the Capitol custodial staff and the president, vice president and members of the Cabinet.

Tourists in T-shirts and sneakers walked

with officers in full ceremonial uniform. A cook wearing an apron stood and paid his respects on the same spot later occupied by the two most influential men in the House, Speaker Newt Gingrich and Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt.

"The story of what they did Friday is already a legend," Clinton said at the official tribute, held at mid-afternoon and attended by the families of the slain officers and scores of other dignitaries who crowded into the Rotunda. Clinton said the nation is "profoundly grateful that, in doing their duty, they saved lives, they consecrated this house."

"They remind us that what makes our democracy strong is not only what Congress may enact or a president may achieve," Clinton said, referring to the two dead officers and the

Liberians fight to stay in U.S.

By JERI YOUNG
THE CHRONICLE

James Hunder spent Sunday at Goler AME Zion Church teaching more than 500 kente cloth clad African Americans about his homeland Liberia.

Garbed in an elaborate purple and gold robe, Hunder shared the history of Liberia moving easily between his native dialect and English. He spoke of his country's roots in America and of its increasingly bright future.

He also worked to dispel some myths about the nation which was founded by American abolitionists as an African homeland for freed slaves.

"Some people are bitter," he said. "I hear sometimes 'your people sold our people so why should we be one.' If you love us so much how come you sold us. That's a good question. I don't have an answer to

that question. It was something that happened. At that time, we simply didn't have control over slavery. It was not an enjoyable thing. They were forced."

The throng gathered at Goler for a celebration of the African nation's 150th birthday. And while stories and plates of spicy jollof rice flowed freely, the event was bittersweet for the members of The Liberian Organization of the Piedmont.

After 20 years of civil unrest, their nation is once again free of martial law and guerrilla warfare. But now Liberians in America face another challenge.

With the end of the vicious civil war, U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno has decided not to renew Liberian refugees' temporary protected status, which allows them to remain in the United States until calm returns at home.



Photo by Jeri Young

See Liberia on A10

James Hunder lead worship service Sunday.

INDEX	
This Week's News	A1-A5
Opinion	A6
Forum	A7
Business News	A8
Sports	B1-B5
Obituaries	B6
Religion	B8
Classifieds	B9
Community Focus	C1
Health & Wellness	C3
Arts & Entertainment	C7
Family Fun	C8
Community Calendar	C10