

# Webster's fight for King holiday

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## gets well-deserved acknowledgment

*"In spite of the sympathy for the bill, HB 320 failed on its first vote for passage in the House of Delegates by one vote. Del. (Kenneth) Webster, defying conventional political wisdom, asked immediately for a recount. When the final vote was taken, HB 320 passed the House by an 11-vote majority. It was then sent to the Senate. HB 320 would not have passed the House if it had not been for ... intensive activity by many people."*

— Congressional Record, House, May 14, 1974, Page 14,624

**W**hat an amazing time in our history that was. Six years after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Del. Kenneth Webster sponsored HB 320, whose passage made Maryland the second state, after Illinois, to make King's birthday a legal state holiday. Maryland's decision influenced other conservative states. Then-Rep. Parren Mitchell, D-Baltimore, decided to insert this story — as reported by the *Baltimore Afro-American* — into the Congressional Record for the consideration of members of Congress.

According to the *Afro-American's* account, the meeting room was jammed when the bill was introduced to the Ways and Means Committee. Ministers from Baltimore had been bused in and "a contingent of community leaders of the City of Annapolis" was present.

Webster stated that "I am proud of the fact that Maryland is one of the first states to legalize Dr. King's birthday as a holiday. I am especially proud of the way the black community responded and fought to make this day our special day."

On Tuesday, 46 years after the March on Washington, that same



### OUR LEGACY

By Janice Hayes-Williams

community took the time to honor and thank Webster for his actions in 1974. At noon about 100 people came together for a luncheon to toast him, roast him, thank him, and relive the history that has made so much possible. King is now memorialized by not just a holiday

but by a statue in Anne Arundel County.

On the day of the luncheon, at the campus of Sojourner-Douglass College in Edgewater, the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Committee established a scholarship fund in Webster's name and presented a check for \$5,000 to college President Dr. Charles W. Simmons and the president of the Annapolis campus, Dr. Charlestine Fairley.

The afternoon was filled with both history and humor. Each of the speakers provided a morsel of history.

Fairley welcomed us to the beautiful Sojourner-Douglass campus, which she rightly called one of Anne Arundel's best-kept secrets. She alluded to the struggle needed before this place of learning was constructed. In the end, a contingent of citizens made it happen.

She was followed by Del. Mary Ann Love, D-Glen Burnie, chairwoman of the Anne Arundel House delegation. Love and I had shared the stage on Oct. 6, 2000, when we received the Fannie Lou Hamer award. She spoke of meeting Webster at a Martin Luther King dinner and presenting him with a citation from the House.

Love was followed by County Councilman Daryl Jones, D-Severn, who reminded us of the history of resistance and the legacy of Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass. Not unlike Webster, both held positions that were unpopular in their time, but both — knowing what was good for the many, and knowing the impact the many could have— always ignited the fight for justice.

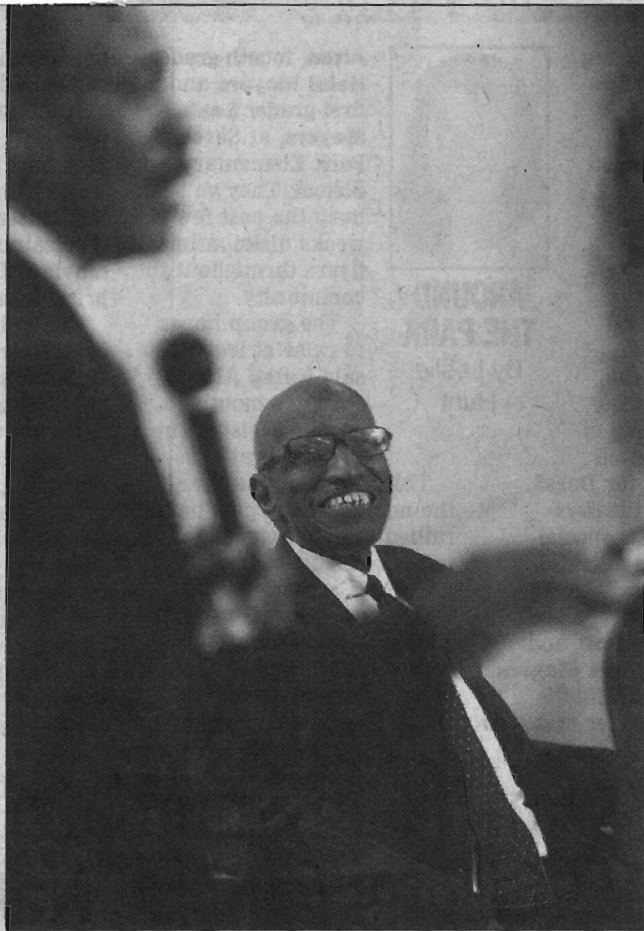
Jones was followed by Annapolis Alderwoman Classie Hoyle, D-Ward 3. This was the first time I had experienced the other side of Hoyle's personality. Before she gave Webster his flowers, she provided the audience with a hilarious inside look at their college days at what was then known as Morgan State College. We also were told about Webster's influence on changing that school's status so that today it is Morgan State University.

Hoyle was followed by Anne Arundel County NAACP President Jacqueline Allsup. Along with kind words of gratitude, she reminded us that Webster was a lifetime member of the NAACP, still active in Baltimore, his hometown.

Carl Snowden, the chairman of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Committee, did not let us forget the details of the history of Webster and the House bill. He reminded us of the relationship between Webster and the Rev. Leroy Bowman, clarifying the Congressional Record's statement about a "contingent of community leaders of the City of Annapolis."

What a warm and wonderful tribute to years of service to this community.

Webster served two terms in the Maryland legislature, from 1970 to 1978. His wife, of 45 years, Phoebe, reminded us all of the commitment



By Joshua McKerrow — The Capital

As a state delegate in the 1970s, Kenneth Webster led the effort to make Maryland the second state in the nation to establish a holiday honoring Martin Luther King Jr. Tuesday, Webster was honored by a \$5,000 scholarship created in his name for students at Sojourner-Douglass College. Webster, seated, listens to Carl Snowden speak during a gathering to salute him at the college's Edgewater campus.

and dedication of a spouse married to politics.

But the most loving tribute was from Del. Nathaniel T. Oaks, D-Baltimore, who said that Webster was his mentor and was responsible for Oaks' years of service to Maryland in the legislature.

Webster was honored in style. There was representation from numerous officials in the state, including the offices of U.S. Sens. Benjamin L. Cardin and Barbara A. Mikulski, both D-Md.,

Anne Arundel County Executive John R. Leopold, county schools Superintendent Kevin M. Maxwell and Sheriff Ron Bateman. There was a citation from the Baltimore City Council. And the list goes on.

Kudos to the Martin Luther King committee for honoring distinguished individuals while they are still here to smell the roses.

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