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PATRICIA IRVIN
DAVID KIDD
Graphic Designer

MONICA J. FOSTER
Seattle Office Coordinator

JULIE KEEFE
SUSAN FRIED
Photographers



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415 N. Killingsworth St.,
P.O. Box 5455, Portland, OR 97228.
Telephone (503) 285-5555.

E-mail: info@theskanner.com
World Wide Web site:

<http://www.theskanner.com>
Fax: (503) 285-2900

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Sen. Edward Brooke Dead at 95

Sandwiched between the deaths of former New York Gov. Mario Cuomo and popular ESPN sportscaster Stuart Scott, the passing of former Massachusetts Senator Edward W. Brooke III at the age of 95 did not get nearly the attention it deserved.

Though two African Americans were elected to the U.S. Senate during the Reconstruction Era by the Mississippi legislature – Hiram R. Revels and Blanche K. Bruce, both Republicans – Brooke was the first Black elected to the upper chamber by popular vote, beginning his term in 1967. What made his election remarkable at the time was that a Black Republican Episcopalian could be elected statewide in Massachusetts, a predominantly Democratic and Catholic state with a Black population of less than 3 percent. It would be another 25 years before another African American – Carol Moseley Braun of Illinois – would win a U.S. Senate seat (1992).

Prior to his election to the Senate, Brooke served two terms as attorney general of Massachusetts. When he came to Washington, he declined to join the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and told *Time* magazine: “I do not intend to be a national leader of the Negro people. I intend to do my job as a senator from Massachusetts.”

While doing his job, Brooke showed that he could be a Black Republican without selling out his principles or abandoning the fight for civil rights.

When Barry Goldwater won the party’s 1964 presidential nomination,



THE CURRY REPORT

George E. Curry

for example, Brooke, the state attorney general, refused to be photographed with Goldwater or endorse the Arizona ultraconservative.

In the 1966 book titled, *The Challenge of Change: Crisis in Our Two-Party System*, he asked, rhetorically: “Where are our plans

civil rights.

On Nov. 4, 1973, Brooke became the first Republican to call for Richard Nixon’s resignation after the famous “Saturday night massacre” that took place when Nixon ordered the firing of Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox after Cox issued a subpoena for copies of Nixon’s taped conversations recorded in the Oval Office.

Brooke assumed an offensive posture as well, particularly on housing issues. He co-sponsored the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion or ethnicity. It was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson a week after the assassination of Dr.

and expanded. He was also part of the team of legislators who retained Title IX that guarantees equal education to females and the Equal Credit Act, a measure that gave married women the right to have credit in their own name.

In 1967, Brooke served on the 11-member President’s Commission on Civil Disorders, better known as the Kerner Commission, which was established by President Johnson to investigate the causes of the 1967 race riots and to provide recommendations for the future.

At various points during his career, Brooke was at odds with civil rights leaders and liberals. As attorney general, he opposed the

What made his election remarkable was that a Black Republican Episcopalian could be elected in Massachusetts, a predominantly Democratic and Catholic state with a Black population of less than 3 percent

for a New Deal or a Great Society?”

Though fellow Republican Richard Nixon was in the White House, Brooke opposed Nixon’s attempts to abolish the Office of Economic Opportunity and the Job Corps and weaken the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

And when Nixon nominated Clement Haynsworth and Harrold Carswell to the U.S. Supreme Court, Brooke was part of a bipartisan coalition that blocked the appointment of the two nominees who were considered hostile to

Martin Luther King, Jr.

He continued to work on strengthening the law and in 1969, Congress passed the “Brooke Amendment” limiting public housing tenants’ out-of-pocket rent expenditure to 25 percent of the resident’s income, a percentage that has since increased to 30 percent.

With the Voting Rights Act up for renewal in 1975, Brooke engaged in an “extended debate” with John Stennis (R-Miss.) on the Senate floor that resulted in the landmark measure being extended

NAACP’s call for a boycott of Boston’s public schools to protest the city’s de facto segregation, saying the law required students to stay in school.

In his 2006 autobiography, *Bridging The Divide: My Life* (Rutgers University Press), Brooke said, “My fervent expectation is that sooner rather than later, the United States Senate will more closely reflect the rich diversity of this great country.”

Throughout his life, Brooke did that exceptionally well.

GOP Official’s White Supremacist Past?

There they go again! Just as the Republican Party is poised to take control of Congress, a key official’s actions and words remind us – just in time for the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday – that it remains implacably hostile to what King represented and what the holiday stands for.

Louisiana blogger Lamar White Jr.’s revealing last week that Rep. Steve Scalise (R-La.), now the third-ranking officer in the GOP’s House majority leadership structure, spoke at a White-supremacist convention in 2002 while a state

LAST CHANCE

Lee A. Daniels



public-policy matters.

However, Scalise’s claim of ignorance about EURO produced widespread skepticism, even among some conservatives, given that he spoke to the group during its two-day convention at a hotel

poster-board for stomach-churning racist invective. For example, one post from 2007 denounced the increasingly multiracial character of today’s Germany, declaring, “The beautiful Germany of the 1930s with blonde children happily running through the streets has been replaced by a multi-racial cesspool. Out of work Africans can be seen shuffling along the same streets which used to be clean and safe in the days of [Hitler’s Nazi Party].”

The pushback forced Scalise to quickly issue another statement declaring that his appearance at

of bigoted comments and actions against Blacks and Hispanics, gays and lesbians, undocumented immigrants, and women, and its many racist references to President Obama, what’s “new” about a decade-and-more-old story of a Deep-South Republican’s trolling for votes among the nation’s most racist elements?

But what caught my attention most about this story was the largely ignored fact that in 1999 and again in 2004 Steve Scalise as a state representative was one of a very few Louisiana state legislators to vote against establishing a state holiday honoring Martin Luther King, Jr.

On those occasions, only three and six Louisiana state legislators, respectively, voted against those proposals. Why at the opening of the 21st century, after the King national holiday had been celebrated for 15 years, would any public official be against establishing an official state holiday? Doesn’t that call for an explanation? Are those votes the actions of someone who’s not a bigot?

In all the hullabaloo about Scalise’s speaking before the EURO group, his anti-King votes have been overlooked. But don’t those votes also raise a question about the content of Steve Scalise’s character? Perhaps this month he’ll find a respectable forum and give a speech about that.

Scalise’s claim of ignorance about EURO produced widespread skepticism, even among some conservatives

representative, set off the by now well-practiced minuet of yet another prominent conservative trying to distance himself or herself from having associated with bigots.

First, Scalise through a spokesperson acknowledged that he had spoken to the group, the European-American Unity and Rights Organization, or EURO, but said he had had no inkling of their anti-Black, Hispanic and – Jewish views. No transcript or otherwise hard evidence of what Scalise said then has surfaced to contradict – or support – his assertion that he spoke only of general

in his own district and that its racist views had been discussed in several recent local news articles.

EURO, which had been founded two years earlier by David Duke, the notorious racist and former Louisiana state legislator, had links to several other similar Southern-based racist groups, although, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks U.S. hate groups, it was and is largely “a paper tiger, serving primarily as a vehicle to publicize Duke’s writing and sell his books.”

Nonetheless, like its confederates among hate groups, it was a

the event was “a mistake in judgment,” caused by the organizational disarray of his scheduling team and this time he emphatically denied approving of EURO’s views. By then, prominent Republicans in Congress had begun speaking up in his defense, and Rep. Cedric Richmond, of New Orleans, Louisiana’s only Black Democratic Congressman, vouched for Scalise’s tolerance and integrity.

By the end of the week, those elements combined to take the steam out of the story. After all, one might also say, given the GOP’s voluminous recent record