

4-1-1987

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Recommended Citation

Scarupa, Harriet Jackson (1987) "Toward Full Black Political Empowerment," *New Directions*: Vol. 14: Iss. 2, Article 5.

Available at: <https://dh.howard.edu/newdirections/vol14/iss2/5>

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TOWARD FULL BLACK POLITICAL EMPOW- ERMENT

By Harriet Jackson Scarupa

Last November 4, Mike Espy, a young lawyer from Yazoo City, Miss., was elected the first Black congressman from Mississippi since Reconstruction. In defeating two-term Republican incumbent Webb Franklin he also became the only Black member of the 100th Congress to represent a rural district.

Espy is a 1975 graduate of Howard's College of Liberal Arts and is currently president of the university's Mississippi alumni club.

On that same day, two other Howard alumni, both graduates of the School of Law and members of its faculty, were more quietly tallying up victories in what may well become the next frontier for Black political advancement: the suburbs.

Alexander ("Alex") Williams Jr. became the first Black state's attorney in Prince George's County, Md., after upsetting Arthur A. Marshall Jr., the powerful 24-year incumbent, in the Democratic pri-

mary and then winning handily over Republican challenger David Simpson in the general election.

In neighboring Montgomery County, Md., fellow Democrat Isiah ("Ike") Leggett edged out Republican Betty Ann Krahnke to win one of two at-large seats on the Montgomery County Council. He thus became the first Black to serve on the seven-member legislative body.

These victories represent individual success stories, true. But they represent far more than that. They are part of a long continuum of struggle toward full Black political empowerment.

As Howard political scientist Ronald Walters says of the newest generation of Black politicians: "They are the inheritors of the mantle of the civil rights move-

ment and they take it another step forward. Instead of dealing with problems of access to the vote, as their foreparents did, they are dealing with office-holding and public policy functions as a product of the vote.

"But it's not just a question of their being *beneficiaries*. It's also a question that they now have the obligation to fulfill the *expectations* of all those people who gave their lives and bled and died for the right to vote hoping such electoral victories as theirs would happen."

The civil rights movement, of course, was a struggle in which Howard University was a vital player. Indeed, many of its faculty, students, alumni and staff served as its theoreticians as well as its foot soldiers. Particularly noteworthy was the instrumental role played by faculty and students of the law school under the leadership of vice dean Charles

Hamilton Houston in laying the legal groundwork of that epochal movement.

The political arrival of Mike Espy, Alex Williams, Ike Leggett — and that of such other Howard alumni office-holders as Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young, Virginia Lt. Gov. L. Douglas Wilder, Oklahoma State Senator Vicki Miles LeGrange and District of Columbia City Council Chairman David A. Clarke — reflect something else as well. And that is Howard University's long tradition of education, not just for education's sake, but education for *leadership*.