

newstalk

Texans speak out in death penalty video

By **MARILYN MARSHALL**
Defender

Texas civil rights leaders can be seen in a new video highlighting racial discrimination in the state's death penalty system and the case of death-row prisoner Duane Buck.

The video, released by the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, is titled "A Broken Promise in Texas." It contains interviews with Texas NAACP President Gary Bledsoe, State Sen. Rodney Ellis, Rev. William Lawson and former Congressman Craig Washington.

Also featured are the surviving victim in the Buck case, one of Buck's trial prosecutors and his family members – all calling for a new sentencing hearing. The video is narrated by former Gov. Mark White, who has also lobbied for new sentencing for Buck.

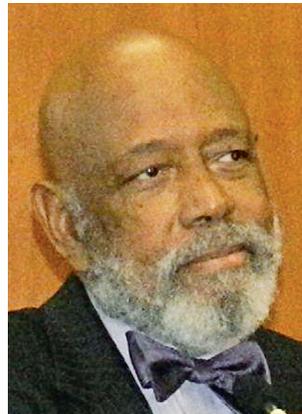
Buck was sentenced to death in Harris County for the 1995 fatal shootings of Debra Gardner and Kenneth Butler. Sentencing came after his trial prosecutor elicited testimony from a psychologist indicating that Buck was more likely to be



Gary Bledsoe



State Sen. Rodney Ellis



Craig Washington

dangerous because he is Black.

Though there is no question of Buck's guilt, supporters say no one can be sentenced to death because of his or her race.

The video's release comes at a time when the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals is currently considering Buck's appeal for a new sentencing hearing free of racial bias.

Buck filed the appeal citing a recent study that found racial bias in a disproportionate number of African-American death penalty cases in Harris County. The court is expected to rule on the case in coming weeks.

"Sometimes the government makes mistakes," Ellis said in the video. "The very least we can do is try to correct it."

Washington echoed Ellis' thoughts.

"If any one of those jurors made a decision that Mr. Buck's life should be

taken as a result of the fact that he was born Black then he didn't get a fair trial," Washington said.

Christina Swarns, Buck's attorney and director of the Legal Defense Fund's Criminal Justice Project, said the video is an eye-opener.

"Everyone who sees this powerful

video will come away from it with the alarming realization that if Duane Buck can be sentenced to death – and possibly executed – based on racial stereotypes, then our criminal justice system is broken not just for Mr. Buck, but for all of us," Swarns said.

To sign a petition calling on Texas officials to grant Duane Buck a new sentencing hearing visit change.org/petitions/sentenced-to-death-because-he-is-black-grant-duane-buck-a-new-hearing.

To view the video visit youtu.be/tD6WWN38ZGc or defendernetwork.com

HISD offers free summer meals

The Houston Independent School District's free summer meal program recently kicked off at more than 200 schools. Children ages 1 to 18 can enjoy a healthy breakfast and lunch at no cost through mid-July.

Children do not have to be enrolled in summer school nor show proof of income in order to receive a free meal at the participating HISD schools. Adults can also participate by purchasing breakfast for \$2 and lunch for \$3.25.

All meals are nutritionally analyzed to ensure children receive the vitamins, minerals, and calories needed to maintain a balanced diet. Last summer, HISD Food Services served nearly 1 million free meals to Houston-area children.

The dates and service times vary at each campus and participating schools are subject to change. For more information call 713-491-5944 or visit hisd.org.

localbriefs

HOWARD JEFFERSON has been appointed to the Harris County Department of Education Board of Trustees to serve the remainder of the term for Position 7. He replaces Jim Henley, who resigned the position. Jefferson served as a HCDE trustee before. He is a national board member with the NAACP...

...**A REPORT ON TEXAS' HIGH SCHOOL** graduation rates was recently released by Education Week and the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center. Among other things, for the class of 2010, Texas' graduation rate for all students (74.8 percent) exceeded the national average (74.7 percent). In addition, large Texas school districts such as HISD are

posting "graduation rates higher than expected." TEA Commissioner Michael Williams said the dramatic jump seen from 2000 through 2010 is the result of the hard work in school districts across the state "coupled with strong leadership at the state level that emphasizes education for all students".....**THE TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION** announces a State of Texas Soldier Employment Initiative (STSEI) pilot project to help returning U.S. Army veterans find employment prior to separating from the service, particularly in the medical, energy and technology fields. STSEI is developed in partnership with the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) as

part of a \$750,000 U.S. project. TWC and TVC representatives will work with military, community and employer organizations to identify areas of need for veterans..... **OLDER ADULTS** are asked to beware of a scam in which an "official" with Medicare is calling because Medicare is sending out new cards and their information needs to be verified. According to the Better Business Bureau, scammers are seeking seniors' banking information. Seniors are reminded that Medicare will not call them on the phone and ask for banking information. Seniors who receive suspicious calls can contact the Texas Senior Medicare Patrol at 1-888-341-6187.