



FREE

# Richmond Free Press

FREE

© 2019 Paradigm Communications, Inc. All rights reserved.

VOL. 28 NO. 5

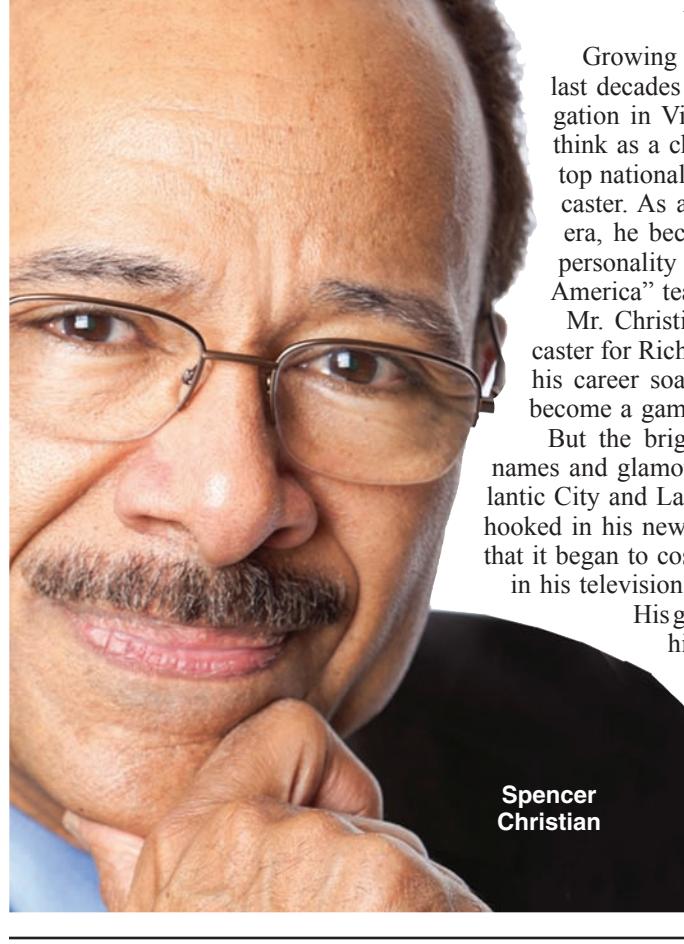
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

[www.richmondfreepress.com](http://www.richmondfreepress.com)

JANUARY 31-FEBRUARY 2, 2019

# Weathering addiction

Spencer Christian, Va. native and former national television weatherman, has been haunted by a gambling addiction for decades



Spencer Christian

By Reginald Stuart

Growing up in Charles City County in the last decades of legally mandated racial segregation in Virginia, Spencer Christian did not think as a child he would someday become a top nationally known television weather forecaster. As a young adult in a new American era, he became a well-recognized television personality as part of ABC's "Good Morning America" team for 13 years.

Mr. Christian, who got his start as a newscaster for Richmond's WWBT-TV and soon saw his career soar, also never imagined he would become a gambling addict.

But the bright lights, fine dining, prominent names and glamour of being a "high roller" in Atlantic City and Las Vegas lured him. He became so hooked in his newly found private life of gambling that it began to cost him the fortune he was earning in his television career.

His gambling addiction repeatedly threw him into debt so badly that he lost his home and declared bankruptcy twice. His addiction also helped end his 29-year marriage, despite his close bonds to his wife, Diane, and their two children.

Being a gambling addict held him hostage to a private life of shame for more than two decades, he said. It was a secret

known only to family, close friends and the big casinos to whom he owed thousands of dollars in loans and gambling losses.

But his secret is making the rounds publicly after the recent release of his book, "You Bet Your Life: How I Survived Jim Crow Racism, Hurricane Chasing and Gambling."

Working now in San Francisco as the morning weatherman for KGO-TV, Mr. Christian, now 71, sounds as optimistic and confident as ever despite still owing untold amounts on his gambling habit. He said he has ended the discrete, yet agonizing, part of his life as a chronic gambler. It is a declaration he has made several times before with no luck.

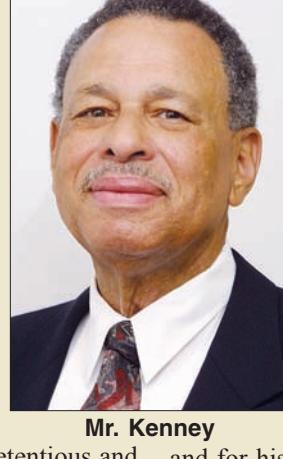
"Despite the stress and anxiety, my faith gave me enough joy to offset the pain and anguish," Mr. Christian said in a recent telephone interview with the Richmond Free Press.

Mr. Christian, who was raised in a small, Charles City County Baptist church and prays on a regular basis, credits his latest turnaround to a "come to Jesus"-like moment with his 40-year-old daughter, Jessica, who is now a mother of two youngsters. Jessica, he said, gave him a straight daughter-father talk about his life and seriously questioned what he planned to leave as a legacy.

Please turn to A5

## Former Mayor Walter T. Kenney Sr., who worked across racial, political and regional lines, dies at 88

By Jeremy M. Lazarus



Mr. Kenney

Former Richmond Mayor Walter T. Kenney Sr. would have been out of step in today's polarized politics.

Mr. Kenney, a proud Richmond native who died Monday, Jan. 28, 2019, in a local hospital at age 88, is being remembered as the "consummate gentleman" of city politics who would talk with everyone, no matter their political leanings.

Even his critics described the lanky politician as an unpretentious and kindly man who received high marks for his unfailing courtesy and his willingness to work across racial and regional lines.

"He was the nicest, kindest, sweetest, gentlest and tallest" member of City Council, his former council colleague Willie J. Dell once said, though she added, "he was also the slowest talker."

He was part of the first African-American majority on City Council in 1977 and later elected by his council colleagues to serve as mayor for two terms, from 1990 to 1994. During that time, he may have been best known for his work for racial healing in Richmond and for his efforts to raise the profile of the city's African-American history.

Please turn to A4

## Coliseum project expected to be key in mayor's State of the City address

By Jeremy M. Lazarus



to meet a new City Charter requirement that he, in consultation with the council, the School Board and the public, would come up with a fully funded plan to modernize all of the city's school buildings.

The requirement stemmed from a referendum that received 85 percent support from the voters in 2017.

Paul Goldman, who led the effort to get that charter requirement on the ballot, said after Monday's vote, "I'm profoundly disappointed with Mayor Stoney and professed City Council leaders ... for their professed Trump Wall Street-style political game

Please turn to A4

Cars and trucks will have to surrender half of their lanes on Brook Road to cyclists.

That's the final decision of Richmond City Council, which voted 6-3 to install bike lanes

and uphold a nearly 4-year-old approved plan for developing biking infrastructure in the city.

"I don't think council should be legislating bike lanes," said 4th District Councilwoman Kristen N. Larson.

The city has not said when the bike lanes would be installed, but it is expected to start later this year following completion of a utility project to replace residential and main underground pipes.

The bike lane issue dominated the council's nearly six-hour meeting Monday at which council also gave the green light to the operation of electric scooters and largely scrapped a 20-year-old residency requirement for city government executives and directors.

In addition, the council also voted to end free parking in Downtown for drivers with handicap licenses or placards, embraced a nonbinding resolution that calls for the city to spend \$800 million on new school construction over 20 years and approved the Richmond School Board's request to shift about \$4.7 million from a planning fund for new schools to a maintenance fund to allow the money to be used to fix leaking roofs and address other urgent problems in existing buildings.

The vote on the Brook Road bike lanes was a bitter pill for Council Vice President Chris A. Hilbert, 3rd District, and Councilwoman Kim B. Gray, 2nd District.

The two, who split representation of the Brook Road corridor, spent months trying to stop the addition of bike lanes that they believe would make the street more dangerous for residents and cyclists.

Mr. Hilbert argued that limiting traffic to just one lane in each direction on the 3.5-mile



### Marching for education

People of all ages wearing red hats, scarves, jackets and shirts signal their support for more state money for public education in Virginia during Monday's #RedforEd march and rally from Monroe Park to the State Capitol. State lawmakers meeting at the General Assembly session said they will support a 5 percent pay hike for Virginia's teachers. Please see article, more photos, A5.

Regina H. Boone/Richmond Free Press

## City Council expands VCU Police jurisdiction

By Daniel Berti  
Capital News Service



Chief Venuti

A packed Richmond City Council meeting turned unruly Monday night as residents and council members clashed over an ordinance to expand the jurisdiction of Virginia Commonwealth University Police.

The ordinance, which passed 7-2, will nearly double the size of VCU Police's current jurisdiction and covers an area between the university's main campus and its medical campus a

mile away.

VCU Police has jurisdiction over both of the university's core campuses, Monroe Park and MCV, but the VCU Police headquarters is located between the two — outside of its jurisdiction. VCU owns at least 25 properties in the expanded jurisdiction, authorities said.

More than a dozen Richmond residents, many current and former VCU students, spoke in opposition to the ordinance and questioned the need for expansion into an area that does not

include VCU's core campuses.

"This is a ridiculous expansion of power," said one opponent.

Another added, "I feel like our young kids will be harassed."

The public comment period was briefly interrupted when several audience members accused a Richmond police officer standing in the back of the room of taking photographs and video of the opponents as they made their case to City Council.

Please turn to A4

Please turn to A4



## Meet 2019 Boys & Girls Club of Metro Richmond Youth of the Year B1



**NCAA bound  
for VUU Lady Panthers  
and VSU Trojans**

VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY

A8

FREE

# Richmond Free Press

FREE

VOL. 28 NO. 11

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

[www.richmondfreepress.com](http://www.richmondfreepress.com)

MARCH 14-16, 2019

# Stand by your plan

**Mayor Levar M. Stoney pushes his proposed tax hikes despite opposition and criticism**

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

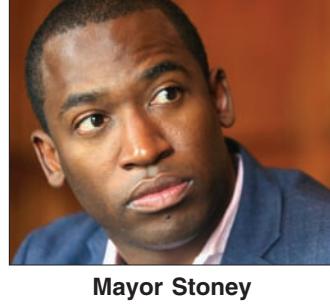
Mayor Levar M. Stoney plans to take his case for tax hikes to Richmond residents in coming weeks, even as his plan draws resistance and foes express gratitude to one of his outspoken opponents, 8th District City Councilwoman Reva M. Trammell, by showering her with bouquets of flowers.

Convinced that the city has no choice if it is to make progress, Mayor Stoney said he knows "I'll take some hits."

But he said he's prepared for criticism if that is what it takes to boost the city's revenue so it can work on getting streets in

shape and get busy creating a public education system in which most students, not just 60 percent, learn to read, write, handle arithmetic and are prepared for careers and college.

Mayor Stoney also said the city must start providing better pay for its employees if it is to continue to attract qualified



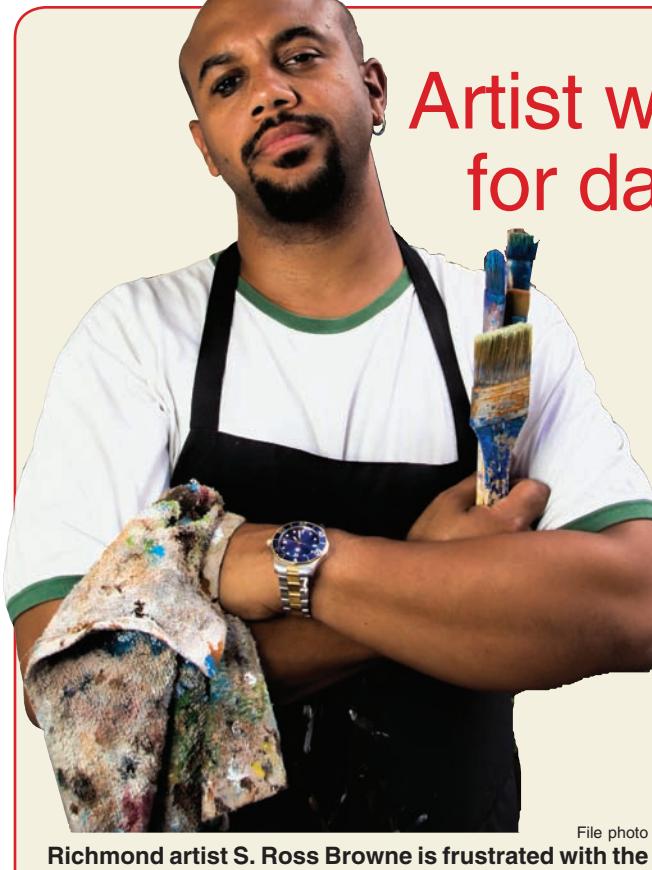
**Mayor Stoney**

people in explaining why his plan includes a 3 percent pay raise for city workers.

The mayor has scheduled four community sessions — one in each quadrant of the city — in coming weeks where he plans to discuss the budget and get an earful from citizens about how they see things.

The mayor visited the Free Press on Monday to pitch his budget even as council members gathered a few blocks away to begin their review of the amended 2019-20 budget, which calls for a 9 cent increase in the property tax and imposition of

Please turn to A4



## Artist wants money from city for damaged works, studio

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

S. Ross Browne was painting in his South Side studio at 4 a.m. Nov. 1 when he heard an explosion outside.

The hydrant in front of his studio at 1100 Hull St. had burst. Water was gushing down the sidewalk and street as if the James River has suddenly flooded South Side.

The gush of water then began flowing into the foundation of his building and started bubbling up through the concrete into his studio.

"Good thing I was up to start making calls. That water was enough to collapse the building," said the award-winning artist who has won recognition for his figurative realism paintings that feature black people in Renaissance-style dress and armor.

Mr. Browne hustled to move his artwork and furniture to higher space, but could not keep the water from damaging 19 pieces that were sitting on the floor.

It took the Richmond Department of Public Utilities three hours to respond and turn off the water despite his repeated calls, he said.

Four months after the flood, Mr. Browne is still fighting the city to secure payment for \$48,000 in damages he said he suffered.

"It's frustrating," he said. "I did nothing wrong, but my studio

Please turn to A4

## RPS attendance officers' jobs on chopping block despite crucial need, service

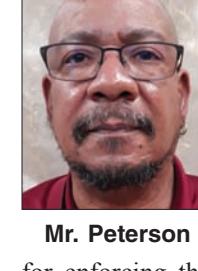


By Jeremy M. Lazarus

With little public attention, the Richmond delegation to the General Assembly joined most Democrats and Republicans last year in voting to dismantle most of the 20-year-old requirements imposed on Virginia public schools to prevent truancy.

The bill that became law doubled from five to 10 the number of days that a student could miss, allowed schools to wait another 10 days before meeting with parents, eliminated most of the authority of school attendance officers to be involved and allowed school districts to use volunteers instead of paid staff to work on attendance issues.

It remains unclear why the leader of House Democrats, Delegate Eileen



Filler-Corn of Fairfax County, wanted to defang the truancy law or why Richmond legislators so eagerly embraced the proposal to largely take the state Department of Education and school districts off the hook for enforcing the state's compulsory attendance law.

But the impact is being felt in Richmond, which has long been a Virginia leader in truancy and dropouts. In the city of Richmond, 4,500 students, or about one in four, miss 10 or more days of class each year, according to state records. And nearly 600 students, or about one in three, who are enrolled in ninth grade fail to graduate four years later.

While he has not responded to a request for comment, Richmond Public Schools Superintendent Jason Kamras appears to have spotted the truancy law change, and with majority support on the Richmond School Board, is using it as part of his effort to cut \$13 million from central office expenses.

The 2019-20 budget the School Board sent to the city recently calls for saving more than \$500,000 by eliminating the 21 positions previously allotted for attendance officers, who have served on the front lines of truancy prevention since 2014 when RPS reclaimed the work from the Richmond Police Department.

Mr. Kamras wants to replace the attendance officers, who are out in the



Regina H. Boone/Richmond Free Press

## Business sense

Lauren Ferrell, 13, shows off inspirational handcrafted items she designed for her business, "Simply Inspired by Lauren." She and dozens of other young entrepreneurs were selling their wares Saturday at the Richmond Children's Business Fair. Please see another photo, B2.

Telephone messages seeking comment have been left with Mr. Caplan, who is accused of paying \$75,000 to get a test supervisor to correct the answers on his daughter's ACT exam after she took it.

Hercules Capital, a Palo Alto, Calif., hedge fund, announced Wednesday it was replacing its leader, Manuel Henriquez, who has been arrested in New York City and released on \$500,000.

Among the parents charged was Gordon Caplan, of Greenwich, Conn., co-chairman of the law firm Willkie Farr & Gallagher based in New York. Mr. Caplan "will have no further firm management responsibilities," the firm said in a statement Wednesday.

Telephone messages seeking comment have been left with

Mr. Caplan, who is accused of paying \$75,000 to get a test

supervisor to correct the answers on his daughter's ACT exam

after she took it.

Representatives of the Richmond Food Justice Alliance, Fit4-

Kids, Sun Path Family Farms, Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens'

Please turn to A5

## Garden at MLK Middle School is part of new city Food Justice Corridor

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Richmond's new Food Justice Corridor is starting to take root. On Saturday, nine new raised garden beds were installed in an interior courtyard at Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School, building on fledgling steps begun last year.

A cadre of 10 volunteers spent more than four hours assembling the beds, filling them with dirt and planting peas, beans and onions — the initial crops.

Representatives of the Richmond Food Justice Alliance, Fit4-

Kids, Sun Path Family Farms, Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens'

urban agriculture initiative, Kinfolk Community Empowerment Center, as well as interested individuals pitched in.

Susan Roberson, director of Richmond Public Schools' Nutrition Program, is thrilled.

"Not only will students get to see plants growing and help grow them, but hopefully, they'll end up eating them to complete the farm-to-table cycle," said Ms. Roberson, who was one of the volunteers.

Elizabeth Theriault, the city Health District's chronic disease and food systems specialist, also spent time volunteering. She promotes healthy eating as part of the formula for helping resi-

dents reduce health challenges and is a big fan of the effort at the middle school.

The garden is the first to be planted this year and will complement gardens that are being developed in Gilpin Court and at Faith Community Baptist Church, according to Arthur Burton founder and director of the Kinfolk Community Empowerment Center.

More gardens are planned for plots on the campus of Armstrong High School, in Mosby Court and at other locations,

Please turn to A4



**NAACP honors  
Beyoncé,  
Black Panther** B2



**Nipsey Hussle  
remembered as  
community builder** B4

FREE

# Richmond Free Press

FREE

VOL. 28 NO. 14

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

[www.richmondfreepress.com](http://www.richmondfreepress.com)

APRIL 4-6, 2019

## ABC's of costs

City officials point to inflation, other factors as drivers in high cost of new schools

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

The administration of Mayor Levar M. Stoney insists that the contracts awarded to build three new city schools "are reflective of the best possible prices given the scope of the work and the current market conditions."

The administration is mounting that defense in response to questions from four Richmond School Board members who are shocked at the \$30 million hike in price for two new elementary schools, George Mason and Greene, and a new middle school to replace Elkhart-Thompson Middle School.

The Free Press first brought the projected 27 percent price hike to public attention in the March 21-23 edition, sparking

Please turn to A4

## Va. NAACP to be run by Tenn. official

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

The longtime president of the Tennessee NAACP has been handed control of the Virginia State Conference NAACP.

Gloria Jean Sweet-Love, who has earned credit for turning around NAACP operations in her state during her 24-year tenure at the helm, was named administrator for the Virginia operations and given sweeping powers over state NAACP policies, programs and expenditures.

Ending weeks of silence, national NAACP President and CEO Derrick Johnson notified the current Virginia NAACP president, the Rev. Kevin Chandler of South Boston, of Ms. Sweet-Love's appointment in a certified letter dated March 15.

The letter, a copy of which was obtained by the Free Press, confirms a report the newspaper published in the Feb. 21-23 edition that the national office of the civil rights organization was poised to take over state operations in the wake of complaints from board members of NAACP policy violations.

Rev. Chandler did not respond to a request for comment. Other officers were not immediately available for comment on the takeover.

"This is the result of issues that have been building up for years," said one NAACP official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Please turn to A4



Regina H. Boone/Richmond Free Press

### Tango togetherness

D'andre Morris, left, and Aaliya Thornhill showcase their tango moves to impress judges at a ballroom dance competition March 28 at Huguenot High School. The two fifth-graders from Overby-Sheppard Elementary were among the young people who participated in the event that Dancing Classrooms of Greater Richmond hosted. The nonprofit organization, which promotes ballroom dancing in city schools as a way to instill discipline, courtesy, teamwork and other values, provided the schoolchildren with 10 weeks of instruction before the event.

Free Press wire report

CHICAGO

Lori Lightfoot's victory in the Chicago mayor's race signaled hope among voters that the nation's third-largest city may someday move beyond long-entrenched divides, racial and otherwise, that have left large parts of the metropolis feeling ignored by people in power.

Mayor-elect Lightfoot became the city's first black female and first openly gay mayor when she defeated another black woman, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, in Tuesday's election. She joins Chicago's top prosecutor and police chief as black leaders in a city that continues to struggle with race relations.

But the significance of her win also transcended race or gender. Ms. Lightfoot was the outsider, a little-known former federal prosecutor who grew up in Ohio and had never been elected to public office, much less climbed through the ranks of Chicago's Democratic machine. Yet she toppled some of the biggest political names and most powerful leaders in the city with a promise to end political corruption and be a voice for low-income and minority people and neighborhoods.

Please turn to A4



Mr. Wilder

Ms. Black detailed her allegations in an interview with The Washington Post that was published March 28. Since then, her allegations have drawn national attention as media outlets have picked up the story involving the celebrated political figure.

In the interview, Ms. Black claimed that Mr. Wilder gave her the unwanted kiss when she went with him to his Richmond condo February 2017 after he took her to a riverfront restaurant for dinner and plied her with liquor on her 20th birthday.

She further alleged that Mr. Wilder,

Please turn to A4

## Chicago makes history in mayoral race



Joshua Lott/Reuters

Chicago Mayor-elect Lori Lightfoot, left, kisses her wife, Amy Eshleman, during her victory celebration Tuesday night after defeating challenger Toni Preckwinkle to become the first African-American woman and openly gay mayor of the city.

Please turn to A4

## Fairfax releases polygraph results as accusers hit airwaves

By Kal Weinstein  
Capital News Service

After two women appeared on national television this week accusing him of sexual assault, Lt. Gov. Justin E. Fairfax released results of polygraph examinations that he says exonerate him.

At a news conference Wednesday in his office in Capitol Square in Downtown, Lt. Gov. Fairfax asked prosecutors to investigate the allegations. He also pledged his full cooperation.

"These allegations, if true, would be incredibly serious," the 40-year-old lieutenant governor said. "Because they are not true, however, they are incredibly hurtful to me and my family and my reputation, which I have spent a lifetime building."

In February, Dr. Vanessa Tyson, a professor at Scripps College in California, went public with an allegation against Lt. Gov. Fairfax, saying he forced her to have oral sex in a Boston hotel room while the two were attending the Democratic National Convention in 2004. The lieutenant governor was a law student at Columbia University at the time.

Then a second woman, Meredith Watson of Maryland, accused Lt. Gov. Fairfax of raping her in 2000 while the two were undergraduate students at Duke University.

Since the women went public with their accusations, Lt. Gov. Fairfax has maintained that he is innocent, saying both encounters were consensual. He said he is the victim of a "vicious and coordinated smear campaign," and in a speech in late February on the floor of the state Senate,

he compared himself to lynching victims during the Jim Crow era.

In separate interviews with Gayle King on "CBS This Morning" airing Monday and Tuesday, Dr. Tyson and Ms. Watson shared their stories with a national television audience.

At the news conference, Lt. Gov. Fairfax said he does not believe television interviews are the right vehicle to get at the truth.

"Sensationalizing allegations does not make them true," he said. "Yet airing salacious allegations without evidence does enormous damage."

Lt. Gov. Fairfax then spoke about each of the allegations, reiterating that both sexual encounters were consensual. He was single when he met Ms. Watson and Dr. Tyson. He is now the married father for two young children.

"I have heard Dr. Tyson say that I held her neck and physically forced her to engage in sexual contact," Lt. Gov. Fairfax said. "That is simply not true."

In addressing Ms. Watson's allegation, Lt. Gov. Fairfax stated that the two "were

Please turn to A4

### What's in a kiss?

## Wilder accused of sexual impropriety by VCU student

Free Press staff, wire report

Aging political lion L. Douglas Wilder allegedly propositioned a Virginia Commonwealth University student who was young enough to be his great-granddaughter and has ended up receiving what amounts to an embarrassing and highly public slap from the young woman.

The student, Sydney Black, now 22, has filed complaints with authorities alleging that, in 2017, the nation's first elected African-American governor and former Richmond mayor, then 86, gave her an unwanted kiss and asked her to become his mistress.

Ms. Black detailed her allegations in an interview with The Washington Post that was published March 28. Since then, her allegations have drawn national attention as media outlets have picked up the story involving the celebrated political figure.

In the interview, Ms. Black claimed that Mr. Wilder gave her the unwanted kiss when she went with him to his Richmond condo February 2017 after he took her to a riverfront restaurant for dinner and plied her with liquor on her 20th birthday.

She further alleged that Mr. Wilder,

Please turn to A4