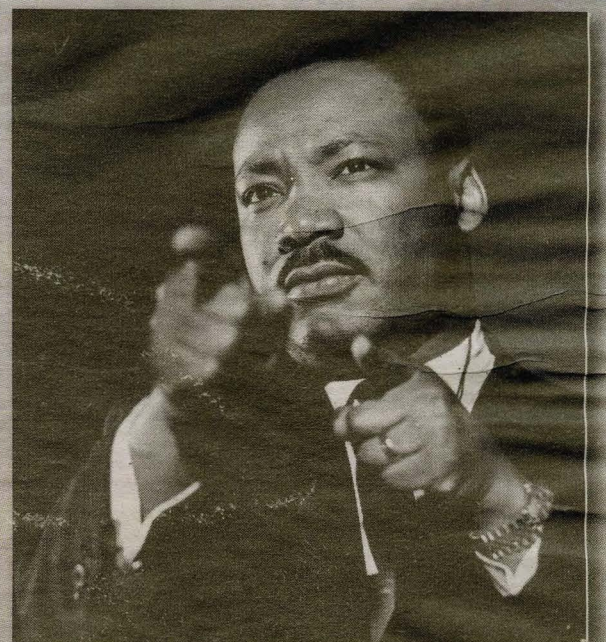
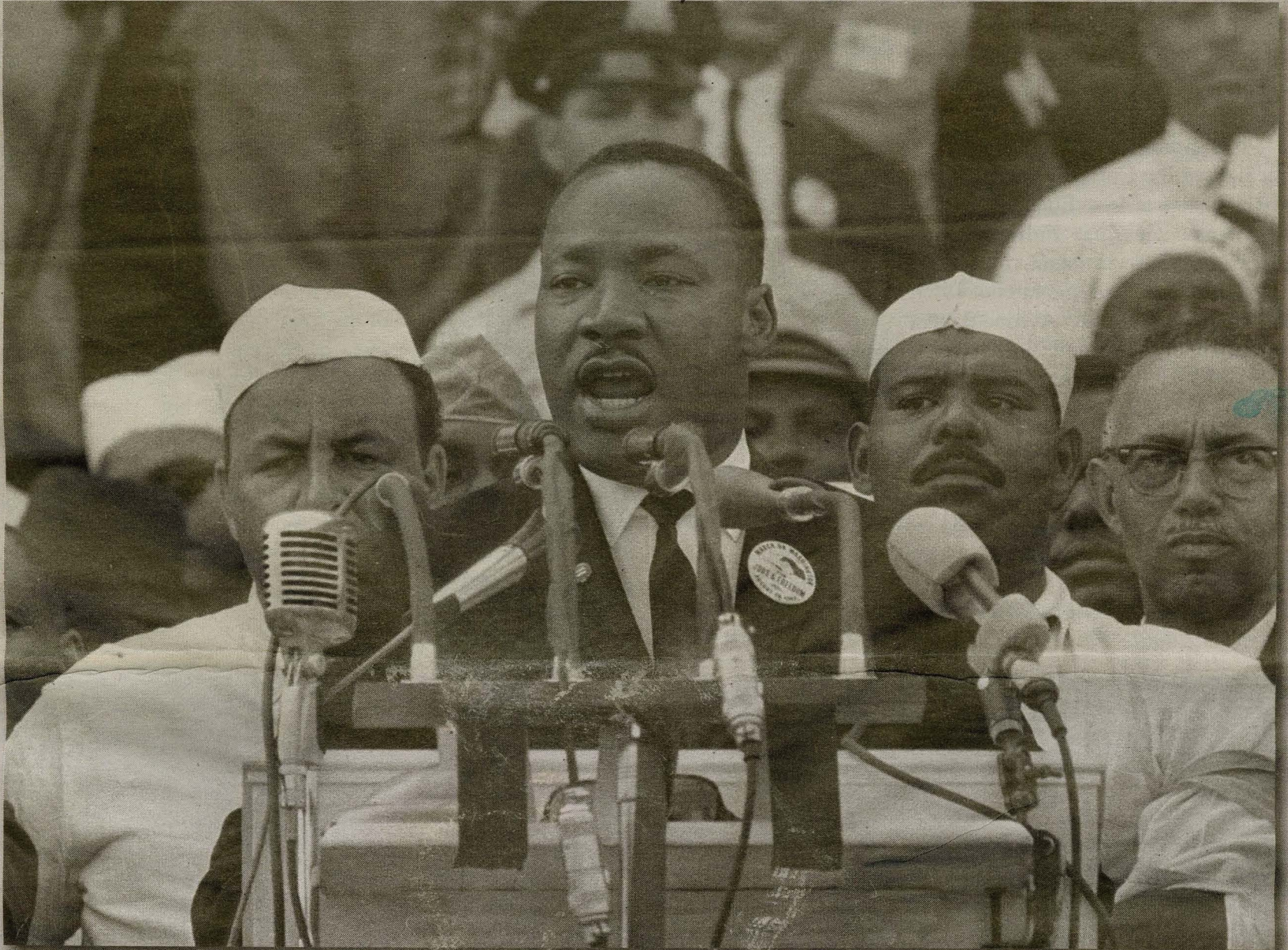


Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

51ST ANNUAL COMMEMORATIVE EDITION

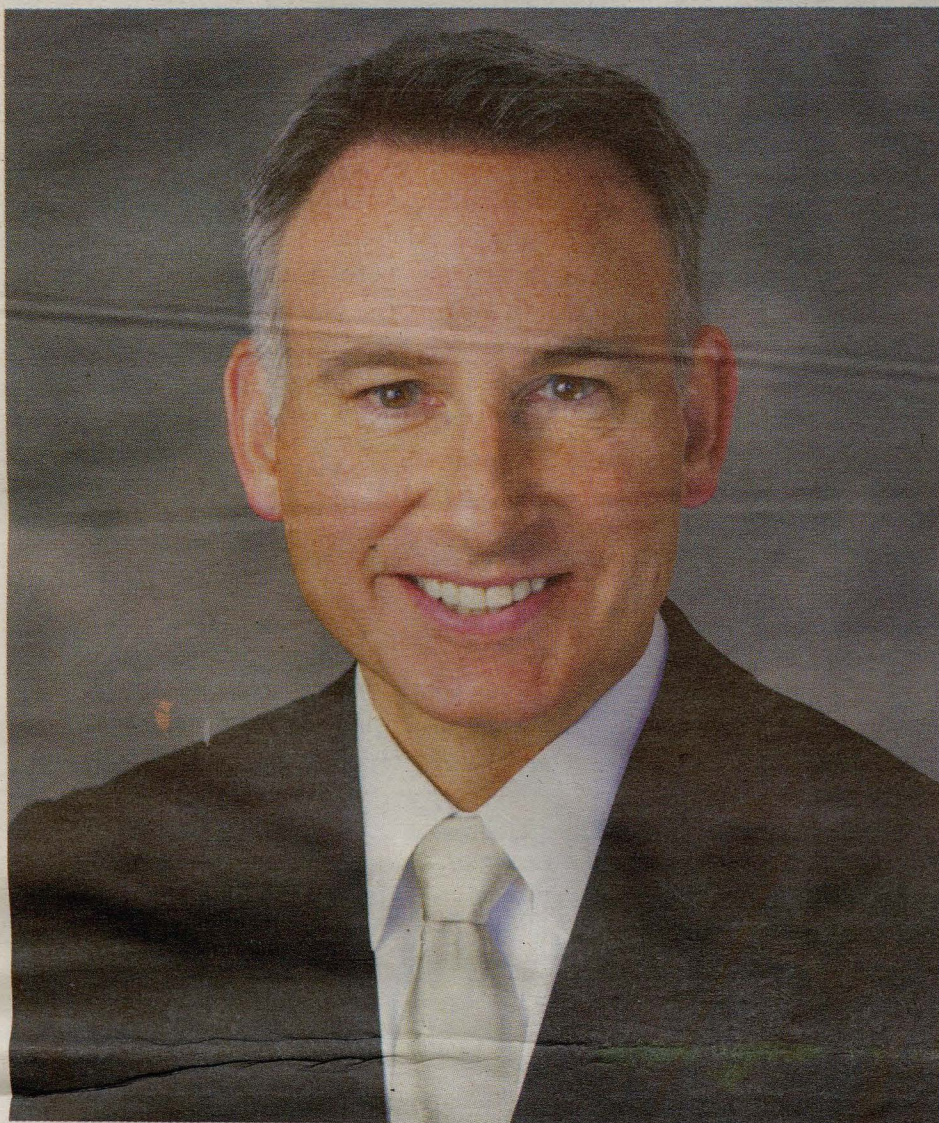
THE SEATTLE MEDIUM & TACOMA TRUE CITIZEN NEWSPAPERS



JANUARY
2021

Sponsored by  **SOUNDTRANSIT**

“Our True North”



By King County Executive Dow Constantine

It is my honor to have the opportunity to address the community in this venue.

This year, as we celebrate and honor the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., finally there is an awakening taking place in America – an awakening of the national conscience to the brutal reality of racism and not only its generational impacts, but its continuing impacts – first to Black and other people of color – and to our entire society.

In this moment of great struggle and anxiety, as we fight through and ultimately begin to recover from this terrible coronavirus pandemic, we have an

unprecedented opportunity to remake ourselves and our nation. At King County our goal is – not to return to normal – not to patch back together a deeply flawed and harmful status quo – but to create, together with community, something better – that beloved community Dr. King dreamed of, and dedicated his life to.

For King County government, this work is guided by our True North: *Making King County a welcoming a community where every person can thrive.*

Efforts to create a government that is by and for the people and that also serves with equity and racial justice run deep in the DNA of Dr. King’s namesake county.

Executive Ron Sims introduced the tenets of Equity and Social Justice into our County culture in 2008. In my first year in office I made ESJ a central pillar of our countywide Strategic Plan, then created our Office of Equity and Social Justice; and then we committed to learning how to truly lead with racial justice.

And we continue to work towards Dr. King’s vision. About 6 months ago, I appointed veteran King County equity leader, Anita Whitfield as our new Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer. Together with me, she will lead all the County’s work to ensure we are a truly pro-equity and anti-racist community and workplace.

Also last year, I joined with Public Health Director Patty Hayes to declare racism a public health crisis, and we committed all of King County government to implementing a racially equitable response to this crisis – centered on community, and on those who are the most negatively affected.

With the guidance of a diverse and talented group of county professionals, led by people of color, I submitted and the King County Council unanimously passed a \$12.4 billion biennial budget that puts our money where our values are. That budget includes an investment of \$350 million in permanent supportive housing for the chronically unsheltered, as well as funding for numerous anti-racism efforts, criminal legal system transformation, and community engagement.

Specifically, my budget shifts \$4.6 million of marijuana excise tax revenue from law enforcement to community-based programs; provides comprehensive, community-based services to about 800 young people in lieu of filing charges; and invests \$750,000 to co-create and implement alternatives to policing in urban unincorporated King County; among many other initiatives.

It is not enough, but it is a down payment on all that is before us to begin to address the disparities and harm that institutional racism has caused.

To the community members who have helped us, led us, directed us and held us accountable on this journey so far – I thank you and recognize that the work we do in King County government only builds on the decades and centuries of work and sacrifice of so many of you, who, just like Dr. Ben Danielson – who graced King County with his knowledge and wisdom during our annual Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration event this year – have dedicated their lives to building a beloved community.

As a government, and a major employer in King County, we will center equity and racial justice in all that we are, and all that we do.



“When you are willing to make sacrifices for a great cause, you will never be alone.”

-- Coretta Scott King

Seattle's Fight To Honor Dr. King

By Chris B. Bennett
The Seattle Medium

The next time you ride down Martin Luther King, Jr. Way in Seattle take time to really appreciate it for what it is. Not only is it symbolic in that it pays tribute to a man who has meant so much to civil rights and life as we know it today, but this street also represents the hard work, desire, and persistence of a community to honor Dr. King regardless of what obstacles they had to overcome.

After two years, two lawsuits, numerous protests and demonstrations, and countless hostile, harassing, and life threatening phone calls later, 127 organizations — that had come together to change the name of the street from Empire Way to Martin Luther King, Jr. Way — stood tall after the Washington State Supreme Court gave the name change its final approval and ended the struggle to honor Dr. King in Seattle.

The effort to rename Empire Way to Martin Luther King, Jr. Way stemmed from a radio interview on KYAC, a now defunct Black radio station in Seattle, by former talk-show host and community activist Eddie Rye, Jr. on Jan. 11, 1981.

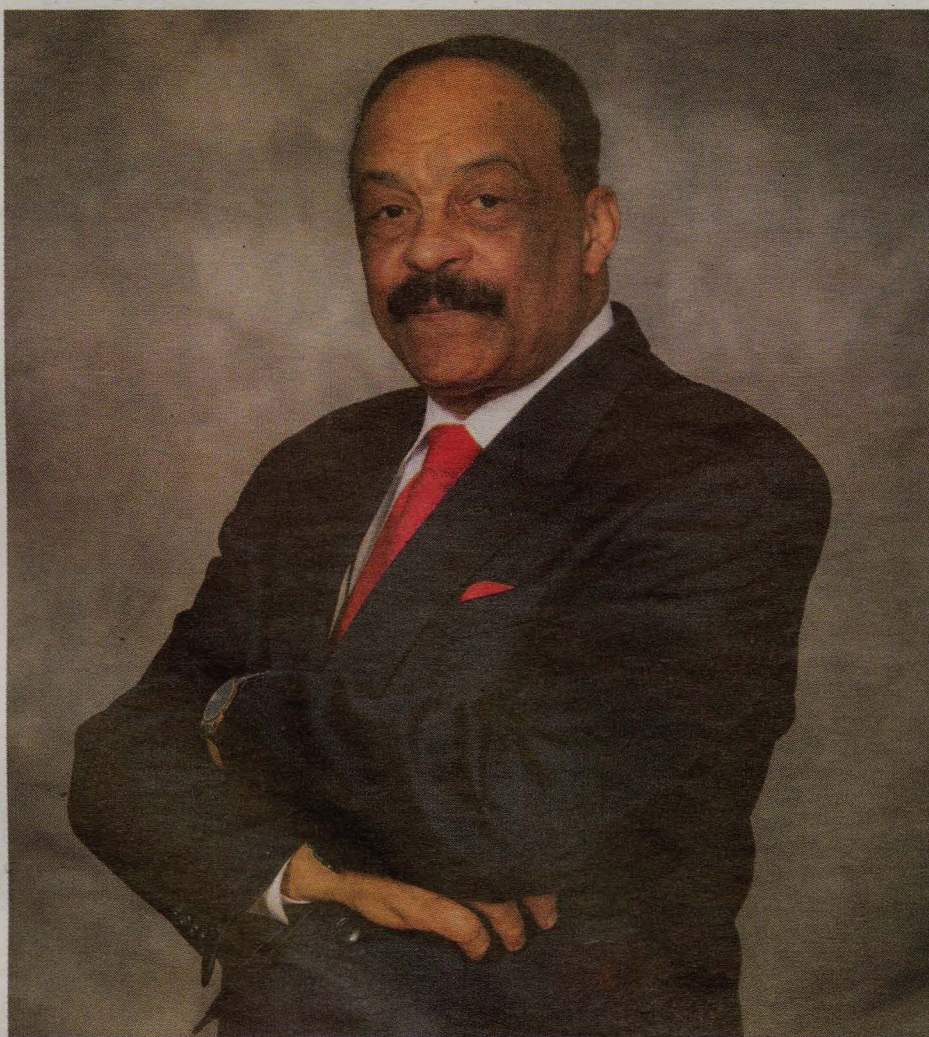
"My guest on that day was Rev. Jesse Jackson of operation PUSH, and I did an interview on their attempts to organize a meeting in Washington, D.C. lobbying to make Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday a national holiday," recalled Rye.

"I had commented on the distance that Washington, D.C. was from Seattle, Washington, and how a lot of people out here would like to be involved in the effort," said Rye. "Jesse then suggested that the people could do something here like create a monument to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and I immediately began to think about a street (Empire Way) that could be changed to Martin Luther King, Jr. Way."

Once the street was identified, Rye and his growing group of supporters needed to present the initiative to the Board of Public Works, which met in April, for their approval.

The initiative was met with opposition and many people wanted to rename only a portion of the street, the first suggestion was to only rename five blocks of the 8-mile stretch.

According to Rye, the board initially wasn't very receptive to the idea, and Walter Hundley, director of the Parks Dept. at the time, came up with the idea of naming half of the street, from Madison to Rainier, to get the issue moved. The board approved



Community activist Eddie Rye, Jr. spearheaded the fight to rename a street that runs through Central and Southeast Seattle in honor of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The name change was met with opposition from South Seattle merchants, which led to a two year battle that ultimately ended with Empire Way being officially renamed to Martin Luther King, Jr. Way.

the measure and now the issue was in the hands of the City of Seattle Transportation Committee.

"They said that if you cut it off here (at Rainier Ave.), then you won't have the merchants on the other side of the street (South of Rainier Ave.) incensed," said Rye.

"I said well on the other side of the street is Rainier Vista and Holly Park," said Rye. "How could we have a street named in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. that would eliminate having the least of these left out of living on a street, so at least they'd have something to remember him by every day."

According to Rye, 23 people testified for the whole street and only 8 testified for only part of the street to be renamed at a hearing held by the Transportation Committee in June of 1981. The Transportation Committee recommended to the City Council that the entire street be renamed, and in April of 1982 the Seattle City Council voted unanimously for the entire street to be named for Dr. King.

The ordinance was formally passed by the council in June of 1982, and was signed by Seattle Mayor Charles Royer

in July. But shortly after, the merchants on Empire Way got together and filed an injunction in King County Superior Court to block the name from being changed.

"At first, they said that it was because of the cost, and they eventually changed that to talk about how the city could take the money and feed poor people in Rainier Valley," said Rye. "The documentation and the research that was done substantiated the fact that it was not going to cost that much money and the reasons for the opposition were other than financial."

"Money really wasn't really the issue or they wouldn't have appealed to the State Supreme Court or hired a professional public relations firm," added Rye.

The Coalition for Respect, headed by Rye, along with other organizations supporting the name change picketed some of the merchants on Empire Way, and several widely publicized confrontations between picketers and merchants occurred.

"The police were called once when drunks came out of a tavern and began to harass us," recalled Rye. "One of

them had to be forcefully arrested. We even had to call the liquor board in because we felt the owners of that tavern was violating the state liquor law. There were a few other times that we could have had a dangerous confrontation."

On another occasion, Rye explained a White protestor went into a hardware store with a picture of Dr. King and had a rifle pulled on him by the store owner and another incident in which a drunk woman came out of a tavern and slapped the glasses off of a White protestor and called him a "n— a lover," which led to the Justice Dept. coming out to monitor the peaceful, non-violent demonstrations of dissatisfaction with the merchants.

"Here we are in the Northwest, having all these types of problems so far from Dixie; but in reality it turned out that we were just up Dixie," said Rye. "They were insensitive at least and racist at worst."

One thing that the merchants didn't take into account was the economic impact that their opposition to the name change would have on their business. Blacks, who accounted for over fifty percent of the clientele for many of these businesses, stopped doing business with the merchants who opposed the change, and other people sympathetic to the cause followed suit.

"Even progressive Whites stopped doing business with these people (the merchants) because of their insensitivity," Rye added. The picketing continued for about two months, but was stopped in September of 1982 when a superior court judge ruled that the city had the legal right to change the name of the street.

But the battle wasn't over yet, as the merchants filed for personal damages because of the name change, and the matter was on it's way to the Supreme Court on a final ruling on whether or not the actions of the city were constitutional.

In lieu of these legal actions, Mayor Royer would not allow the city to put up the new "Martin Luther King, Jr. Way" signs to rename the street, until the legal dispute was resolved.

On Jan. 15, 1983, Over 10,000 people turned out and marched along the 8-mile stretch to protest the legal challenge of the merchants, and Mayor Royer for not putting up the signs.

"We were tired of waiting, and we didn't feel that the mayor made a proper decision in delaying this (putting up the signs) because it really encouraged a lot of people who were in opposition to act

(Cont'd. On Page 11)

Seattle's Fight To Honor Dr. King

Continued From Page 10

act in more bold ways in terms of their insensitivities," added Rye.

In April of 1983, Seattle City Council President Jeanette Williams sent a letter to Mayor Royer asking him to instruct the city departments to "immediately implement the legislation," although the legal challenges were still pending.

In the letter, she wrote: "When the council passed the legislation several months ago, it was with the intent that implementation would proceed immediately."

But the mayor's office maintained that he wanted the signs to go up once and for all, and not get into a situation where the signs might have to be taken down.

On Aug. 27, 1983, the Aug. 27th Committee, a group of more than 120 organizations, held a march and rally to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the March on Washington led by Dr. King that drew over 20,000 people to the streets and send a clear message that people of all races, colors, and creeds wanted to see the signs up.

And finally after being totally fed up with the delay from the Mayor's office, the August 27th Committee printed their own adhesive "Martin



Luther King, Jr." street signs, to place over the top of the existing Empire Way signs, and held a major demonstration on Nov. 19, 1983 to rename the streets. The late Sam Smith, former Seattle City Councilman and the dean of Black politicians in the Northwest, put up the first sign on the corner of Martin Luther King, Jr. Way & South Jackson.

And on Nov. 30, 1983, the Washington State Supreme Court ruled that the City of Seattle has the right and the legal authority to change the name of the street.

On December 1, 1983, the first official signs renaming Empire Way to

Martin Luther King, Jr. Way were put up by the city. Ironically, it was the same day in 1955 that Rosa Parks refused to get up and move to the back of the bus, and it was that act of defiance that ushered in the Civil Rights Movement and brought Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. into national prominence.

The final sign was put up on Jan. 14, 1984.

During the entire process, Mr. Rye and his family were subjected to hostile and harassing phone calls and messages, and received threats on his life, and received criticism from both

outside and within his community. But he continued the battle he started until it was over and the community is proud of his efforts.

"All during this process my family received all kinds of death threats," said Rye.

"My mother had a phone call from someone who knew each of her six children's names, where they worked, where they lived, and it really frightened her to no end."

"Everything we were doing was lawful, and we followed a process," said Rye. "This is a democracy, we do have first amendment rights, we were able to prevail, and we didn't force anyone to change the name of their business."

An excerpt from a front page article in the September 18, 1984 issue of The Seattle Medium reads: "Rye was faced with the constant criticism by fair weather and armchair civil rights leaders who felt he was only seeking publicity and that he was pushing too hard and should back off. Yes, it was indeed a struggle and a challenge just to keep the struggle non-violent. A struggle that even Martin would have been proud of."

**"OUR LIVES
BEGIN TO END
THE DAY WE
BECOME
SILENT ABOUT
THINGS THAT
MATTER."**



The Seattle Seahawks are proud to support the vision of Dr. Martin Luther King.

[Seahawks.com/socialjustice](https://seahawks.com/socialjustice)

