

# Blanco, state pay tribute to Coach

By John Hill

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BATON ROUGE — Gov. Kathleen Blanco, calling legendary coach Eddie Robinson “a great Louisianian and a true American hero,” presided over a rare State Capitol memorial service carried live statewide over public broadcasting Monday.

More than 5,600 filed past Robinson’s body, which lay in repose from 9 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. in the Capitol’s Memorial Hall, an honor Blanco initiated after Robinson’s death at 88 last week.

A standing-room-only crowd packed the House Chamber, and an overflow crowd watched on large monitors in legislative committee rooms.

“Coach Robinson lived by the motto ‘one school, one team and one wife,’” said Blanco, who led a series of tributes at a one-hour special service. “He was a tender-hearted man who would definitely put that small town (Grambling) on the national map.”

The governor presented the American flag that flew over Monday’s ceremonies to Robinson’s widow Doris and the Robinson family, seated in the front row of the House chamber during the accolades.

“He used the gridiron to bring us together and he became one of the great civil rights leaders,” the governor said. “When he took the reins at

See ROBINSON 5A



Doug Williams

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For extended coverage, including photo galleries of Monday’s Capitol services, audio clips and news updates, keep checking [thenewsstar.com](http://thenewsstar.com).

## Services

Services for former Grambling State University head football coach Eddie Robinson are at 11 a.m. Wednesday at the Assembly Center on the campus of Grambling State University. Visitation is from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. today at New Rocky Valley Baptist Church, 2155 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave., Grambling. Burial is in Memorial Gardens in Grambling under the direction of Miller Funeral Home, Ruston.

## Memorials

The Robinson family asks that donations be made to the Friends of the Eddie G. Robinson Museum. Mail a donation to the Friends of the Eddie G. Robinson Museum at P.O. Box 550 Grambling, LA 71245.

consideration of the contract. For the renewal of the contract to be reconsidered, it would have had to have been brought up by a board member who voted against the renewal.

In other action, the board accepted the resignation of Frankie Futch, principal at Spearsville High School. His resignation is effective July 31. Although the agenda lists his leaving as a resignation, Futch said it is retirement.

Futch said the recent issue of fifth graders engaging in sexual activity at the school had nothing to do with his leaving.

“I had told Mabry in January that I was retiring,” Futch said. “I figured 52 years in education was enough. I was retiring anyway.” Futch will go on medical leave beginning April 16, which will continue until his resignation on July 31.

Appointed as interim principal for the school is David Gray, director of Student Affairs at Marion High School. The board will advertise for a permanent replacement.

The board also tabled discussions regarding a special election to re-issue a 15-mill property tax for operating expenses for the Union Parish School Board.

After a defeat of three propositions for the school board on the March ballot, board members have to look at alternative ways of funding the education in Union Parish.

Board president Michael Holley told the board the continuation of the millage was crucial to the running of the district. “We can’t just sit here like we’ve got money enough to operate,” Holley said. “We don’t”

Board members agreed to discuss the proposal at a later date, possibly the end of April.

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# Downing Pines Road could reopen by weekend

By Greg Hilburn

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Downing Pines Road, one of the primary traffic arteries into the city of West Monroe’s Downing Pines Park, could reopen to traffic as soon as this weekend, the contractor said on Monday.

“I’ve had so many people say they didn’t realize how important that road is until it was closed,” West Monroe Mayor Dave Norris said. “It’s especially important for the businesses in the area.”



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tion. Norris said the state has the contract on required signage before the ramps can open.

Downing Pines Road has

and off ramps

“We’re planning to begin striping the road on Wednesday,” said Bill Holdman of Amythest

to traffic.”

Holdman said the road could open as soon as Saturday, but he’ll announce a hard opening later this week.

Steve Ross, owner of Sassagoula Falls Adventure Golf in Downing Pines Park, said the road’s reopening will make it more convenient for both his customers and employees.

“Right now they have to go all the way to Thomas Road or Well Road, including myself and my employees, because we all live in that area,” Ross

for years,” Ross said. “It’s one of the reasons we located here. We’re exciting about it.”

Norris said the westbound ramps will improve access to the park, which includes the city’s Ike Hamilton Exposition center as well as businesses like Sassagoula Falls and Tom Sanders Building Mart.

He said the completion of the westbound interchange — the eastbound interchange opened last year — could be the trigger for a major retail center in the park that the city