Baraka debate nearly put to rest

By Brooke Olster
Staff Writer

On Jan. 23, the New Jersey State Senate voted to eliminate the Poet Laureate post, currently held by former Black Panther, Amiri Baraka.

After an unsuccessful plea from Governor James McGreevey urging Baraka’s resignation, he appealed to the state legislature to grant him power to fire the state’s Poet Laureate.

Even though the State Senate has voted to remove the post, the State Assembly has yet to debate the issue, and is unlikely to do so anytime in the near future, according to several state representatives, as reported in The Star Ledger.

Baraka, who visited campus last semester, caused a significant degree of turmoil due to the controversial nature of his poems, among them, “Somebody Blew Up America,” which insinuated that Israelis may have known to stay home from work in the Twin Towers on Sept. 11.

“If the public feels so strongly about his controversial poem, then maybe he should not be serving them in the capacity that he currently serves the state,” said junior Chris Caicco.

After reading his works, which many view as anti-Semitic, at the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival at Waterloo Village on Sept. 20, there has been significant action from the public to expose his poetry.

Baraka was appointed to the post of N.J. Poet Laureate last August by a panel from the N.J. State Council of the Arts and the N.J. Council for Humanities and is entitled to serve out a two-year term. A $10,000 stipend comes with the title, which McGreevey has already retracted.

Since there is no law granting power to strip the state’s Poet Laureate from his title, the governor introduced bills to either remove or censure him.

Baraka refuses to resign and threatens to take this issue to court if he is expelled.

“I will not apologize. I will not resign,” said Baraka.

See “Baraka” on page 3