

NEWS BRIEFS

LA OFFICIALS, NAACP UNITE TO STOP CONNERLY'S INITIATIVE

LOS ANGELES (NNPA)—The big guns came out against Proposition 54 recently, with Julian Bond, national chair of the NAACP, and several Southland Baptist ministers denouncing the ballot measure as an abomination against morality and one of the most serious threats to civil rights the country has ever faced. Mayor Jim Hahn hosted Bond, other NAACP officials, members of the City Council, state and congressional representatives and an array of religious and labor leaders and multicultural activists at a news conference on the steps of City Hall to announce their fight against the initiative. More than 300 political, labor, religious and community leaders trekked to Long Beach for a California empowerment conference where strategies were launched to defeat Proposition 54 and the recall of Gov. Gray Davis. Proposition 54, which will appear on the Oct. 7 recall ballot, would ban the collection of racial data in California. Written by Ward Connerly, a member of the University of California Board of Regents, the measure seeks to prohibit the state from collecting information on a person's race, ethnicity, color or national origin.

WHITE SUPREMACIST GROUP FOUNDER PROBED IN SHOOTING

CHICAGO (AP) - A federal grand jury is investigating whether white supremacist Matt Hale ordered or encouraged a fellow supremacist's shooting rampage, federal prosecutors revealed in filing a new obstruction of justice charge against him. Over the 1999 Fourth of July weekend, Benjamin Smith, a member of Hale's World Church of the Creator, targeted minorities in Illinois and Indiana, killing two people and injuring nine before killing himself. The new charge alleges that Hale - while in custody on a murder solicitation charge - instructed his father to lie to the grand jury about Smith's death. A judge Thursday entered an innocent plea to the charge on Hale's behalf. The indictment alleges that Hale told his father in an April phone call to testify falsely that Hale had stopped a TV interview when he started to cry over Smith's death. It was intended to show that Hale was surprised and saddened by Smith's death and didn't know of his plans in advance, the indictment alleges. An investigation of Hale in connection to the shooting is continuing. Hale's lawyer called the allegation a desperate attempt to bolster a weak case. Hale has been jailed since January on charges he solicited the murder of U.S. District Judge Joan Humphrey Lefkowitz after she enforced a court order that Hale's group change its name after losing a copyright infringement lawsuit. The group is now known as the Creativity Movement. Hale's trial is scheduled for Sept. 22 in Chicago.

HUNDREDS OF MINORITY ARCHITECTS TO HOLD A CONFERENCE IN CHICAGO

Washington, D.C. - Hundreds of the nation's most accomplished African-American architects, architecture students and other minority architects from across the country will convene in Chicago October 23-25 for the National Organization of Minority Architects 2003 International Congress and Exposition, Redefinition. NOMA will highlight opportunities for participants to explore and expand the practice, design, culture, education and identity of architecture. Chicago's rich architectural history and vibrant African-American culture has allowed the city to remain at the forefront of academic and professional discourse. NOMA's 31st annual national conference will be held at the Hyatt McCormick Hotel. Advance registration is strongly encouraged. The deadline is Oct. 1. The three-day event will include workshops and seminars for students, professionals and industry representatives about architecture and construction-related issues, including urban housing, academia and practice, and starting one's own firm. Participants will also discuss the values shared by African-American and other underrepresented minorities in the field and identify methods of enhancing one's client base. There will also be a vendors' fair. Lee Bey, deputy chief of staff for Mayor Richard M. Daley and former Chicago Sun-Times architecture critic, has been invited to deliver the keynote address.

35 pardoned in Tulia drug scandal

TULIA, Texas (AP) - Thirty-five people who were convicted in the 1999 Tulia drug busts have been pardoned by Gov. Rick Perry, who says he was influenced by questions about the testimony of the lone undercover agent who made the arrests and was later charged with perjury.

"I believe my decision to grant pardons in these cases is both appropriate and just,"

St. Louis officials sign pact for minority contracts

By Alvin A. Reid.

Special to Sentinel-Voice

ST. LOUIS (NNPA)—After a summer of heated allegations of racism and civil disobedience, minority contractors, MOKAN and the Concerned Citizens Coalition have cooled off and adopted a memorandum of understanding that all parties say will lead to more minority participation on current MetroLink expansion projects and future contracts.

Larry Salci, Metro CEO, said in a statement "we recognize minority contractors face a financial capacity problem in the St. Louis construction industry and have agreed to work together to help resolve it."

Life sentence given for killer of Baltimore family of seven

By Earl Byrd

Special to Sentinel-Voice

BALTIMORE (NNPA)—Darrell Brooks confessed to setting the fire that claimed the life of Angela Dawson and her husband, Carnell, and their five children, and then addressed a hushed court last week sentenced to life in prison. Now he is sorry and wished he could die.

He chose to plead guilty and avoid a death sentence, he said, to spare Dawson relatives and his own family the ordeal of years of appeals while he waited on death row. This way, he explained, sobbing in remorse, tears falling from eyes, he could bring closure to the bereaved family and an end to the story.

But, according to attorney Johnny Cochran, this is not the end. He says the city should pay, and pay big, "a substantial redress." In a legal memo he sent City Hall, Cochran placed part of the blame for the Dawson murders on the "BELIEVE" campaign.

And although Janell Byrd-Chichester, lead attorney for the Cochran firm handling the Dawson case, said on

Perry said in a statement Friday.

The case divided this small town and prompted accusations of racism.

An attorney with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, which marshaled law firms in New York and Washington to represent the defendants for free, said Perry did the right thing.

"This is just really incredible news. This is what we

"Financial barriers often prevent minority contractors from bidding on large public projects."

The three parties have agreed to implement several "short- and long-term goals" including:

Continuing to improve minority participation on existing cross-county contracts.

Increasing minority-bidding opportunities on remaining contracts by breaking them into smaller increments of work.

In cooperation with Mayor Francis Slay and County Executive Buzz Westfall, an Economic Review Council will be formed to address problems, formulate strategies, make recommendations

Aug. 28 that Brooks' life sentence brings "a piece of closure," she added, "No, this is not the end of the story." Although she would not elaborate on the suit, she said nothing had changed.

After the Dawson family retained the Cochran firm, Byrd-Chichester said, "We have serious concerns about the fact that they [City Hall] affirmatively solicited citizens to act and then didn't seem to seriously step up to provide police protection that's needed to complement such a program that puts citizens' lives in danger."

Once the murder occurred, however, the homicide and narcotics squads went into high gear and rounded up witnesses to testify against Brooks.

Legal observers say their testimony may have prompted Brooks' willingness to confess and apologize to avoid the death sentence.

As part of his plea agreement, he admitted setting fire to the Dawson home on Oct. 3. He said he did it because, "Mrs. Dawson was snitching on people."

She had asked dealers selling narcotics in front of her

saw the facts showed," said the lawyer, Vanita Gupta.

The governor said he was influenced by questions about the testimony of Tom Coleman, the only undercover agent involved in the busts. In June, Perry signed a bill allowing the release of the 12 Tulia defendants who were still in prison.

"It feels good to finally be completely free," said Freddie Brookins Jr., who had

and identify opportunities for building capacity for minority disadvantaged businesses in the region.

Launching financial and lending institution support programs targeting bonding and working capital needs of small to medium-sized minority firms within 45 to 90 days of Metro projects.

Eddie Hasan, MOKAN executive director, said the agreement of understanding would end threats of continued civil disobedience at MetroLink stops.

"We got separate goals between African-American owned and women-owned businesses, and we got the goal from 20 percent combined to 30 percent," Hasan

door to move their operations elsewhere because she had children in the house and didn't want them exposed to heroin and cocaine trafficking.

When the dealers refused, Angela Dawson started asking police for help, and between June 26 and Oct. 9, the family made at least 34 calls to the police, saying their lives were in danger and that they needed police protection.

Brooks said that two weeks after he firebombed the Dawson's house for the first time on Oct. 15, he came back and kicked in the back door, doused the first floor with gasoline and set the East Baltimore home ablaze. Only

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been sentenced to 20 years in prison based on Coleman's word. He was released in June.

His father called Friday's pardons "fantastic."

"We've been waiting for this for four years," Freddie Brookins Sr. said.

Coleman had worked alone and used no audio or video surveillance to substantiate drug buys he said he

said. "Metro has also agreed to go back on existing contracts to identify any chances for minority firms to become involved on the contracts that have already been awarded."

Hasan said the rewards would come in the future, if not immediately.

"Some people will say to me after we make the announcement, 'Is that all you got out of this?' And others will ask Metro, 'Why did you give anything up?' I would say to the former, you couldn't eat an elephant in one bite. I say to the latter that whatever you give, it will come back to you double or triple, especially when you

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Carnell managed to escape the fire, but died a week later in the hospital.

City State's Attorney Patricia C. Jessamy and Police Commissioner Kevin P. Clark said after the Aug. 27 court hearing that the Dawson case should unite the entire community around the issue of drugs in Baltimore and make some drug dealers realize it is better to quit than be sorry for such a heinous act as the Dawson murders.

What no one said was whether or not the next citizen who calls the police about drug dealers in front of her house would be safe.

Earl Byrd writes for the Afro American Newspapers.