

Should Blacks support Social Security reform?

By Cash Michaels
Special to Sentinel-Voice
WILMINGTON, N.C. (NNPA) — When the Social Security Act was signed into law on August, 1935 by President Franklin Roosevelt, it was designed to "...frame a law which will give some measure of protection to the average citizen and to his family against the loss of a job and against poverty-ridden old age."

Almost 70 years later, when President Bush met with his Black supporters and the Congressional Black Caucus last week, he made it clear that the Social Security System will have to be changed.

African-Americans should support his efforts to privatize Social Security (SS), he said, because they are allegedly being cheated. Bush and several conservative pundits contend that because Blacks live shorter life spans than Whites, they end up paying more into the system than they get out.

Bush wants younger workers, Black and White, to invest part of their payroll taxes in the stock market, thus giving up some of their guaranteed benefits down the road. Nothing would change for those retired or disabled

who are currently receiving benefits.

The president says this reform will save a Social Security system that is going bankrupt fast.

"S.1," the designation for the president's SS reform Senate bill to be introduced this session, "is probably the most important domestic legislation we will address in this Congress, and that is modernizing and strengthening the Social Security program," Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist told reporters.

But Senate Democrats disagree.

They counter that the system is financially solvent for at least the next 50 years, and recent studies show that the stock market is not as stable as Republicans would like people to believe.

So why the urgency?

"This is no crisis, so why should we be lurching forward?" Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid [D-Nevada] asked.

Bush supporters are making a special pitch to African-Americans.

According to a study several years ago by the libertarian think tank, the Cato Institute, and more recently, the

conservative Heritage Foundation, because Blacks have shorter life spans than Whites, they collect fewer Social Security benefits for fewer years than Whites.

Because they make less money, Blacks aren't able to invest as much as Whites to secure their futures. A study, conducted by Michael Tanner, even goes as far to say that this should be a "civil rights issue" for Blacks.

Other conservatives agree.

"There is a direct correlation between economic status and average life span," Rich Lowery, columnist for the National Review Online, wrote. "This means that Blacks are proportionately poor, partly for historic reasons, tend to have shorter life spans, especially Black males. The average life expectancy of a Black male is roughly 68.6 [years]. The retirement age of Social Security is set under current law to eventually rise to 67. You do the math — this cannot be a good deal."

Lowery goes on to assert that 60 percent of African-Americans actually favor privatizing Social Security, but their leadership and the Democratic Party oppose the Bush plan.

pervisors in November voted to close the hospital's trauma unit so the hospital can focus on improving operations. The proposed closure drew politicians, celebrities and hundreds of protesters at a rally. They argued that shutting down the facility would leave the poor without medical care in a violent area.

The hospital has endured severe problems, including patient deaths blamed on poor nursing, lawsuits filed by patients who had medical objects left inside them.

"They should think of the accounts as financial affirmative action, or any other government initiative meant to benefit Blacks," Lowery wrote. "According to the ideology of Black victimhood, Blacks are apparently owed everything — except a better opportunity to save and own their own retirement assets."

An editorial in the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* observes: "Of all the lies — let's call them by their right name — that the Bush administration is spreading about Social Security, none is as vile as the canard Bush repeated last Tuesday, when he said, 'African-American males die sooner than other males do, which means the [Social Security] system is inherently unfair to a certain group of people. And that needs to be fixed.'

"That is an entirely phony assertion; it has been debunked by the Social Security Administration, by the Government Accountability

Office and by other experts. Bush and those around him know that. For them to repeat what they know to be a blatant lie is despicable fear-mongering," the editorial stated.

There are "serious methodological flaws and numerous bad assumptions" in what the conservatives propose, the *Star-Tribune* went on.

Because Blacks make less money than Whites, they get more Social Security benefits. Blacks also benefit disproportionately from the disability and survivor benefits than Whites.

Social Security actuaries told the newspaper, "results from more careful research reflecting actual work histories for workers by race indicate that the non-White population actually enjoys the same or better expected rates of return from Social Security than for the White population."

The federal government's General Accounting Office

agreed, saying, "In the aggregate, Blacks and Hispanics have higher disability rates and lower lifetime earnings, and thus receive greater benefits relative to taxes [paid] than Whites."

Online columnist Nathan Newman takes on the point of Blacks living shorter lives.

"Even the argument that Blacks collect less than their share is based on assuming that Blacks will continue to live less long than Whites," Newman writes. "If we had a decent universal health care system, that difference would rapidly change. Essentially, you have conservatives refusing to fund decent health care for all Americans, leading to Blacks and other poor minorities dying off early, then using this as justification for further eroding the social safety net."

"It's a neat trick," Newman concluded, "and based on lies."

Cash Michaels writes for the Wilmington Journal.

LA hospital loses accreditation

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The only public hospital in South Los Angeles has lost its accreditation, meaning it also could lose its ability to train doctors and care for emergency psychiatric and low-income patients.

Martin Luther King/Drew Medical Center in South Los Angeles lost the approval Tuesday after the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations denied a final appeal by Los Angeles County to halt the withdrawal.

The accrediting agency decided in September that the hospital did not meet its standards. The commission repealed its accreditation after an August inspection that found incompetent staff, inconsistent patient care, incomplete medical charts and other problems.

The commission provides credentials for about 4,600 nationwide and King/Drew is only the second hospital in the last year to lose its accreditation.

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Christian investment guru tries to make a difference

By Nicole Williams
Special to Sentinel-Voice

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (NNPA) — Chaz L. Murrell has seen hard times. But now, he is giving back to the community — Murrell, president of Christian Investment Properties, Inc. refurbished a former "crack house" to HUD approved standards. But not only that, he's making them available to those who may otherwise have difficulty securing decent housing.

"I'm making these apartments available to good people who may have some credit problems and need a second chance," Murrell said. "I also want to offer them to the elderly and people with disabilities."

After being laid off six years ago from his job as a social worker, he had to start from the bottom. Murrell became a client at the Salvation Army.

"I had no income coming in ... I lost everything," he said. Including his marriage.

Murrell began working with U.S. Gypsum, later becoming a longshoreman.

"I finally became deep sea," he said.

But despite his financial turnaround, displaying his ability to pull himself up, Murrell was initially denied funding when he began the venture of refurbishing the apartment building. "Because of my past disposition and because the building was in a crack/cocaine area, they refused me," he said.

However, Murrell's resilience proved favorably. He secured enough funding to not only purchase the building, but perform complete renovation.

"Because of everything I went through, I wanted to give back," he said. "These apartments are geared towards underprivileged people who are in dire need of housing."

Murrell said he is not charging his tenants for the first month.

Nicole Williams writes for the Jacksonville Advocate.

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