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"THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE"



**Kweisi Mfume, former president and CEO of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, announces his 2006 candidacy for the U.S. Senate for Maryland on Monday at Oriole Park at Camden Yards in his hometown of Baltimore.**

## Ex-NAACP head eyeing Senate

BALTIMORE (AP) —Former NAACP President Kweisi Mfume announced Monday that he will run for the U.S. Senate in 2006.

"It is with great pride and deep humility that I announce to you today my candidacy for the Senate of the United States," Mfume said at a news conference in Baltimore.

"I can't be bought. I won't be intimidated. I don't know how to quit," Mfume said as his supporters applauded.

Mfume, who was a five-term U.S. congressman before becoming president of the Baltimore-based National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, issued the statement after incumbent Paul Sarbanes announced Friday that he will not run for reelection.

"This is step one in what will be an embarrassment of wealth for the Democratic Party in 2006," said Derek Walker, spokesman for the Maryland Democratic Party.

Mfume, 56, left the House in 1996 to take the NAACP post.

At the time, the civil rights group was in turmoil — rocked by an embarrassing sex scandal involving its previous head, bitter internal strife and a crippling \$3.2 million deficit.

Many observers say Mfume brought credibility and stability, working to institute corporate style-management practices.

When he stepped down in November, the organization had enjoyed a budget surplus for eight consecutive years and an increasing endowment fund.

Mfume, whose adopted West African name translates to "conquering son of kings," began his career as a dashiki-clad radio talk show host and political activist in the 1970s.

He also has been mentioned as a possible Democratic candidate for governor of Maryland.

Sarbanes, 72, announced Friday that he would not seek a sixth term, noting that he would be 80 by the time

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## Candidates' forum success

By Lés Pierres Streater  
Sentinel-Voice

Several dozen community members gathered at Victory Baptist Church on Monday evening to hear from a panel of candidates vying for various public offices including mayoral races in Henderson and North Las Vegas, the Las Vegas City Council Ward 6 race and the one for North Las Vegas City Council Ward 3.

The event, free and open to the public, was jointly sponsored by three groups: the Caucus of African-American Nevadans (CAAN), a non-partisan political action committee; the *Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice Newspaper*; and the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., Kappa Xi Chapter.

The focus of the event was to allow the sponsoring orga-

nizations an opportunity to investigate the candidates running for office and find out what they had to offer African-Americans living



Americans.

One of the topics included procurement contracting issues and diversity in how contracts are handled by the

*"I think this issue [promoting diversity] is about sincerity and leadership. You're talking about government rules and regulations that are set by the government. This is something that the government should change, and can change."*

—Andres Ramirez

within their districts.

Each sponsoring group presented a set of two questions (written in advance but not provided to respondents) directed to the candidates in the various races to get their responses on a variety of topics concerning African-

municipalities and other agencies according to Cordell Stokes, spokesperson for CAAN, who served as forum moderator.

The audience members, comprised of about three dozen members, having direct affiliation with the host

organizations or the candidates' campaigns, and about twelve guests from the general public, were then invited to ask additional questions based on the speakers' presentations.

Representing the three host organizations were panelists Richard Blue, co-chair of education subcommittee, CAAN; *Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice Newspaper* Publisher-Editor Ramon Savoy; and Ken Evans, member of Omega Psi Phi.

Following the candidates' presentations, the public was directed to reflect on the information provided and comments made by the candidates in an effort to cast a public, non-binding vote for an endorsement of a particular candidate by CAAN. That guest group endorsement was

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## Children of jailed mothers fair poorly

By Makebra M. Anderson  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) —For some children, it has been months since they've seen their mother. For others, it has been years. And for a few, they might never see their mother again.

In all of the back and forth over prison, the children are often neglected. Women represent the fastest-growing prison population in the U.S., which means millions of children are left abandoned every year by incarcerated mothers. Because the justice system disproportionately affects people of color, Black and Hispanic children are at the greatest risk for losing a parent to incarceration.

"From our research, these children have a cluster of risk factors. They're at increased risk for becoming involved with the law themselves, increased risk for drug and alcohol abuse, increased risk for behavior problems, increased risk for psychological [problems], among other issues," says Linda Baker, director of the Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System.

In 1999, more than 1.5 million children in the U.S. had a parent in prison. Only 25 percent of kids stay with their father when their mother is incarcerated, compared to the 90 percent that stay with their mom when their father is incarcerated, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS).

"The biggest issue for women in prison is separation from their kids — especially if they were the primary care giver. Whether it's getting visits, keeping in touch through mail or maintaining custody and not losing their kid to the foster care system," Cassie Pierson, staff attorney for Legal Services for Prisoners with Children (LSPC).

The BJS reports that the female prisoner population has increased significantly since 1995. There were 62,362 female prisoners in 1995 compared to 86,028 in 2000. The number of male prisoners also increased. In 1995, there were 961,210 male prisoners. Five years later, that number increased to 1,219,225.

A study by the Depart-

ment of Justice observes, "women were over-represented among those convicted of low-level drug-related crimes and despite having no prior criminal histories, received sentences similar to those convicted as 'high-level' drug offenders under the federal mandatory minimum sentencing laws."

Before mandatory minimums for crack offenses went into effect, the number of African-Americans convicted of a drug-related crime was slightly higher than Whites. In 1986, Congress enacted mandatory drug sentencing. Of the 246,100 state prison inmates serving time for drug offenses in 2001, 139,700 (56.7 percent) were Black, 47,000 (19 percent) were Hispanic and 57,300 (23.2 percent) were White, reports the BJS. From 1986 to 1996, the number of women sentenced to state prison for drug crimes increased from approximately 2,370 to 23,700, according to an Amnesty International study "Not Part of My Sentence: Violation of the Human Rights of Women in Custody." Most of these

women had children.

"If the child is present when mom is arrested, and there is no other adult around who can take care of them, the police will call in social services. Then Child Protective Services takes at least temporary custody," explains Cassie Pierson, staff attorney for LSPC.

"What we have found is that, at least in California, there is no set protocol for who should be called or what should be done if the child is present at the time of arrest. One county will do one thing and another county will do something different. Every once in a while we get these horror stories where mom is busted, child is present, and no arrangements are made. Sometimes the child lives alone for days or weeks until somebody figures out what's happening." Baker, who also works with women in prison, agrees and says that the justice system should think of better ways to help women and children adjust to prison life.

"Throughout the world, there are pockets of promis-

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