

New Orleans universities intend to rebuild

NEW ORLEANS (AP) - In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, professors and students from the city's universities took academic refuge in other schools — some as far away as the University of Haifa in Israel.

Now, more than a month after the storm, New Orleans' universities — including Tulane, Loyola and Xavier — are putting together am-

bitious plans to reopen in January.

Officials are patching up battered campuses, finding housing for employees whose homes were destroyed, gauging how many students will return and persuading top faculty not to jump ship.

"There might be some people who prefer not to go back to the city, especially if

they've lost their houses, but for the faculty who have invested a lot in Loyola, they won't be inclined to hunt for something else," said Bernard Cook, a history professor at the university.

Cook, who has a visiting assistant professorship at Georgetown until his school reopens, said he is splitting his time between the university and the National Ar-

chives in Washington, D.C., where he's working on a book about diplomatic relations between the United States and Romania prior to World War I.

Many New Orleans faculty have taken temporary refuge at universities like Brown, Yale and Princeton, and are using their break from teaching as uninterupted time to focus on re-

search projects.

"One or two of our people have indicated that they have had offers that they are considering," said Elizabeth Barron, the vice president for academic affairs at Xavier. "I think most institutions would be a bit above that under the circumstances."

To lure faculty back with their families, Tulane — the largest private employer in

greater New Orleans with 6,000 employees — has received approval from the Orleans Parish School Board to sponsor a charter school aimed at children in the neighborhood.

Kristine Davis, a spokeswoman for Loyola, said the university was working on lining up temporary housing for the 60 percent of its em- (See Universities, Page 13)

CAAN

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center in Centennial Arms, a North Las Vegas housing complex, where she provides a gamut of family support services, from early literacy to adult education programs.

"I know in my heart that this is what God has for me to do," Dickerson said as she received her award. She thanked supporters and drew laughs after thanking family, "who are my volunteers — they don't know it, but they really are."

Helen Toland, the other award recipient, has lived in Las Vegas since the 1960s. During her tenure with the Clark County School District, she became a successful speech therapist and the first African-American principal in Nevada history. Toland excelled outside the classroom, too, working with the legal and redress committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and sitting on the West Las Vegas Library Community Advisory Board. Invited to Africa by the Namibia Women's Association, she has since established dual residency.

"Now, my burning interest is in Africa and the things that it can do for our Black people," she said during her acceptance remarks. Toland also encouraged attendants to get to know "the truth about our homeland, and the good place from which we came, and the good endeavors that are going on there now." Toland closed her remarks with, "I tell you, my Black brothers and sisters, we came from something beautiful, something wonderful, something warm, and something caring."

Rep. Shelley Berkley, D-Nev., touched on current events, condemning self-styled Morals Czar William Bennett's scathing remarks about how aborting Black babies could lower the crime rate. She then introduced keynote speaker Watt.

"This is my first time vis-



Rep. Shelley Berkley, D-Nev., caucuses with Mel Watt.

iting Las Vegas, it's great to be here," said Watt, who has been in Congress since 1992 and heads the 43-member CBC. "I've seen all these buildings on television, and now I'm finally here."

Watt's speech spotlighted how seriously the current administration's apathy toward and neglect of Black issues exacerbate disparities in health, economics and criminal justice.

"When I became chair of the Congressional Black Caucus [in December 2004], I decided that we had to have an agenda to close, eliminate, and get rid of these inequities that exist between African-Americans and other Americans ... the only person who was trying to destroy that agenda was George Bush," Watt said.

"Hearing that we (the CBC) were going to have a meeting on January 5 to plan our agenda, he called to request a meeting with us on Jan. 5, at 10 a.m. — the same time we were scheduled to meet. We had begged him for four years to meet with the Congressional Black Caucus."

"We articulated our agenda on Jan. 5 and finally met with the President on Jan. 20 and it was a dramatic kind of event," he continued.

"We started to tell him about some of the facts that were a part of our agenda. They're profound, these disparities,

den we see it on television... we've got people who, even when they've seen a hurricane coming at them, an imminent disaster, can't afford to get out of the way. They have no car, have no money to put gas in the car — if they had a car — and worst of all, we're right at the end of the month and 'I'm waiting on my social security check or other check, and you want me to leave without any money or resources in my pocket with my check coming tomorrow? It ain't going to happen.' This is the impact of poverty, and not only did it happen to folks in New Orleans, it's happening all over this country to our

people." Following the event, Watt (D-N.C.) spoke about the CBC agenda. "The broader you make the issues, the more difficult it is to be unified," said Watt. "We (the CBC) try to be narrow in our focus." Watt urged Blacks not to be discouraged by a lack of success in swaying the White House: "Don't think it's because there is a lack of commitment. We can't just give up. We can't just stop. We can't win as often as we should be winning... We need a different kind of presidency." When asked if CAAN and the CBC are planning any initiatives together, CAAN spokesperson Cordell Stokes said there's nothing in the pipe yet. CAAN is a non-partisan, political action committee that seeks to marshal Black political and voting clout for people of color and the entire community primarily on a local and state level. "This is our first time connecting with the CBC... some of our members are planning on their own to meet with some of the members of CBC," Stokes said. For more information on CAAN, their website is www.nevadablackcaucus.com or call (702) 349-0969. Parker Philpot contributed to this article.


caucuses with Mel Watt. In education, 39 percent of African-American students in 4th grade can only read at or above a basic grade level, 74 percent of White students in comparison, 'a gap that you, Mr. President, must do something about.'" "We started talking to the president about the unemployment rate, the income gap, the justice gap, and the health gap, and after a while, I was sitting next to [him]. I heard the man say 'umph' like we were hitting this man over and over in the stomach. The man had never heard these discrepancies described in these ways. How could 8 percent of the African-American male population be 40 percent of those that are in jail? How could it be that 1 million African-Americans died in this country over the past ten years because they didn't have healthcare? A million people who could still be alive today if they had just gotten some kind of healthcare. [The meeting] was profound, and I think it had an impact — for about two days."

Watt said Black America needs to set an agenda and stick to it. The community must also rally around the victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the wake of fumbled federal responses to the disasters.

"Fast forward to Hurricane Katrina. Katrina brought home a lot to a lot of folks," he said. "All of a sud-

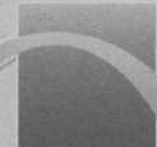
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