

Congress preps for cuts to entitlement programs

By K. Chandler

Special to Sentinel-Voice

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (NNPA) - With the federal deficit ballooning out of control, the war in Iraq racking up billions, and Hurricanes Katrina and Rita exacting an enormous toll on the U.S. economy, Republican and Democratic congressional members are poised to pass legislation that would involve tens of billions in spending cuts over the next five years, including steep reductions in Medicaid and the food stamp program. Medicaid, the 40-year-old federal/state-funded health insurance program, provides coverage and long-term healthcare to some 52 million low-income children and families, along with the elderly and the disabled.

Republican House members are pushing for \$54 billion in overall spending cuts that, among other things, would entail imposing co-payments and premiums on Medicaid recipients, potentially impacting 6 million children; restricting child-care eligibility, and stripping \$844 million from the federal food stamp program resulting in the removal of approximately 300,000 recipients, including legal immigrants and 40,000 youngsters who'd be dropped from the free- and reduced-cost school lunch program.

At the same time, Senate leaders are calling for budget cuts of \$36 billion over the next five years; however, their bill proposes less stringent cuts to Medicaid and essentially leaves the food stamp program untouched.

Funding by the federal government to collect child support payments and track

down non-custodial parents, who are in the arrears on their child support payments, would also be curtailed with the Congressional Budget Office estimating that a whopping \$24 billion would go uncollected over a 10-year period.

At the same time that the Republican-led Congress is pushing for substantial spending cuts in government-sponsored entitlement programs that serve some of the most vulnerable citizens in this nation, including millions of children, they are planning to continue \$70 billion in tax breaks set to expire this year, the majority of which benefit upper-income households in this country.

"Instead of trying to combat poverty, provide shelter to the homeless or medical care to the infirm, the Republican leadership of the U.S. Congress will, again, pay for the tax cuts to the wealthiest among us on the backs of the least among us," blasted Rep. Alcee Hastings, (D-Mir.).

Compounding the glaring inequity between proposed entitlement program cuts and billions in tax breaks, recently released statistics from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, indicate that hunger has dramatically risen in the United States every year for the past five years.

According to USDA statistics, the number of people who are actually going hungry rose from 3.1 million to 4.5 million between 1999 and 2004, for a 43 percent increase. Similarly, the number of Americans who had experienced periods during the year when they were unsure of their next meal rose from 31 million people to 38.2 million people and in-

cluded 14 million children.

According to Lynn Parker, director of child nutrition for the Washington D.C.-based Food Research Action Center, "Food insecurity and hunger," which have steadily grown in every part of the country, "will mean more children who have trouble at school, more illnesses among children and adults and less ability to purchase a balanced and nutritious diet."

According to Alan Essig, executive director of the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, a think-tank located in Atlanta "Research clearly demonstrates that monthly premiums suppress enrollment and co-payments lead to reduced service usage as well as less preventive care. The results of a study that examined cost sharing in Oregon highlight the problems," he said.

"In March 2003, Oregon increased the monthly premiums paid by adults and expanded co-payments. By the end of 2003, enrollment had declined by 46 percent. Of those who lost coverage, 67 percent remain uninsured. Seventy-two percent of those who lost coverage reported that cost was the primary reason."

Nor will Medicaid reform necessarily translate into less expensive, more efficient care, he warned. "Increasing the cost of health care for those least able to afford it may save state funds in the short term but will increase overall health care expenditures in the long term.

Pregnant women who drop Medicaid coverage due to the implementation of premiums will still give birth. (See Programs, Page 14)

LAPD to review fatal shooting of teen, 13

By Kevin Herrera

Special to Sentinel-Voice

LOS ANGELES (NNPA) - Police Chief William Bratton said his department will conduct a swift but thorough investigation into the shooting death of 13-year-old Devin Brown after the district attorney's office announced that it would not prosecute the officer who shot the youngster.

Bratton said that the LAPD's Use of Force Review Board will begin looking at the case Dec. 28 and the investigation will be completed and submitted to the Los Angeles Police Commission no later than the end of January. At that time, the commission will review the findings and either approve the chief's recommendations or make their own.

The matter will then be sent back to the chief, who can impose the determined level of discipline or send the case to a Board of Rights hearing where the officer can protest.

"We indicated right from the beginning there was no criminal wrongdoing on the part of the officer, so that has now been determined by those responsible under the law," Bratton said. "However, this doesn't change anything relative to the administrative review... It's a process that we are following and one that will take us to the truth... We are just asking people to have patience and let the process take its course."

Bratton's promise that the internal investigation will be "transparent and open" did nothing to relieve the anger and frustration community members are feeling. Those who attended the meeting of the Police Commission said they have lost faith in the criminal justice system and the LAPD's ability to monitor itself.

Some activists called for federal prosecutors to get involved in what they see as a series of unnecessary, and often deadly, officer-involved shootings against people of color, particularly African-Americans.

"This is just another case of the erosion of trust of African-Americans and Latinos" for the police department, said Minister Tony Muhammad, head of the Western states for the Nation of Islam, who formed a South Los Angeles coalition immediately after Brown's death. "The excessive use

of force only becomes an issue when you are dealing with Black people. To execute the death penalty on [Brown] on a little misdemeanor joy ride, he wouldn't have got a month in jail for what he did... We don't need patience. We need protest."

According to a report released by the office of District Attorney Steve Cooley, officers Steve Garcia and his partner Dana Grant were on patrol in the Newton Division around 3:45 a.m. on Feb. 6 when they observed a 1990 Toyota Camry, driven by Brown, run a red light at the Gage Avenue onramp to the Harbor (110) Freeway.

Suspecting the driver was drunk, the officers tried to pull the Camry over. A brief car chase ensued, at which time the officers learned the Camry had been reported stolen several hours earlier.

Near the intersection of 83rd Street and Vermont Avenue, officers said Brown tried to turn east at a speed of 40 to 50 miles per hour, lost control and crashed into an iron fence. The passenger, identified in the report as Chad R., bailed out of the car and ran. The officers exited their patrol car, which was parked behind the Camry, drew their weapons and sought cover behind their car doors in a standard LAPD felony stop.

The report states that Brown then revved the engine loudly, shifted in reverse and backed into the patrol car at a high rate of speed. As the car crashed into the police cruiser and continued to move backwards, Garcia apparently jumped out from behind the cruiser's passenger door and ran to the right of the Camry where he fired 10 shots at Brown, two of which were "rapidly fatal."

The coroner's report revealed that Brown had marijuana in his system at the time of his death.

County prosecutors said they did not file charges against Garcia because a witness corroborated the officer's statement that he was in harm's way as Brown backed the stolen Toyota toward Garcia and his partner.

The witness, Miles Carthron, said he was traveling in the area when he saw the Toyota's driver "smash the gas" and put the car in reverse. Carthron said Garcia "was

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Annan

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his lawyer."

"I am neither his spokesman or his lawyer," he said. "The report of Paul Volcker is clear. I am not going to rehash it."

Annan, whose second five-year term ends in December 2006, had some advice for the man or woman who will succeed him.

"They need a thick skin. They need a sense of humor, and they should laugh a lot inside and outside and at themselves ... and be able to reach out and work effectively with leaders across the world," Annan said.

Asked about his regrets, Annan said he was sorry he was not able to avert the war in Iraq in 2003.

"If I go back in recent years, one thing I would have liked to see ... is for us to have done everything that we could have done to

avoid a war in Iraq that has brought such division within this organization and the international community," Annan said.

"And that is one thing that I must say still haunts me and bothers me that, as an organization, as an international community, we were not able to do."

Annan also said he hoped the U.N.'s biennial budget, now in contention, would be adopted by the end of the year, or the world body would face a financial crisis.

He spoke in favor of revamping the 15-member U.N. Security Council, another proposal that has run into resistance from U.N. members, and the necessity to form a new human rights council and abolish the discredited 53-nation U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

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