

Obama's visit brings hope to Kenya homeland

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) - Sen. Barack Obama visited one of the world's worst slums Sunday, where he told residents he wants everyone in America to know about their plight and promised to push the U.S. and Kenyan government to help.

About a third of Nairobi's total population, at least 700,000, are crammed into a single square mile in the slum of Kibera, with little access to running water and other basic services.

"I love all of you, my brothers — all of you, my sisters," Obama told a crowd in Kibera. "I want to make sure everybody in American knows Kibera. That's why we have all the news crews."

The Illinois Democrat arrived in Kenya last Thursday for his first visit to his father's homeland country since taking office.



U.S. Senator Barack Obama (C) gestures as holds his step grandmother Sarah Hussein Onyango Obama (R) as he returned to his ancestral rural village Kogelo on Saturday.

On Sunday, he visited a program to start small businesses, and also stopped by an AIDS prevention program

in Kibera. The program is affiliated with the University of North Carolina and he met with students who are part of

local abstinence campaigns. The group, called Carolina for Kibera, estimates one in five of the slum's population is HIV positive.

AIDS prevention has been a theme of Obama's visit. On Saturday, he and his wife, Michelle, underwent public HIV tests at a hospital in Kenyan city of Kisumu in an effort to reduce the public and societal stigma associ-

ated with HIV testing.

"Everybody in Kibera needs the same opportunities to go to school, to start businesses, to have enough to eat, to have decent clothes," Obama said over a megaphone as hundreds of cheering people surrounded him.

The slum stands in sharp contrast to the elegant homes, luxurious hotels and impressive office buildings found elsewhere in the city. Kibera residents are mostly squatters, with no legal claim on the land.

Kenyans have claimed Obama as one of their own even though he was raised mostly in Hawaii and did not know his Kenyan father well.

Obama's father, also named Barack, grew up herding goats and going to tin-roof schools, but he won a college scholarship in Hawaii. There, he married Obama's mother. The two soon separated, however, and Obama's father eventually returned to Kenya and worked as a government economist.

His father died in an auto crash in 1982, leaving the family with three wives, six

sons and a daughter.

Earlier Sunday, Obama flew to Wajir, a rural area in northeastern Kenya near the borders with Somalia and Ethiopia. The area is at the epicenter of a severe drought that has hit the Horn of Africa region after erratic and insufficient rains during the April-June season.

Malnutrition levels in parts of the northeastern province are more than double the 15 percent level at which an emergency is declared by U.N. standards.

Obama said he inspected a project to help prevent disease among the herds of cattle, goats and camels raised by the region's Muslim herders.

He also learned about efforts to resolve conflicts among local clans, which he said is important for preventing the violence and turmoil in neighboring countries.

Obama and his family traveled Saturday to Nyangoma-Kogelo, a tiny village in the rural west where his father grew up. Obama stopped at his father's grave and visited his 85-year-old grandmother.

Black Caucus seeks to increase its influence

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - For years, members of the Congressional Black Caucus have introduced key economic, civil rights, criminal justice and health care bills that have been discussed at length at CBC Annual Legislative Weekends rather than on the House or Senate floors.

These are just a few introduced legislations that have been largely ignored on the House or Senate floors because of Black lawmakers' inability to arrange fair committee hearings: felony disenfranchisement bills of Congressman John Conyers (D-Mich.); the predatory lending bill of Congressman Mel Watt (D-N.C.); the mandatory minimum sentence bill of Congresswoman Maxine Waters (D-Calif.); the minimum wage bill of Congressman Charlie Rangel (D-N.Y.) and the health care disparities and anti-AIDS bills of Donna Christian Christiansen; racial profiling and reparations.

That could soon change. If Democrats win a majority during November's mid-term elections, Black Caucus members could seize chairs of at least four major congressional committees and 15 subcommittees and the post of majority whip. This would give CBC members unprecedented control over committee agendas, the ability to forward legislation

never fully entertained by Congress and extra incentive to celebrate during the 36th Annual Legislative Weekend starting Sept. 6. The weekends are considered the premier Black conference to air policy issues.

"The CBC has very dynamic leadership right now. And I think that a lot of the cheer you're going to see in this CBC weekend is going to be an attribute to the hopefulness of having more of the people that the CBC wants to see elected," said Hilary Shelton, who works closely with the CBC as director of the Washington Bureau of the NAACP.

"It means the sensibilities and sensitivities that they hold and the concerns of our communities would be more front and center as they chair these very strategic and important committees. Indeed, they will be the gatekeepers. They will be the ones who will largely determine which bills will get a hearing and which will be marked up."

Political maneuvering could win Caucus members even more clout, but by seniority alone, a Democratic majority would likely mean Rangel as chair of the Ways and Means Committee, which oversees key fiscal matters, such as tax hikes, the minimum wage and military spending; Conyers as chair of the Judiciary Committee, which oversees judicial and civil rights matters; Congressman Bennie Thompson

(D-Miss.) as chair of the Homeland Security Committee, which oversees emergency preparedness, attack prevention and investigations among other security matters; and Congresswoman Juanita Millender-McDonald (D-Calif.) as chair of the Administration Committee, which oversees the Library of Congress. It could also mean Congressman Jim Clyburn (D-S.C.) as majority whip, who assists the House speaker and the majority leader to garner support for proposed legislation.

As the CBC's weekend begins this year with the theme, "Changing Course, Confronting Crises, Continuing the Legacy," the 43-member CBC already has a major reason to celebrate. Political spectators have credited Watt and his leadership for the fight and successful passage of the Voting Rights Act renewal, signed by President Bush on July 28. Watt had been empowered by Conyers to negotiate with Republican leaders, mainly Judiciary Committee Chairman F. James Sensenbrenner (R-Wis.) to advocate the bill's passage with no amendments. But, even with the bipartisan support of that bill, other key issues in the Black community have perished in Republican hands, many relegated to subcommittees without ever getting a hearing. It could be different after Election Day Nov. 7.

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"V" Community Jubilee

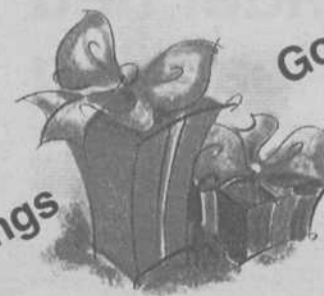
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