

Obama returns to more praise

By Lorinda M. Bullock
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Wherever Sen. Barack Obama goes, he's guaranteed to draw a crowd. His session, "Africa, the 21st Century," during the 36th Annual Congressional Black Caucus Legislative Conference was no exception.

Fresh from a recent trip to Kenya, Capital Hill's lone Black U.S. senator, a Democrat from Illinois, packed the conference room at the Washington Convention Center to the point a partition separating an adjoining room had to be opened to accommodate the overflow.

Obama kicked off the panel by answering the question, "Why a panel on Africa?"

"U.S. foreign policy continues to ignore Africa; it's not new. It's historically been the case... It's not just African-Americans who need to care about Africa, Americans should care about Africa, and Americans should care about Africa because our fate is immanently tied to what Africa has."

Obama further explained the links between Africa and America in areas of health, national security and terrorism.

"If you're concerned about national security and terrorism, you need to be concerned about Africa," said Obama, who described the 53-nation continent as having "the most ungoverned states in the world."

"When you have refugees crossing borders that are unpatrolled; when you have waters that are not being controlled in any sort of way; when you have great deprivation and millions of young people who basically have no opportunities, no hope — that ends up being fertile ground for the recruitment of terrorism."

Using Somalia as an example, he said, "Because of our lack of attention... We ended up having a situation in which... you now have a Somali government with some of whom had direct connections to Al-Qaeda in power."

Joining him on the panel were Susan Rice, senior fellow foreign policy institute at the Brookings Institute, Ambassador Phil Lyman, and Helene Gayle, CARE USA president and CEO.

Rice also stressed the importance of helping unstable African governments get on their feet in areas of health and economics. "We in the United States have not only an enormous humanitarian stake, we have a critical security stake as well... If we don't recognize that in a globalized world when terrorists or disease or anything

(See Obama, Page 5)

Desegregation case ends

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) - After 38 years, a teacher's desegregation lawsuit meant to force Tennessee to increase racial diversity at its colleges and universities is coming to end.

Gov. Phil Bredesen and the woman who filed the lawsuit announced its end on Monday and filed a joint motion in U.S. District Court asking to dismiss it. The governor also vowed to commit about \$19 million a year to fund programs it had required.

"In some ways, this journey is ended," Bredesen said. "But in other ways, this journey stretches far out before us and won't be complete until we remove every kind of barrier that stands in the way of any Tennessean's dream to earn a college education."

The agreement stemmed from the 1968 lawsuit filed by Rita Geier, then an instructor at historically Black Tennessee State University, who challenged the state's "dual system" of higher education for minorities.

After one settlement failed in 1984, a federal judge approved a new one in 2001, which became the Geier Consent Decree. If the required goals were met, the litigation was to end.

Under the decree's requirements, Tennessee has spent \$77 million since January 2001 to help public colleges and universities diversify their student bodies and staffs. It established minority and nontraditional scholarship programs, pre-doctoral fellowship programs and a

pre-university program for prospective Black students.

In the motion filed Monday, both sides agreed "the state is now operating a unitary system of public higher education" and "will not reinstitute nor reestablish any

practices or policies of its prior dual system that would foster or encourage the re-segregation of the Tennessee system of public higher education."

Geier said she was proud of the changes in Tennessee's

higher education over the past 40 years and is excited about the future.

"I've been brought to tears when I visit campuses and am told by students I had a part in them getting to where they are," she said.

High school dropouts face more obstacles

WASHINGTON (AP) - Dropping out of high school has its costs around the globe, but nowhere steeper than in the United States.

Adults that don't finish high school in the U.S. earn 65 percent of what people who have high school degrees make, according to a new report comparing industrialized nations. No other country had such a severe income gap.

Adults without a high school diploma typically make about 80 percent of the salaries earned by high school graduates in nations across Asia, Europe and elsewhere. Countries such as Finland, Belgium, Germany and Sweden have the smallest gaps in earnings between

dropouts and graduates.

The figures come from "Education at a Glance," an annual study by the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The report, released Tuesday, aims to help leaders see how their nations stack up.

The findings underscore the cost of a persistent dropout problem in the United States. It is rising as a national concern as politicians see the risks for the economy and for millions of kids.

The new report says 44 percent of adults without high school degrees in the United States have low incomes — that is, they make half of the country's median income or less. According to

the Child Trends Data Bank, Black and Hispanic youth are more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to drop out of high school. In 2004, seven percent of non-Hispanic Whites ages 16 to 24 were not enrolled in school and had not completed high school, compared with 12 percent of Blacks and 24 percent of Hispanics.

Only Denmark had a higher proportion of dropouts with low incomes.

Also, the United States is below the international average when it comes to its employment rate among adults age 25 to 64 who have no high school degree.

Even U.S. adult education and job training do little to

(See Dropout, Page 13)



STAR AMONG STARS

Sen. Barack Obama, D-Illinois, right, poses with his Grammy awarded by Grammy President Neil Portnow, second from right, singer Kelly Clarkson, second from left, and producer Jimmy Jam, during 'Grammys on the Hill' on Capitol Hill last week.

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