

House passes landmark hate crimes bill

Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - The U.S. House of Representatives has passed the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2007, sponsored by House Judiciary Committee Chairman John Conyers, Jr., D-Mich.

The bill passed with a strong vote of 237-180. As it goes to the Senate for a vote, Conyers lauds the bill as giving strong civil rights protec-

tion to an issue with deep roots in the Black community.

"It is one that is supported by more than 230 civil rights, education, religious and civic organizations, including the NAACP, the ACLU, and the Leadership Conference of Civil Rights," Conyers said. "It is also supported by virtually every major law enforcement organization in the country, including the International Association of

Chiefs of Police, the National District Attorneys Association, and the National Sheriffs Association."

Conyers recalled, "At one time in our history, race-based lynchings were a national scourge. Nearly 4,000 African-Americans were tortured and killed between 1880 and 1930, and the federal government was powerless to take action. Finally, some forty years ago, after years of filibuster in the other

body, we finally acted and sent the signal that race-based killings would not be tolerated by the federal government."

However, the laws had not gone far enough, he said.

The current hate crimes bill would add the following stipulations, according to a release from the Judiciary Committee.

— It would permit the federal government to offer assistance to state and local

governments to pursue hate crimes investigations.

— It would expand the current federal law so that it is not limited to just stopping interference in specified "federally protected activities," as the current statute provides. Under current law, the Justice Department is not able to bring its resources to bear on many heinous crimes, the release states.

— It would expand the reach of the federal law,

which currently covers race, color, religion, and national origin, to include gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability. We are doing this because we know that these groups have been and continue to be targeted for violent crimes of bias, it states.

On the Senate side, Sen. Ted Kennedy is sponsoring the bill, S-1105. It is being met with strong opposition (See Act, Page 5)

Keynote

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Ralph is an honorary member of the NCBW's Los Angeles Chapter. Of the several topics Ralph expects to address in her message to the NCBW members and guests, AIDS awareness will be the focus issue.

Ralph, who has been an AIDS education advocate for 17 years, in an exclusive *Sentinel-Voice* interview by phone, said: "These women are my target audience. While women between the ages of 18 and 40 make up the largest population of new HIV/AIDS cases, women over 40 are contracting HIV at alarming rates, mostly due to their reintroduction to the dating scene as widows or recent divorcees. By educating them, we can better educate our daughters. When I decided to educate others about AIDS, I was discouraged by the fact the disease was one that was largely ignored. And since that time, I've spoken to anyone who'd listen."

Ralph and Mack explain that young people don't believe that AIDS is a disease that they could possibly contract. Both women also see it

as a disease that older women overlook, believing it to be a youthful affliction.

Ralph added, "When you're young, you don't believe anything can happen to you. You think you're invincible."

"By educating mothers, we can open the ears of our children," Mack said.

"Our organization is an advocacy-based organization. We are not a sorority. We don't gather to simply participate in community service projects. We are content knowing that there are other organizations taking care of that community need. But what we as an organization hope to do is find problems within our communities and do what is needed to address them and fix them," said Mack.

"That is why Sheryl Lee Ralph and Gloria Ruben have been our top choices for keynote speakers for the last two years. The work that they do in helping people is commendable. The NCBW hopes to better prepare our people and inform them in the areas of health, education, economy and leadership. But



Keynote speaker, Sheryl Lee Ralph and her husband, Pennsylvania State Sen. Vincent James Hughes.

AIDS is clearly the largest issue that we have chosen to target. And we hope to have an effect on the national level."

Ralph stated: "HIV/AIDS awareness will be a major topic in my address, but I want these women to understand the effects that they may have on the world and in their communities."

She commented on the events namesake and her his-

toric significance.

"Let's review the success of Madam C.J. Walker," Ralph said.

"She was a hair care specialist. She didn't care what type of hair you had. Her intention was to make sure you had every opportunity to better care for it. And while she worked to bring convenience to the lives of us Black women, she became a self-made millionaire. Today, we have similar opportunities for success, for power. I want these women to know their power and the inspiration they give."

She continued, "We have to protect our bodies, educate our children, and uplift our communities. We all have to do our part. I'm a social entrepreneur. And by educating others about HIV and AIDS, I feel like I'm doing mine."

Ralph is currently touring the country performing her one-woman show, "Sometimes I Cry," about the lives, loves and losses of women infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.

"I am fielding my international obligations. I've just been invited to both London and Australia to present my show. My next project will be 'The Sister Circle,' my attempt at bringing together different generations of women to celebrate each other. I also hope to put together a show or write a movie script surrounding the power of the HIV virus and its prevention."

The NCBW is a national advocacy organization dedicated to improving the lives of their communities through public forums and symposiums and is mostly targeted toward helping Black women.

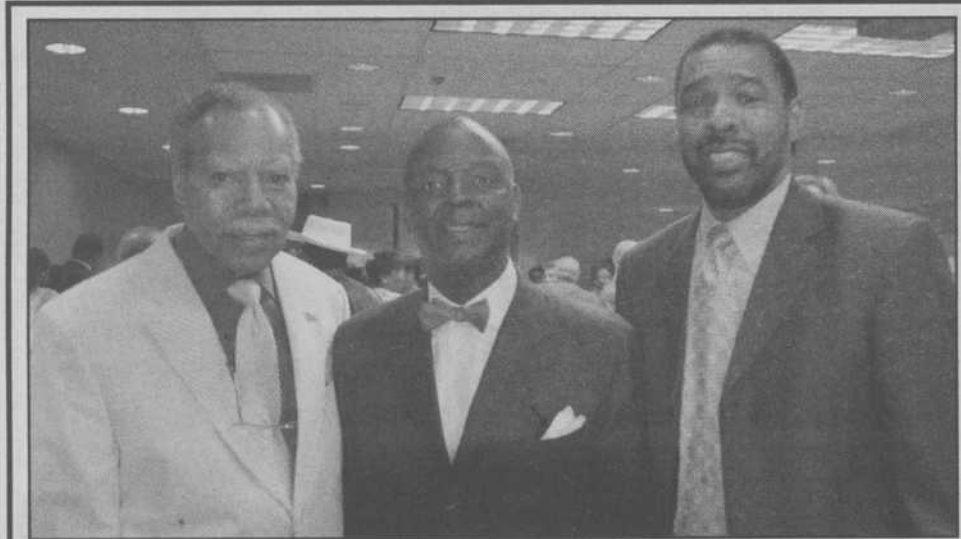
There are 60 chapters in 25 states and Washington, D.C., chiefly on the east coast and in southern states. There are four chapters in Califor-

nia and one locally. Among the sponsors for this year's event are Harrah's Entertainment and Prudential Financial Group, a returning sponsor for the third year. The proceeds from the \$50 per person luncheon go toward AIDS education, leadership workshops and community economic forums.

Ralph said she hopes her work has had positive impact on the lives of others through her various artistic projects and business ventures. The NCBW inductees and its current membership have advanced their communities through business, advocacy and volunteer efforts.

Although she's been awarded opportunities to sing on Broadway and work alongside famous names like Lauryn Hill, Whoopi Goldberg, Brandy Norwood, and many others, Ralph believes that her life's most significant celebrity impact is felt through her work as an international educator and AIDS awareness advocate.

"I've been blessed with the opportunity to travel all over the world. And helping to save lives by informing others about the seriousness of this disease, has been quite a blessing for me," said Ralph who relocated to the U.S. from Jamaica.



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

BUSINESS! MEN!

William "Bob" Bailey, left, and Ernest Fountain, right, stand with Ronald Langston, national director of the federal Minority Business Development Agency. Bailey was appointed deputy director of the national agency in the early '90s. Fountain's New Venture Capital Development Company recently received a \$218,250 grant to operate the Nevada Minority Business Enterprise Center. A ceremony was held at the Clark County County Government Center on May 9.

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