

# Does President Bush take anything serious?

By Nicole C. Lee

Special to Sentinel-Voice

President Bush has announced plans to travel to Africa from Feb. 15-21. His second visit to the continent, the President wants to "see firsthand" the fruits of U.S. efforts in Africa. Although the president and the State Department consistently boast of the increased benefits of attention paid there, the reality does not reflect the rhetoric.

For the fifth year, the president's own flagship PEPFAR initiative for Africa, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, will remain woefully under funded.

During his January 28 State of the Union Address, he proposed level funding for 2008 making it literally impossible for African nations to get ahead of the spread of the virus. His plan will make it possible to merely treat an additional 500,000 new infections in the next five years worldwide.

This in the midst of a pandemic that will cost the lives of at least 2 million mothers, fathers, sons and daughters this year alone. Limiting doctors and healthcare facilities on the African continent even further, President Bush has blocked every effort to increase the effectiveness of treatment dollars by refus-

ing to allow countries to buy generic medications instead of costly name brand drugs. It is clear he is not serious about assisting the people of the African Continent.

What does President Bush take seriously? —

U.S. military positioning and control of the African continent's natural resources.

According to the National Intelligence Council, the U.S. is likely to draw 25 percent of its oil from West Africa by 2015, surpassing the Persian Gulf.

Since the beginning of the Iraq War, President Bush has redirected over \$1 trillion through the Department of Defense. Little known, however, is that increasingly, defense funding also includes monies for economic development, also known as foreign assistance programs.

The administration is placing progressively more funding for humanitarian and diplomatic efforts, typically State Department functions, into the hands of the Pentagon. This dual initiative has come together in the form of the Africa Command, or AFRICOM.



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Despite overwhelming opposition by African nations, the Pentagon has begun to restructure U.S. forces to bring the new Africa Command on line, with a headquarters on the continent and "lily pads" around the continent. These lily pads allow for "forward basing" of U.S. military, enabling them to ignore national boundaries and political sen-

sitivities.

In the face of opposition, the administration has begun to spin new stories lauding the benefits of good works completed by U.S. military forces in Djibouti: for example, water wells and good roads for the poorest of Africa's poor. However Djibouti, which hosts the U.S. Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, the CJTF-HOA, remains a country strapped with political concerns and rampant disease with the average life expectancy of 43 years for its citizens.

There is no evidence to support the presence of the U.S. military automatically improve the lives of Africans.

The historical record cannot be disputed.

U.S. military power has left nations devastated and unstable. Past administrations have under funded vital programs, undermined indigenous democracies, backed vicious dictators and used the African continent as a playground for proxy wars. In short, there is little reason for U.S. military motives on African continent to be trusted.

The price of oil is at an all time high. The African continent is becoming an attractive investment site for many other growing economies, notably China. Africa's governments and peoples know the Bush Administration and its corporate allies want to ensure U.S. control over the continent's vast resources.

Some have said this new attention will put the African continent more at the center of U.S. foreign policy. Administration officials have claimed that a U.S. military presence on the continent proves that Africa is important and central to the U.S. But not all attention is good. Iraq and Afghanistan remain at the center of our Pentagon-driven foreign policy, and we can all see the devastating, deadly results.

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## Stimulus efforts not enough to halt economic decline

By Marc H. Morial

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The news is in. In 2007, 1.3 million U.S. households faced some stage of foreclosure, up 79 percent from the previous year, according to RealtyTrac, which tracks foreclosures. This startling statistic coupled with declines in housing starts and sales explains to some extent why our nation's leaders want to, as soon as possible, stem the tide of economic decline in which the subprime mortgage debacle has no doubt played a role.

It should come as no surprise that in light of topsy-turvy markets and skittish investors that the powers that be would spring to action, in the midst of a competitive election year.

Just what they ultimately agree upon will determine just how stimulating their efforts will be. In mid-January, U.S. House leaders and President George W. Bush struck an unlikely alliance in the name of stimulating the faltering economy. They must have realized that a tightening pocketbook and unemployment do little to quiet the restless and vote-happy American ranks.

Remember the 1992 presidential election, when economics emerged as a major issue, thanks in part to Independent candidate H. Ross Perot's crusade for a balanced federal budget?

### Alford

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public will continue to miss our neighborhoods. We won't get healthcare and decent educational opportunities for our children. Corrupt police and lazy stewards of our environment will be allowed to continue their existence.

If you have noticed, not one question has asked how any of the current candidates will prevent another Katrina disaster. They don't have a clue and will never be able to prevent it until we demand that they start considering.

Why can't we begin to demand resolutions and accountability during this election cycle?

The billionaire's campaign helped give Bill Clinton an electoral edge over Bush's father, then-incumbent President George Herbert Walker Bush. Together, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi with Bush and Minority Leader John Boehner arrived at a \$150 billion compromise that provides tax rebates of \$300 and up, among other things, to moderate- and low-income households. Much to the National Urban League's approval, they also included a provision raising limits on Federal Housing Administration-backed home loans designed to help ease the credit crunch and to give homeowners a greater opportunity to refinance debilitating adjustable-rate mortgages.

There's no doubt that every little bit helps, especially in lean times, when a few hundred dollars can ease the strain of living paycheck to paycheck, like so many African-Americans do. But, in crafting their stimulus package, our nation's leaders ignored tried-and-true strategies used in past recessions with much bigger bang for the buck than what the House passed in January.

A few hundred dollars isn't likely to give an unemployed American the kind of boost



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that an extra six months to find a new job would do. Similarly, an extra \$300 per child is not likely to improve a household's bottom line as much as a summer job.

To effect long-term positive change, our leaders need to invest in long-term strategies that teach its citizens how to fish — not to throw them a minnow, usually in an election year. The Urban League movement, however, would prefer a more comprehensive effort that incorporates an extension of unemployment benefits, increased food stamps and greater investment in summer jobs for at-risk youth.

According to a recent analysis by Moody.com's Chief Economist Mark Zandi, extending unemployment insurance and increasing food stamp payments would generate \$1.64 and \$1.73 per \$1 investment, respectively. That compares to \$1.26 per \$1 cost of the House-proposed tax rebates. With long-term unemployment up by 200,000 in 2007, an extension of unemployment insurance coupled with increased food stamps should be the first things put on the table.

In the House, they aren't, but in the Senate they are. Even in prosperous times, Blacks experience twice the rate of unemployment of Whites. Just imagine how bad it is when the economy tanks. Increased food stamps not only help the unemployed, they help the underemployed as well as part-timers.

### Support

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It wasn't the only point at which he said he would do better against the Republicans in the fall.

"I have no doubt that I can get the people who vote for Senator Clinton. ...It's not clear that Senator Clinton can get all the people I'm getting," he said.

Obama sought to claim the permanent underdog's role in the race, saying the New

York senator is backed by a "political machine honed over two decades."

At the same time, he said the more he appears before voters, the better he does on primary days. He said he intends to campaign in the states next up on the calendar — Louisiana, Nebraska and Washington vote on Saturday; Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia on Tuesday.

For Black teens, more than one third of them were unemployed in December 2007, more than twice the rate of White teens; summer jobs help connect them to the working world, giving them desperately needed skills and putting them on the road to economic self-sufficiency.

It's wonderful that our nation's leaders want to show their love to their constituents in an election year. But will they still love us after Election Day?

That is the real question here. Is it worth digging our nation further into debt for a short-term feel-good gain? Is it worth putting our future in jeopardy by investing in initiatives that fail to achieve the best result?

I would be remiss if I didn't applaud our leaders for putting aside partisan politics to further efforts to help Americans fiscally struggling. This rare show of bipartisan cooperation gives me hope that comprehensive and effective stimulus legislation will eventually see the light of day.

It is the NUL's ultimate hope that final legislation will look more like what the U.S. Senate is considering — one that includes an extension of unemployment benefits, as well as increased food stamps — but also includes funds for summer jobs.

Our leaders should also use their stimulus package as a springboard for future efforts to level the economic playing field for all Americans of all tax brackets.

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