

Groups fear new DNA test's effect

By Charlene Muhammad
Special to Sentinel-Voice

LOS ANGELES (NNPA) — Civil liberties groups say that plans to expand DNA collection through changes to federal and California state laws violate constitutional protections and criminalize innocent people.

Under the proposals, close relatives of arrestees in California could be asked to provide DNA evidence; under federal law any federal arrestees, either for felonies or misdemeanors, will be required to provide DNA samples.

Atty. Gen. Michael Mukasey published a proposal to amend the DNA Fingerprint Act of 2005 and the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006 in April. The change directs U.S. agencies that arrest and detain individuals or that supervise individuals facing charges, including non-U.S. citizens, to collect DNA samples.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation will analyze and enter the samples into a federal database known as the Combined DNA Index System.

In California, the DNA of anyone closely related to a suspect that has been arrested would also be stored through the expanded testing. California Atty. Gen. Edmund Brown Jr. announced the plan last month, saying it will help law enforcement solve crimes committed by killers and sex offenders.

"One of our concerns about this is that if you look at the criminal justice system, obviously it's full of racial disparities against people of color," said Atty. Michael Risher of the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California.

Currently, state laboratories alert law enforcement when all 26 genetic markers of a suspect match. The change would result in alerts when just 15 markers match, which could mean investigations of innocent people who are simply related to suspects.

"Combining the expansion to the familial searches means that those persons, primarily males, will be logged in this database and their families, and we all know where this is not going to happen. This gives enormous discretion to police, who already have a lot of discretion whether or not to arrest someone," Atty. Risher told *The Final Call*. The information stored in the databases would include private identification about one's family, ancestry, diseases, predispositions to drug abuse, and other private information. If arrests don't end with convictions, certified court records are required to remove the DNA data. The ACLU worries America's current mood, particularly after 9/11, seems to approve curbing of rights for the appearance of a bit more public safety or crime fighting.

Politicians are willing to sacrifice civil liberties and tax dollars in hopes of fighting crime, looking past the negative ramifications of their decisions, the ACLU said.

In 2004, California voters overwhelmingly passed the DNA Fingerprint, Unsolved Crime and Innocence Protection Act DNA, so they cannot entirely blame politicians. Unfortunately, advocates say, the law is growing beyond the scope voters desired. Anyone, not just criminals, can get caught up, they warn. "I don't think this will deter any crimes, but I think there is a place for DNA in solving crimes. It's quite successful when applied to serious crime, but as it expands and you get more people, it becomes less useful," Risher said.

The California plan to gather DNA in felony arrests is effective Jan. 1, 2009, but the familial or "partial match" policy took effect on May 6 during the grand opening of the Jan Bashinski DNA Laboratory in Richmond.

According to reports, the state's database holds more than one million DNA profiles, and more than two million samples are expected to be collected over the next five years. At the opening ceremony, state Attorney Gen. Brown Jr. said California's DNA database has completed a \$10 million expansion to accommodate the increased samples expected over the next 5 years as a result of changes to the law.

The public comment period for the federal rule change ended May 19.

Charlene Muhammad writes for the *Final Call*.

Black leaders: Democrats will heal

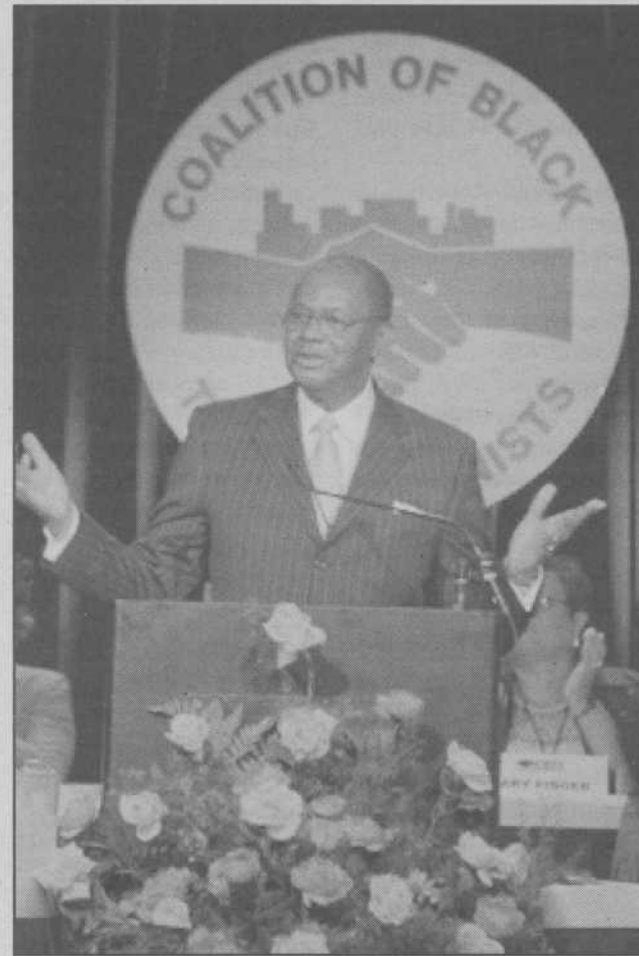
By Chris King
Special to Sentinel-Voice

ST. LOUIS (NNPA) — The American labor movement has unequivocally vowed to heal any division in the Democratic Party. It made the promise at the opening session of the 37th International Convention of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists held last week in Downtown St. Louis.

The senior leadership of the CBTU, the senior leadership of St. Louis Labor and executive leaders from the AFL-CIO and many other powerful international unions all spoke as one, vowing to register voters, mobilize voters and educate constituents to defeat the Republican Party Nov. 4.

Whether local to St. Louis or international, whether Black or White — more than a dozen senior-level labor leaders all dismissed any divisions in the Democratic Party and challenged the rank and file to actively work to elect a democratic U.S. president. "You can take a break after November," said William (Bill) Lucy, beloved president of CBTU.

Other labor leaders who spoke in unison with Lucy include: Arlene Holt-Baker, executive vice president of the AFL-CIO and the highest-ranking minority in the American labor movement; Henry Nicholas, interna-



Sentinel-Voice photo by Wiley Price/St. Louis American
Bill Lucy, president of the International Convention of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, opened the organization's 37th convention in St. Louis.

tional vice president of AFSME; Robert Soutier, president of the St. Louis Labor Council; Gerald Feldhouse, executive secretary of the Building and Construction Trades Council of St. Louis; and Hugh McVey, president of the Missouri AFL-CIO.

Though everyone referred

to all their colleagues as brother and sister, regardless of race, it is worth noting that Soutier, Feldhouse and McVey are White labor leaders — indeed three of the most powerful labor leaders in heavily unionized St. Louis.

For one morning, at least, it was easy to believe that

there are no divisions by race or gender in the Democratic Party and that adequate and dedicated leadership is in place to attack any divisions left over from a contentious democratic primary.

CBTU is strongly pushing an Obama candidacy. Obama called in to the morning session and even his disembodied voice relayed by telephone drew a standing ovation.

Though some unions, including the AFL-CIO, have not endorsed Obama openly, the pro-Obama spirit that overwhelms the convention animated even the president of the Missouri AFL-CIO.

After apologizing to his boss, Arlene Holdneker — who is an African-American woman — McVey, a powerhouse of a labor leader in Missouri, said he must depart from the protocol of neutrality and promise that Barack Obama would be the next president of the United States.

The convention also featured a speech from Rev. Jesse Jackson, a greeting from U.S. Rep. William Lacy Clay — who has been pinpointed as the leader of voter registration efforts in Missouri — and a sermon at the Sunday morning worship service by Rev. Douglas Parham.

Chris King writes for the *St. Louis American*.

Gender disparity in retirement funds

Special to Sentinel-Voice

(NNPA) — Women are at a much higher risk than men of facing economic uncertainty in retirement and, on average, they'll enter retirement with considerably less savings than men.

Women face these unique challenges because they spend fewer years in the workforce, earn less income and have longer life spans than men, according to a report released May 7 entitled, "The Female Factor 2008: Why Women are at Greater Financial Risk in Retirement."

Multiple factors combine to cloud women's retirement security, including less time in the workforce and lower lifetime earnings than men. The report finds that women earn 77 cents for every dollar earned by men, which translates into a median retirement income of just 58 percent of men's. Additionally, due to family caregiving

responsibilities, women are in the workforce an average of 12 years less than men. This translates into fewer years saving or participating in an employer-provided retirement plan.

The median salary for a woman working full-time in 2006 was \$32,515 compared to \$42,261 for men.

The disparity is even more dramatic for minority women, with African-American women's median income at \$27,535 and Hispanic women's median income at \$22,285.

Women also live, on average, five years longer than men and are far more likely than men to be widowed and living some part of their retirement years alone. Older women living alone — whether widowed, divorced or never married — face much higher rates of poverty than men do. Approximately one in five unmarried elderly women is poor.

"With more years out of the workforce to care for family, combined with lower wages and a greater life expectancy, it's clear that simply being a woman in our society may jeopardize your financial security," said Cindy Hounsell, president of Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement and author of the study.

Hounsell joined Reps Stephanie Tubbs-Jones, D-Ohio, and Phil English, R-Pa., as well as Senators Kent Conrad, D-N.D., and Gordon Smith, R-Ore., and women from around the country today in calling for public action to mitigate the real risk of poverty that American women face in retirement.

"The legislation my colleagues and I have introduced, The Retirement Security for Life Act, will help Americans secure a steady stream of retirement income. This will be especially helpful for women without access

to traditional retirement plans, who, as this report shows, are at greater risk of having a financially insecure retirement," said Rep. Tubbs-Jones.

"As this report shows, all too often women are reaching retirement age without adequate savings. It's time we recognize these challenges and put public policies in place that help women take control of their financial futures," said Sen. Conrad.

The report finds that lifetime annuities are an important tool that women can use to plan for a more secure retirement.

Life annuities relieve the risks and burdens of managing a nest egg and can maximize savings' value over the course of an individual's retirement years. Life annuities are the only vehicle besides pensions and Social Security that provide a steady stream of income for life — a "pay-

(See *Income*, Page 5)