

Lawsuit: Discrimination in Katrina recovery

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A group of civil rights attorneys filed a federal lawsuit Wednesday claiming racial discrimination by the Louisiana Road Home program, an already troubled \$10.3 billion effort designed to help Hurricane Katrina victims rebuild their storm-damaged homes.

The lawsuit argues that it was unfair for the program to base grant amounts on pre-storm market value, as opposed to actual rebuilding costs. It claims as many as 20,000 African-American homeowners received diminished grants because the value of a three-bedroom home in a mostly Black neighborhood like the Lower 9th Ward fetches thousands less on the market than a home of the same size in mostly White areas. Yet, the rebuilding costs are similar.

Report: Kanye West arrested in England

LONDON (AP) — Rapper Kanye West was arrested after a fracas outside a nightclub but released without charge, British media reported.

The Press Association news agency and others reported that the 31-year-old rapper was detained early Friday after an incident involving a photographer outside the Tup Tup Palace bar in Newcastle, northern England.

Police said only that a 31-year-old man had been arrested on suspicion of assault after an incident at a nightclub. They said he was later released without charge. British police do not usually identify suspects who have not been charged.

The Tup Tup Palace said West visited the club after his gig in Newcastle Thursday

“HUD allowed a formula that is biased and threatens to undermine the recovery efforts of African-American homeowners,” said Shanna L. Smith, president and CEO of the National Fair Housing Alliance, one of three groups that has sued seeking class-action status.

“It failed to take into account the legacy of racial discrimination in the housing market, which has resulted in systematically lower values for homes in communities of color.”

The lawsuit seeks a recalculation of awards based upon actual rebuilding amounts, an adjustment that plaintiffs acknowledge could cost U.S. taxpayers another \$1 billion for the federally funded program.

A Louisiana Road Home spokesman said the program has given additional awards to 49,824 applicants earning



This home was symbolic of the destruction that Hurricane Katrina wrought throughout the Gulf Coast in August 2005.

less than 80 percent of the area median income. Those additional awards averaged \$26,874, spokesman Darin Mann wrote in an e-mail.

“When the Road Home program was designed, the state added an additional compensation grant to assist low-income homeowners who may have had low pre-storm values. The Road Home program does not discriminate,” Mann wrote.

According to program statistics, \$7.3 billion in aid has been disbursed through average awards of \$61,344 since

its creation in 2006. The maximum award for applicants, even after an additional compensation grant, is \$150,000. About 120,000 people have received grants so far, but as many as 35,000 continue to wait in a program that has been plagued with errors and bureaucratic delays.

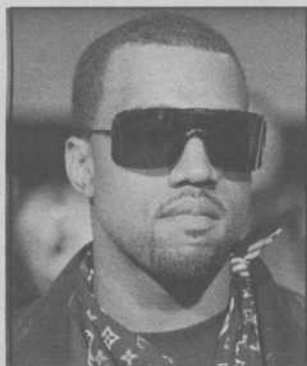
Many applicants have decided to rebuild only portions of their home with the grant or seek other sources of funding to complete the job. Others have built less-expensive homes.

Matthew Colangelo of the NAACP defense fund, which is also a plaintiff, said the additional compensation doesn't eliminate racial disparities because the formula is flawed to begin with. The five Katrina victims who are part of the suit remain tens of thousands of dollars short of what is needed to rebuild, he said.

Isabel Medina, a professor at the Loyola University New Orleans College of Law who has specialized in civil rights and immigration cases, said the plaintiffs do not have to

prove that discrimination was intentional, only that the program had a statistically adverse affect on minorities.

HUD and the state, Medina said, can argue that there were no practical alternatives available other than using pre-storm value estimates. She said they can also argue that the unprecedented nature of the Road Home, created on the fly and the largest single housing program in U.S. history, makes it exempt from the 1960s-era housing discrimination acts in which the suit is based.



KANYE WEST

but could not confirm the arrest.

A spokeswoman for West did not immediately return a call seeking comment.

West was arrested last month at Los Angeles International Airport after he was filmed struggling with a paparazzo. He was not charged.

West is playing dates around Britain as part of his Glow in the Dark tour.

Bush reflects on Africa relief effort

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Bush, reflecting on his time in office, said that “one of the most uplifting” experiences of his nearly eight-year tenure has been witnessing the gains Africa has made in education and fighting hunger and disease. Speaking at a charity dinner, Bush called the work done for Africa by his administration and family “a labor of love.”

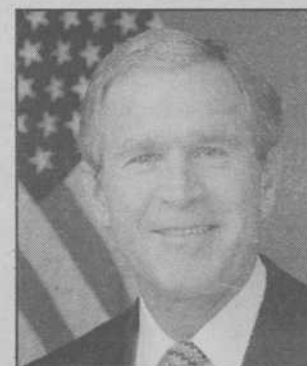
Before his remarks, he accepted the Bishop John T. Walker Distinguished Humanitarian Service Award, which pays tribute to leaders in humanitarian fields for Africa.

The dinner benefits Africare, a U.S.-based charity that aims to improve the quality of life in Africa by addressing needs in food security, agriculture, health and HIV/AIDS.

His voice rising, Bush said the heart of the U.S.

“One of the most uplifting experiences has been to witness a new and more hopeful era dawning on the continent [of Africa].”

— George W. Bush



policy in Africa is knowing that its people have the “talent and ambition and resolve to overcome” great challenges.

“We do not believe in paternalism. We believe in partnership, because we believe in the potential of the people on the continent of Africa,” he told an audience of about 1,500 in a hotel ballroom. “One of the most uplifting experiences has been to witness a new and more hopeful era dawning on the conti-

ment.”

Bush was honored for U.S. initiatives that have supported education, helped to suppress HIV/AIDS and helped to end hunger in African countries.

The White House has said the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief has supported care for more than 6.6 million people worldwide and allowed nearly 200,000 children in Africa to be born HIV-free through mother-to-child prevention work. The

U.S. has trained more than 700,000 teachers, distributed more than 10 million textbooks and provided hundreds of thousands of scholarships to help girls go to school in Africa.

Bush defended his large contributions to Africa against those who say “What good does it do me, Mr. President, for our government to support Africa?”

“One, it is in our national security interest that we defeat hopelessness. It is in our economic interest that we help economies grow,” he said. “And it is in our moral interest that when we find hunger and suffering, the United States of America responds in a robust and effective way.”

The dinner is in memory of Bishop John T. Walker, the first African-American Episcopal Bishop of Washington and the longtime chairman of Africare's board.

Muslims

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Afghanistan have found the flesh of your soldiers to be delicious, so send thousands after thousands to them,” he said.

Al-Zawahri did not threaten specific attacks, but warned Obama that he was “facing a Jihadi (holy war) awakening and renaissance which is shaking the pillars of the entire Islamic world; and this is the fact which you and your government and country refuse to recognize and pretend not to see.”

He said Obama's victory showed Americans acknowledged that President George W. Bush's policies were a failure and that the result was an “admission of defeat in Iraq.”

But Obama's professions of support for Israel during the election campaign “confirmed to the Ummah (Islamic world) that you have chosen a stance of hostility to Islam and Muslims,” al-Zawahri said.