

Obama inaugural parade route opened to public

By Askia Muhammad
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — President-elect Barack Obama's inauguration may be attended by more people than the Million Man March, according to District of Columbia officials and National Park Service organizers. Against that landscape, the inaugural parade route will be more open to the public than recent parades, as a result of a long-fought lawsuit.

"I think you could have an inauguration that could be in the 3-5 million viewership, either on the Mall or on the parade route," Mayor Adrian Fenty told reporters recently.

Such a turnout would easily eclipse the current record set in 1965, when 1.2 million people attended Lyndon B. Johnson's inauguration, and it would be greater than the more than 2 million who attended the Million Man March in 1995.

The National Mall should be able to handle such a crowd on its two-mile-long span between the Capitol and Lincoln Memorial, as well as the parade route on Pennsylvania Avenue officials predicted.

But the parade route itself will be very different this time as a result of litigation by the Partnership for Civil Justice. The lawsuit was filed

four years ago against the National Park Service on behalf of anti-war protestors who were barred from large stretches of Pennsylvania Avenue on January 20, 2005 when only 150,000 attended the second inauguration of President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney.

The lawsuit argued that the National Park Service in effect "privatized" Pennsylvania Avenue — America's Main Street — in order to "stage-manage democracy and reserve dozens of blocks to fat-cat donors and corporate sponsors."

In 2005, there were so many bleachers set up for campaign contributors who bought tickets that space was limited for those who wanted to stand curbside and watch, and protest, for free.

At the Jan. 20, 2009 event — one day after the observance of the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday — there will be only 8,700 reserved bleacher seats, compared with 20,000 in 2005, officials said.

"This lawsuit has resulted in a free-speech victory not only for those organizing for peace and social justice, but for all those who want to be able to participate in the inaugural event," Mara Verheyden-Hilliard, co-



A worker applies a coat of primer on a stand at the construction site of the inaugural stand on the west side of the Capitol in Washington, D.C. The inauguration is Jan. 20.

founder of the Partnership for Civil Justice and counsel told *The Final Call*.

"Recent administrations have tried to restrict access to Pennsylvania Avenue to those in favor of the Presidential Inaugural Committee, which is a private entity

funded largely by the largest corporations and banks in the United States. We consider this victory to be an important expansion for democracy.

"The result of the litigation now is that they have been pushed significantly

back. The parade route is now opening up, and we'll be able to see now, as hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people want to come to Washington, D.C. on Jan. 20, people will now be able to be along the parade route. It won't just be set aside for fat-cat donors and bankers."

In 2005, bleacher seats were priced from \$15 to \$150 but were sold for \$500 or more by ticket scalpers. The bleacher tickets typically go on sale several weeks before the event, but in the past, Ticketmaster informed people wishing to purchase parade bleacher tickets that they must have invitations and identification numbers.

Tickets for the inauguration itself are free, but they are distributed by invitation only from members of Congress, the Senate and the Presidential Inaugural Committee. The swearing in will be held on the West Front of the U.S. Capitol, facing the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial.

But members of Congress have already complained that requests for inauguration tickets swamped their office telephone and fax lines immediately after the election, prompting elected officials to declare in mid-November that the 200 tickets each office is allotted have already been allocated and that no more tickets are available.

For this inaugural parade, about 17 percent of the route will be bleachers, and 83 percent will be open to the public. Some of that room will be taken up by the International ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism) Coalition — plaintiffs in the lawsuit. The coalition plans a demonstration to draw attention to home foreclosures, ANSWER officials said.

"We're bringing the human face of people who are suffering but aren't being bailed out," Brian Becker ANSWER Coalition National Coordinator said in a statement.

"People will be jubilant, but we also want to send a message on that first day: Justice first, people first."

Any demonstration by members of the ANSWER Coalition is not to be confused with possible protests announced by Ku Klux Klan, and by Skinhead and Nazi groups, Verheyden-Hilliard said.

"There's a far significant difference between people who want to express a mes-

sage for social justice and people who want to spread a message of terror and hate. I can't imagine that the Klan or the Nazis would even think about showing up because I can't imagine they would be well received, to put it mildly.

"In terms of the issue of protests on that day, I think that most progressive people — even if they don't have illusions about the Democratic Party, and the nature of the Democratic Party as being a corporate party and beholden to the bankers and to Wall Street — recognize the historic nature of the day, and the fact that for all of us in the United States, for so many people it is within people's lifetime, going from a Jim Crow-apartheid state, to seeing an African-American president, that this is a very meaningful moment, and I think there will be a lot of people who do bring messages of hope and messages of social justice, and messages talking about what the priorities should be. But I think that's far different from it being a protest against [President-elect] Obama, or a hostile kind of event.

"People will be out there and they will be, on one hand, hopeful and happy and recognizing the importance of the day, and simultaneously being able to say: 'Save our homes,' 'Bail out people,' 'Stand with the people,' and that will be the message," Verheyden-Hilliard said.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), who is co-chair of the Joint-Congressional Committee overseeing President-elect Obama's official swearing-in ceremony, said on the Senate floor that more than 1.5 million people could descend on the nation's capital.

D.C. Police Chief Cathy Lanier told reporters that her department is tailoring its security plans for the maximum number of attendees, but would not give any estimate.

The city is ready for the crowds given its experience with large events in the past, such as the Million Man March and Fourth of July celebrations, Lanier said.

Her entire force will be on duty, along with 4,000 officers from 93 agencies around the country.

There also will be hundreds of firefighters and paramedics on duty.

Askia Muhammad writes for *The Final Call*.

Music legends, service projects and much more

Celebrities to flood D.C. on Jan. 20

By Sean Yoes
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — As the nation's capital braces for what some officials estimate will be a crowd of at least 4 million people, President-elect Barack Obama's inauguration is shaping up to be a four-day first-class affair that will include top entertainers, wall-to-wall parties, traditional balls and service projects to honor Martin Luther King's holiday.

The inaugural theme, "Renewing America's Promise," is borrowed from the Democratic National Convention in Denver and from the party's national platform.

"At this moment of great challenge and great change, renewing the promise of America begins with renewing the idea that in America, we rise or fall as one nation and one people," Obama said in a statement.

"That sense of unity and

shared purpose is what this inauguration will reflect."

The 56th Presidential Inauguration will be held Jan. 20 on the west front of the U.S. Capitol.

Musical Selection

— Aretha Franklin, whose career spans more than 50 years, featuring a repertoire of soul, jazz, rock, blues, pop and gospel and earning 21



Aretha Franklin is among many celebrities headed to D.C.

Grammy Awards. Rolling Stone recently named the Queen of Soul the greatest singer of the rock era.

Oath of Office to President-elect Barack H. Obama — Administered by the Chief Justice of the United States the Honorable John G. Roberts Jr.

Inaugural Address

— The President of the United States, the Honorable Barack H. Obama

Poem

— Elizabeth Alexander, poet, essayist and playwright who has written four books and was a Pulitzer Prize finalist in 2005.

Benediction

— Rev. Dr. Joseph E. Lowery, dean of the Civil Rights Movement and co-founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference with Martin Luther King Jr.

Congressional organizers are looking for ways to ex- (See Inauguration, Page 10)