

CBC hopes for more power under Barack Obama

*By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice*
WASHINGTON (NNPA) — The 41-member Congressional Black Caucus, which often describes itself as the “conscience of the Congress,” is anticipating a power surge next week as one of its former members takes the oath of office as president of the United States.

“As I stand here today, I can tell you with certainty that these 41 members of the Congressional Black Caucus recognizes that this is our moment,” said U.S. Rep. Barbara Lee, the new chairwoman of the 40-year-old caucus at the group’s ceremonial swearing in last week.

Recalling the mission of the 13 founding members of



Members of the Congressional Black Caucus are angling for more power after Jan. 20.

the CBC as being “to achieve greater equity for persons of African decent,” Lee, of California, told the audience

of hundreds in the new Capitol Visitors Center, “As we change the course of our country, and as we confront

the economy, and as we continue moving forward, we will continue their legacy in working day and night to

make this a better and more secure world for our children.”

Then-U.S. Sen. Barack Obama served as a member of the Congressional Black Caucus with a consistent record of 100 percent on the NAACP Civil Rights report card. But it is often said that he must now govern the nation as a president — not as a “Black president.”

Agreeing, members of the CBC interviewed by the NNPA News Service at a reception following the Jan. 6 swearing in, said as they push legislation to improve the plight of Blacks in America, they will be emboldened by the support of the president — because of his principles, not because of his race.

“It challenges the Congressional Black Caucus because now more than ever, America will recognize that there are three branches of government — the executive, the judicial and the legislative, the legislature being the initiator of ideas,” said Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee, D-Texas. “It will be very good to compliment the leadership of President Obama to have ideas coming from the Caucus — ideas and solutions to problems, working on the dream that is still a work in progress.”

For too long have certain tenets of American democracy, such as “freedom and justice for all,” been recited, but not fully realized, says Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va. He ticked off a list of issues that will need immediate attention.

“Healthcare, jobs, education... getting serious about reducing crime. We have a lot of work to do and we look forward to working with President Obama and we will work enthusiastically to solve these problems,” said Scott.

Black political observers will also watch closely to see what will happen with legislation on predatory lending, police profiling and misconduct, sentencing disparities, affirmative action, and other areas of public policy that have largely remained stagnant.

The CBC was founded in January of 1969 when 13 African-American representatives of the 77th Congress formed the Democratic Select Committee. The committee was renamed the Congressional Black Caucus in 1971. Founding members of the CBC were Reps. Shirley Chisholm (N.Y.), William Clay (Mo.), George Collins (Ill.), John Conyers (Mich.), Ronald Dellums (Calif.), Charles Diggs (Mich.), Augustus Hawkins (Calif.), Ralph Metcalfe (Ill.), Parren Mitchell (Md.), Robert Nix (Pa.), Charles Rangel (N.Y.), Louis Stokes (Ohio), and Delegate Walter Fauntroy (D.C.).

Forty years later, two of the CBC founding members are chairing two of the most powerful committees in Congress. Rep. John Conyers, known as the “dean” of the CBC, chairs the House Judiciary Committee and Rep. Charlie Rangel chairs the

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King’s son: Time to roll up sleeves

*By Hazel Trice Edney
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WASHINGTON (NNPA) — On the verge of commemorating the Martin Luther King National Holiday Jan. 19, Martin Luther King III, has declared “We’ve got to roll up our sleeves” during what he describes as “a very special period in the history of our nation and world.”

Speaking last week to the ceremonial swearing in of the Congressional Black Caucus, King says America must remind itself that despite the historic swearing in of the nation’s first Black president Jan. 20, his father’s “dream has not been fulfilled even though a significant aspect of that dream has been fulfilled.”

Setting aside a prepared speech, King III, now a human rights leader in his own right, spoke from his heart as he stood before the Capitol Hill audience of hundreds, thinking of his father, who

was assassinated April 4, 1968 and his mother who died of cancer on Jan. 30, 2006. “I cannot say exactly what my father and mother would say, but I know they’re looking down on us smiling,” said King, founder and president of Realizing the Dream, a non-profit advocacy organization for the poor. Then he laid out the bare facts:

“But, as long as there are 37 plus million people living in poverty, the dream will not be fulfilled; as long as we live in a nation where 47 plus million people have no health insurance, the dream has not been fulfilled; as long as we live in a nation where the criminal justice system has millions of people and just about 50-50 percent of those people are people of color, the dream will not be fulfilled,” he told the vigorously applauding audience. “We still have work to do, but the wonderful thing is we can make it happen. Where there is great challenge, there is

also great opportunity.” Referring to the historic inauguration of President-Elect Barack Obama, King said, “Our nation is getting ready to move in a most powerful direction in the most positive way.”

But, he added, “We’ve got to roll up our sleeves.”

Had he lived, Dr. King would be 80 years old on Jan. 15 this year. Listening to King III speak were civil rights icons U. S. Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) and Dr. Dorothy Height, president emerita of the National Council of Negro Women, both of whom marched on Washington with Dr. King on Aug. 28,

1963, where he rendered the famous “I Have a Dream” speech. Both Lewis and Height received rousing applause when acknowledged by King III.

But King pointed out that it was the principles for which they stood that made them great. He encouraged the CBC and the audience to remember those principles as outlined succinctly by Dr. King in several of his speeches. King quoted his father: “The ultimate measure of a person is not where they stand in times of comfort and convenience, but where they stand in times of challenge and controversy.”



MONEY WELL SPENT

The National Coalition of 100 Black Women (NCBW) presented Frances Barron, chairperson of the Las Vegas-Clark County Library District’s Board of Trustees, with a check for \$1,000. The donation’s purpose is to assist the district with purchasing 40 copies of the inaugural “Who’s Who in Black Las Vegas.” The Las Vegas chapter of NCBW wants the book, which highlights Black achievement in the Valley, available for checkout by area youth.

Sentinel-Voice photos by Marty Frierson

Voting

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court papers that more than 2,400 proposed voting changes have been blocked since 1982.

“The record includes evidence of discrimination throughout covered jurisdictions perpetrated at every level of government,” the government said.

Eight states are covered in their entirety: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina and Texas. In Virginia, all but 15 cities and counties must comply with the measure.

Parts of California, Florida, Michigan, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina and South Dakota also need permission to make voting changes.

The case is Northwest Austin Municipal Utility District No. 1 v. Mukasey, 08-322.