

Katrina affects Black politicians

NATO

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17,000 more combat troops and 4,000 trainers.

The president stressed that troops to train and mentor Afghan forces and police are needed just as much as combat troops in the country's dangerous south, where the Taliban is strongest. "The troops that we're sending in are no less important," he said.

New NATO contributions that were announced prior to the summit include:

—About 3,000 troops to provide security around the Aug. 20 Afghan elections, including from Britain, Germany and Spain. Unless those elections come off smoothly, "a lot of the security going forward won't matter," White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said.

—Between 1,400 and 2,800 troops to serve as trainers for Afghan military units in the field.

—More than 300 paramilitary trainers and mentors to work with Afghan police forces. It marks the first time NATO has committed to police training. Top contributors: France and Italy.

—About \$100 million in new aid to help Afghanistan expand the size of its army. Germany led the way with \$57 million.

By Christopher Tidmore
Special to Sentinel-Voice
NEW ORLEANS (NNPA) — Thanks to Hurricane Katrina, Louisiana is poised to lose one of its current congressional districts after the 2010 Census.

Due to the fact that the storm more proportionally de-populated the New Orleans portions of the Second Congressional District, one conservative political organization has suggested that the current Black Majority District should be drawn into the Caucasian swing seat currently held by Charlie Melançon, D-Napoleonville.

Louisiana Family Forum Action President Gene Mills introduced the plan to legis-

lators and media outlets throughout Louisiana on Thursday, March 19, explaining that the proposal is "a starting point for discussion on how the congressional lines should be redrawn."

LFFAction is a conservative, yet non-partisan tax exempt 501(c)3 organization, but Mills has close relationships with senior Republicans like Senator David Vitter and GOP Chairman Roger Villere. The plan as constituted would combine the seat of a sitting Democratic Congressman with a Black-majority district.

According to the plan, the more Caucasian and conservative parts of the district

would be drawn into surrounding seats currently held by Republicans Charles Boustany, Bill Cassidy, and Steve Scalise.

"It is expected that Louisiana will lose a congressional seat after the 2010 census. Our plan takes that likelihood into consideration, combining the current District Three and District Two seats to reflect the large population loss from Hurricane Katrina," said Mills. But, it would also have the effect of turning the Sixth and Seventh Congressional Districts from swing seats, able to be won by either party, into safe Republican seats.

More specifically, it would lower the percentage

of African-American registration from the Second District's estimated 62 percent to just greater than 50 percent.

Mills defends the plan by pointing out that Hurricane Katrina already lowered the percentages of not only minority registration but basic population in the flooded areas.

"The remaining five districts remain basically unchanged and give continuity to Louisiana's historical districts, while maintaining a majority 'minority district,'" he said.

Political consultant Mike Bayham points out to *The Louisiana Weekly* that North (See Seats, Page 10)

Crisis

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year-old robber, who—it was later found—had killed two others.

The personal loss taught him two things, said Barnes, who has a master's degree in clinical psychology. One, the effect of violence is "perpetual" and two, addressing the mental and emotional health needs of young people is critical to reducing violence and enhancing public safety.

"He was just as much a victim as my son [because] if you have a violent child, and you do nothing to help that violent child, you can't expect him to change," Barnes said of his son's murderer.

Barnes and other community, government and academic experts comprised a panel at a March 26 congressional briefing on the correlation between mental illness and violence. The meeting was convened by Congressman Towns.

"We cannot sit back and allow our young people's lives to be wasted. We must do something about it," the New York Democrat said of his reason for the meeting. "[But] we have a lot to learn because people don't quite know why some of these things take place."

One explanation is mental illness.

According to panelist, Darcy Gruttadaro, director of the Child and Adolescent Action Center at the National Alliance on Mental Illness, research shows that 70 percent of youth involved in state and local juvenile justice systems have a serious mental illness.

Yet, "too many kids are being labeled as bad, lazy and

dumb," she said.

In terms of behavioral problems, Dr. Westley Clark, director of the Department of Health and Human Services' Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, said adolescents are already given to impulse behaviors such as violence and drug abuse due to their level of development.

But Clark and others agreed that when children are steeped in a culture and environment of violence—as they tend to be in urban communities—those behaviors can become endemic.

"Violence is a disease," said Ronald Moten of the District-based advocacy group, Peaceaholics. "What we see every day in our urban communities is countless youth who have been subject to violence; [or] have siblings who were victims of violence—often homicide—more often become violent, deal with depression, become drug addicts or are bipolar [and] do not receive treatment until they perpetrate a violent crime themselves."

Referring to the well-publicized accounts of violence at Columbine High School and Virginia Tech, Moten pointed out the counseling and other services they received.

"Now visualize that the high-risk youth we see who witness these vicious and heinous crimes, their loved ones and family maimed on a daily basis yet, they have virtually nothing to help them heal from such trauma... So what you have is a community that is desensitized and violence continues to be perpetrated," Moten said.

Given those markers,

Barnes said, violence is both "predictable and preventable" but politicians tend to "react to" rather than "prevent" violence.

"None of these people just got up one day and said, 'I'm going to kill somebody.' There were signs all along. And what do we do? We sit back and let them do it," he said.

"...Most politicians want sound-bite and photo op opportunities; they really don't want to deal with this issue because it takes time and effort."

And the easy way out for many officials, Clark said, and especially in cases involving African-American and Latino youth, is to lock them up.

"Diversion programs are going to Whites and incarceration programs are going to minorities," he said.

According to testimony submitted by NAMI's Gruttadaro, youth of color represent two-thirds of the juvenile justice population. And, while many of them have untreated mental illness, "youth with mental illness in African-American and Latino communities receive less mental health care."

Many children of color are also misdiagnosed and placed on drugs like Ritalin when counseling would have worked just as well.

"How many children are labeled as [having a] learning disability and ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) when it's not a learning disability at all but post-traumatic stress disorder?" Barnes said. "In fact... instead of calling it post-traumatic stress disorder, we should call it chronic trau-

matic stress disorder because 'post' means it's over when these children have to deal with (trauma) on a daily basis."

All the panelists agreed solving youth violence must involve a comprehensive approach that involves community and government agencies and addresses both mental/emotional problems and social ills like poor education, little access to health care, lack of family planning and life skills development, slow community progress and more.

That's the approach offered by HR 1303, the CAN DO Act (Communities in Action Neighborhood Defense and Opportunity Act of

2009), which was introduced this year by Congressman Bobby Rush of Illinois.

To get legislation like that passed, however, we need to "convince our colleagues that if we invest money now, it will save us later," said Towns, a co-sponsor of the measure. "But trying to make the case for that is not easy."

Having more briefings like this one, however, where youths like Maurice Benton can share his story is important, the lawmaker said.

Benton, who lived in the infamous Barry Farms projects, saw tragedy after tragedy: in 2004, one brother was incarcerated for murder; later, another brother killed and then, after Benton was

shot in the stomach, he almost died four times.

"I had to learn to walk, eat and talk all over again," he said of the main incident that led him to eschew a life of violence and pursue a degree at the University of the District of Columbia.

Said Towns, "I was sitting there in the room thinking, 'I wish we had all the appropriators here to hear this story. Because, if they heard this young man's story, they'd give the resources to turn this around....' If you're not close enough to hear the stories, they think there's not a serious problem out here."

Zenitha Prince writes for the *Afro-American Newspapers*.



JOURNALISM SCHOLAR

Bonnie Pennix, president of the Las Vegas Association of Black Journalists, presents Demetrius Pipkin with a \$500 scholarship. A Canyon Springs High School alum, Pipkin attends the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism at Arizona State University.