

# THE LOUISIANA WEEKLY

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Walter Vine, an experienced contractor, used his knowledge to cut through the red tape to get power to his home and others on his street who have returned home. Vine said his uncle a licensed electrician certified the work.

(AP Photo)

## Residents are taking matters into their hands

By Rukmini Callimachi  
AP Writer

NEW ORLEANS (AP) - Tired of waiting in the dark for the lights to come back on, Walter Vine took matters into his own hands: He unscrewed his electrical meter and rigged it to bring power into his flood-damaged home. Vine, a building contractor, broke the law and risked serious injury or death. But like so many others in this hurricane-ravaged city, he figured it was the only way to avoid the red tape and hair-pulling frustration so many have faced in trying to get their electricity restored.

"People cannot possibly do this by the book and stay in the city," said Vine, who lives a block from one of the city's former mayors in the upper-middle-class Broadmoor neighborhood.

Five months after Katrina plunged New Orleans into darkness, roughly 124,000 homes and businesses-or more than 66 percent of the city's structures-still have no electricity, according to the utility, Entergy New Orleans.

The really frustrating part is that since December, power has been restored to 90 percent of the electrical grid-and the street lights are back on in many neighborhoods-yet only one-third of homeowners can draw juice into their homes.

That is largely because the city requires a permit before the utility can reconnect a meter at any home whose wiring was damaged by flooding. Getting that permit from one of the city's few electrical inspectors has been a bureaucratic nightmare involving phone calls, waiting in line at city offices and waiting some more at home.

Late last month, Mayor Ray Nagin suspended

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## The White House knew says Brown

By Lara Jakes Jordan  
AP Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) - Former federal disaster chief Michael Brown testified Friday he notified top White House and Homeland Security offi-

cial on the day Hurricane Katrina roared ashore that "we were realizing our worst nightmare" and New Orleans was seriously flooding.

He dismissed as "just baloney" and "a little disingenuous" claims by agency officials that they didn't

know about the severity of the damage until the next day.

Testifying before a Senate committee, Brown said he agreed with members who characterized him as a scapegoat. "I feel somewhat abandoned," said Brown, who quit under

fire as chief of the Federal Emergency Management Agency just days after the storm ravaged much of the Gulf Coast of the United States.

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## SEEING IS BELIEVING!



Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco, standing, opens the 2006 legislative special session, dedicated to hurricane recovery, Monday, Feb. 6, 2006, with a bus tour of New Orleans, followed by an opening speech at the Ernest L. Morial Convention Center. About 40 percent of the 144-member Legislature boarded the four buses to view the ruined neighborhoods where thousands of homes remain largely untouched since Katrina.

(AP Photo)

## Mayoral candidates lining up: Add Couhig, Foti and Foreman to the list

By Christopher Tidmore  
Political Columnist

The Mayoral field just keeps on growing. In an exclusive, The Louisiana Weekly has learned that Rob Couhig of Zephyrs baseball fame plans to announce for Mayor of New Orleans while reportedly Attorney General Charles Foti waits on a nod from Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu of whether or not Landrieu will enter the race before declaring that he will join the growing list of

candidates.

According to Sources close to Couhig, the politically connected lawyer has begun fund-raising efforts and will jump into the race within the next few days.

Couhig, who most recently ran for the First Congressional seat now occupied by Cong. David Vitter, reportedly will craft himself as a reformist pro-business alternative to the candidates currently in the field. He was head of the Law Firm of Adams & Reese's Governmental

Affairs section for several years and led the recent legal fight in state court to have the Orleans Citywide elections held before the end of April. The election is schedule for April 22, 2006.

A close advisor to Attorney General Foti says, "He (Foti)is waiting for Mitch to decide," before making a decision to run for mayor.

"Charlie would be a strong candidate...If he could run the [Orleans]

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## Historic Treme' parish to be abolished

The archdiocese of New Orleans is abolishing one of the oldest and historic parishes in the City, St. Augustine Parish, in mid-March.

Archbishop Alfred Hughes made the announcement last Thursday. In total, the archdiocese will close seven parishes in parts of New Orleans, St. Bernard and Plaquemine parishes, while consolidating many, as it struggles to keep afloat from the damages caused by Hurricane Katrina and the flooding of the city from the breaches in the levees. It is estimated that the archdiocese faces uninsured losses of \$84 million with nearly a third of the church's 1,200 buildings across the eight civil

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## Ex-judge sentenced to 51 mos.

(AP) - A former state judge who became entwined in a bribery scheme involving bail bonds was sentenced Thursday to four years and three months in federal prison for mail fraud.

Alan Green, who served on the state district court bench in suburban Jefferson Parish until his conviction last year, saw his recommended sentence of 33 to 41 months increased by U.S. District Judge Lance Africk. Green also was fined \$50,000 and told to surrender to federal authorities on March 27.

Africk acted on prosecutors' contentions that Green had lied on the witness stand during his trial and had cut bonds for dan-

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## The Death Of A Neighborhood

By Zenitha Prince  
NNPA Special Correspondent

*Editor's Note: This is the first of an 8-part series of stories about the Gulf Coast and the road to recovery after Hurricane Katrina. This project is a cooperative effort between the National Newspaper Publishers Association and the Baltimore Afro.*

(NNPA) - The air was thick with an oppressive silence and the smell of rot. The streets that once teemed with the play and laughter of children, the industry of mothers and fathers were empty now, reduced to mere dirt tracks. On the sidewalks, a lone boot, a mud-encrusted car, an overturned basketball ring, a red tricycle lay like ominous and mocking reminders of a life now lost. Battered, sometimes mangled houses stood abandoned, forlorn in the

gathering gloom like looming sentinels of a ghost town. 1229 Deslonde Street was Pamela Everage's home, yet on first sight, she could barely recognize it.

"This is my first time back. It's just awful," she said. "Just driving through the city, it looks like a Third World country."

With a hand on her hip, Everage surveyed her neighborhood from the remains of her front lawn. Dressed in white T-shirt, blue jeans, a white bandanna and a pair of sneakers encrusted in black, pungent mud, Everage was the lone smidgen of life on an otherwise dead street.

Then we began to walk.

A slightly rusted sign proclaimed "Beautiful Blocks," an especially unseemly sentiment against the backdrop of decay. A nearby "Dead End" sign seemed much more

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Pamela Everage is dismayed, but hopeful as she returns to her Katrina-battered home on Deslonde Street

Photo by Zenitha Prince





# The death of a neighborhood

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appropriate.

Everage's face was a study of defeat and worry, wreathed in frowns and dominated by a pair of tired-looking eyes. She had not gotten much news about her extended family. She had seen one neighbor and her son at a shelter, who told her that the morning after the hurricane, people had already begun to walk their dogs and clean their yards before the floodwaters began to rise. She wondered if she would ever see them again.

"That family down there, all three of them were in wheelchairs. I think they got out when my sons left," said Everage, pointing out the houses as she spoke.

"That guy over there, he works off shore. He was gone, too. Those two people in that house over there, they're middle and high school teachers.

"The lady here, an administrator at

Charity Hospital-everybody knew each other. People went to high school together, they knew your family."

Having no other idea of her neighbors' fates, Everage read the hieroglyphic markings on the houses, left there by rescue workers to document the dates of their visits and the fates of the inhabitants. A "0" meant no bodies were found, and as Everage surveyed the houses, she breathed a sigh of relief at all the zeros she saw.

Then she came to a house where a single woman lived with her five small children. She looked at the abandoned car mired in the bog of the front yard, then hesitantly raised her eyes to the markings on the wall. The "6" confirmed what she already knew in her heart.

"They didn't make it," she whispered with a shake of her head. "I taught her son how to ride his bike."

Everage also worried about her relatives and friends, who lived on the other side of North Claiborne Avenue between Florida and Caffin Avenues,

a place where, at the time, soldiers were barring people from entering and where, it was rumored, bodies were still being found.

"I know people on the other side and they are people I grew up with and they're not letting you over there," Everage said. "I know a lot of the old people didn't leave. And I'm afraid that a lot of people - my relatives and other people - didn't make it."

Everage, 39, was working on a cruise ship in Hawaii when Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit New Orleans and like many others she observed the devastation of her home on television.

"Everything was crushed and saturated weeks ago and then the second storm hit and I'm watching [television] and saying, 'That's my neighborhood,'" she said. And then they said the lower Ninth Ward got hit the worst. And I'm thinking, 'The levee that broke is right where I live.'"

Everage lived in a largely African-American community best known for producing cultural icons like

Antonine "Fats" Domino Jr., the legendary rock-and-roll star and Kalamu ya Salaam, a dramatist, fiction writer and prolific poet.

Like a small city within a city, the Lower Ninth Ward is bounded by the Southern Railway railroad and Florida Avenue Canal to the north, the St. Bernard Parish line to the east, St. Claude Avenue to the south and the Industrial Canal to the west, which effectively isolates the enclave from the rest of New Orleans.

Wrested from the wilds of a cypress swamp by poor African-Americans and immigrant laborers from Ireland, Italy and Germany, the Ward was among the last of the city's neighborhoods to be developed. And while in recent times, quaint early 20th Century homes were mingled with shrines of modern life such as barber and beauty shops, small businesses, gasoline stations, eateries, 'washetarias,' a surfeit of churches and the ubiquitous corner store, more than 36 percent of its residents live under the poverty line.

Many attribute the ward's slow eco-

nomie growth to the flood that ran longtime commercial and industrial businesses and residents out of the neighborhood when Hurricane Betsy devastated the city in 1965.

Now, again, many wonder about the future of the neighborhood that bore the worst of Hurricanes Hurricane and Rita with most of its 5,601 housing units destroyed and its nearly 14,000 residents scattered, homeless or dead.

Everage felt relief that at least her children were not counted among the latter.

"I spoke to my son two days before the storm and I told him, I got a feeling this storm will really hit so go ahead and take a backpack, go ahead and get out," Everage recalled.

For days, her son traveled from town to town trying to evade the reach of the storm until he was finally able to board a Greyhound bus to Virginia, where his sister attended college. As she took in the utter ruin of the neighborhood, Everage was glad she had decided not to bring him back.

In her home the situation was equally grim. Foot-high black sludge; waterlogged, capsized furniture and

the putrid scent of mould hampered her efforts to salvage mementos of her family's life. And in the end, there was not a lot to save.

"I had a lot of nice paintings on the wall, all my paintings are gone," as well as a computer and other hard-earned items, she said.

Her children's diplomas, some of their trophies, her grandfather's gramophone and her daughter's rusted trumpet were all that was left of years of living.

"I don't think I know what to feel," Everage said.

But as Everage continued to think about her loss and the loss of her neighbors, many of whom did not have renters' insurance, she knew she could not come back and she became angry.

"We can't come back. The problem's been the levee for 25 years since 1964. Same stuff happened: a lot of people lost their houses and their lives. It's like déjà vu," Everage said, then added, "There's got to be charges against somebody-federal government, state-somebody has got to be held accountable."

# Residents

Continued from Page 1

the rule that said all electrical work done by contractors needs approval from a city inspector. Now, any state-licensed electrician can certify the work.

Greg Meffert, one of two deputy mayors, could not say how many residents have taken matters into their own hands, but acknowledged the practice appears to be widespread.

The Associated Press interviewed six people who restored power to their homes on their own. Two of them showed the AP how it is done.

"It's better than sitting in the dark," said Jeff Bennett, 40, who broke a small lock on his Entergy electric meter, unscrewed the glass bubble and popped off two pieces of plastic that locked the current out of the house. It was that simple.

Bennett is living in a trailer home, parked alongside his gutted house. The trailer is powered by an orange extension cord running to a socket inside his house.

For weeks after he rigged his meter, Bennett would wake up and hurry out in his boxer shorts in the morning chill to unplug the cord, in case the inspector showed up. In December, two months after he turned the power on himself, the inspector finally arrived.

"We weren't supposed to do it. But everybody is so fed up," said retiree David Snyder, 74, who lives in a pink stucco house. An electrician tipped him off to how to fix the meter to accept power.

The meter-riggers are not getting the electricity for free. "Even if a customer has illegally connected himself, the meter is still spinning and we can still get a read on their usage," said Entergy spokesman Chanel Lagarde.

Katrina flooded 11 of the city's 18 electrical substations, causing an estimated \$275 million in damage to New Orleans' utility infrastructure, Lagarde said.

Within weeks, residents began returning to the city, gutting their houses and replacing their flooded wiring. But once it came time to have the electrical panel inspected, they found there were only six city inspectors charged with issuing permits for the thousands of rewired houses.

"We can't waive the inspection because unfortunately the liability would be too great," said Clinton Vince, an attorney who advises the City Council's utilities committee. "The electrical work needs to be inspected because if the wire is not installed properly, it could cause serious safety problems-including loss of life."

Meffert, the deputy mayor, said the city tried to get money from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to hire more inspectors. But FEMA spokeswoman Nicol Andrews said FEMA money cannot be used to pay a City Hall employee's salary.

While concerned about the illegal hookups, Meffert said, the city will not prosecute homeowners. "I can't blame them," he said. "These are extraordinary times."

Vine has had his lights on illegally since Nov. 11, the same day he applied for a permit. An electrical inspector has yet to show, but the utility bills never stopped coming.

"I told my wife, 'Pay it,'" Vine said. "The last thing I want is for them to come and put a real lock on my meter."



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# Top 10 Education questions for Mayoral and City Council candidates...

By Dr. Andre Perry  
Contributing Columnist

Are you ready for one of the most anticipated elections in recent history? The Mayoral and City Council elections that were once scheduled for February 4 are now scheduled for April 22 and May 20. As the two parties scramble to locate their constituents throughout Louisiana and other states, candidates must prepare their platforms for whoever will listen.

Education issues in elections are as ubiquitous as healthcare, taxes, and security. Many folks, candidates included, will insincerely declare that education does not fall within the jurisdiction of the Mayor or City Council. Structurally, educational matters do fall on the shoulders of the state and elected local board, albeit the current board controls 20 of the over 100 public schools in the Parish. However, those with a keen interest in the politics of education, know that schools and families reside in a city context, and that power and influence are not limited to rigid lines of governmental dominion.

To ensure that we elect qualified candidates, citizens should be armed with questions that measure their position on matters within the realm of their influence. Here is a list of ten that attempt get at candidates' plans, visions, and values on various educational topics.

**10. What is your plan to rebuild the city's intellectual infrastructure, which includes local libraries, museums, and cultural centers?** Yes, most of our learning occurs outside of the classroom. The overall community's health is somewhat contingent upon the richness of the city's broader educational environment.

**9. Where in your list of priorities do you place parks and recreational facilities in the Parish's rebuilding efforts?** All work and no play, makes for an idle, overweight, stressed out ten year-old. Most of our learning occurs in peer-to-peer environments outside of curricular settings. Adolescents can practice ball in summer league programs or hangout under the bridge.

**8. What role should the city's police department play in providing security for schools?** Should we have armed guards in and around school buildings? Do police officers provide security or do metal detectors encourage violent attitudes and militarism?

**7. If the city eventually claims razed land near public colleges and universities, should those institutions be given first access to it?** Pending those who were displaced have access to these institutions (a big "if"), this strategy can benefit many parties.

**6. How should the city's housing plans interface with the rebuilding of public schools?** The aspiration of diverse schools is somewhat dependent on diverse communities. However, a "not in my backyard" campaign may curb these dreamy aims.

**5. How will you encourage parents to send their children to school on its official first day?** Thousands of parents opt to send their child to school on the day after Labor Day, two weeks after the official start date.

**4. Do you support an elected or appointed school board?** This question may gauge the candidate's belief of the extent of the current board's ineffectiveness. However, it also gets at candidates' position on accountability, voting rights, centralization, decentralization, and other

important principles that transcend education.

**3. Do you view state or mayoral takeover as an appropriate step in school improvement?** Nagin considered this action. Why not seek his advice?

**2. Should we place G.P.A. requirements on high school band members' participation in Mardi Gras? If so, what should they be?** Have candidates deal with the tension between high educational standards and tradition. Is there a conflict between artistic success and conventional measures of academic achievement found on many standardized tests?

**1. Should public schools provide pregnancy tests and birth control pills?** For a moment, remove federal and state guidelines around this matter. Ask this question rhetorically. However, a few public schools possessed clinics in their buildings that could have provided these services if directed. Nevertheless, candidates must demonstrate how they will use city resources to support stable learning environments in schools.

Public schools desperately need healthcare and counseling assistance. School/healthcare debates in particular often are rife with political, scientific, and religious tensions. This question should poke at all of these.

There you have it. You are now equipped grill your candidates and get to the truth of their educational values. Be advised they may say, "I won't deal with such matters." However when in office, they most certainly will.

The last day to register to vote is March 22. There are presently three ways to vote in the New Orleans Municipal Elections: (1) absentee by mail ballot, which begins April 10 and ends April 15 at 4:30 PM. (2) early voting in person in the Registrar of Voters office six to twelve days before an election, and (3) in person at the polling place on Election Day April 22. You can learn more about the election on the State's website, <http://www.sec.state.la.us/elections/elections-index.htm>, or you can call on the toll free information line at 1-877-286-6931.



PERRY

# Bill would allow N.O. voters to cast ballots in Baton Rouge, Lafayette

(AP) - New Orleans evacuees could vote for mayor, city council and other offices this spring in Baton Rouge, Lafayette and other Louisiana metropolitan areas under a bill that awaits debate in the Senate.

New Orleans voters would cast those ballots during the early voting or absentee voting period, which runs April 10 to April 15. The New Orleans municipal election is set for April 22.

The regional voting plan is one of two proposals advancing in the Legislature to make it easier for thousands of Hurricane Katrina evacuees to participate in the New Orleans elections.

The other proposal-advanced Wednesday by House and Senate committees-would allow more people who registered to vote by mail to cast absentee ballots. Under current law, those who register to vote by mail have to vote in person the first time to prove their identity. That provision would be lifted until July 16.

The Senate and Governmental Affairs Committee approved the legislation that would allow New Orleans voters to cast ballots outside the parish and closer to their temporary homes in other parts of the state or other states such as Texas.

The bill by Sen. Derrick Shepherd, D-Marrero, originally would have

allowed evacuees to go to any registrar of voters' office in Louisiana during the early voting period. But Secretary of State Al Ater said that would be "an awesome and expensive task, which wouldn't produce the results for the dollars invested."

Ater suggested the changes that would create regional voting centers in registrars' offices in parishes with populations of 104,000 or more. That means evacuees could go to East Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Terrebonne, Jefferson, Calcasieu, Caddo, Rapides and Ouachita registrar's offices. The panel adopted Ater's recommendation, then approved the measure.

# House agrees to create recovery authority in law

BATON ROUGE (AP) — The House agreed Thursday to formally make Governor Kathleen Blanco's hurricane recovery commission a state agency, but not before requiring more legislative eyes review the commission's reconstruction plans.

Blanco created the Louisiana Recovery Authority in October to develop a statewide roadmap for rebuilding after hurricanes Katrina

and Rita, but she needs legislative backing to continue its operations beyond the one year allowed by her executive order.

Lawmakers have worried publicly that the LRA would make the Legislature only a rubber stamp for billion-dollar spending plans developed for hurricane recovery. The House-backed version of the bill spells out that the LRA is an advisory board, not the director of budget plans.

ry board, not the director of budget plans.

Though the legislative budget committee currently has to approve LRA-backed spending plans, lawmakers want to make sure they get to weigh in on the use of at least \$7.7 billion in federal aid that the recovery authority is drawing up plans to spend.

# Three cases of meningitis confirmed around Lafayette

LAFAYETTE (AP)— Three cases of meningitis, one fatal and all involving current or former students at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, have been confirmed, public health officials say.

The disease is suspected in the Thursday death of a person who had

attended the university last semester, and two other cases were reported in current university students, ULL spokeswoman Julie Simon-Dronet said.

Since the disease is contagious, Simon-Dronet said university and public health officials are working

to identify people who had close contact with the three victims.

The university learned of the first case early Thursday and hospitals reported the other two cases later in the day, Simon-Dronet said.

Authorities have not determined whether the three cases are linked.

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Guest Editorials

# Unemployment and uninsurance

By Peter Rost  
Guest Columnist

The U.S. Department of Labor claims we have an unemployment rate of 4.9%. According to "the Economist, however, the true unemployment rate in the U.S. is over 8%, or 12.6 million Americans. The difference is due to the fact that the U.S. Government doesn't count people as unemployed after six months without a job.

I recently joined the ranks of our many unemployed citizens. The termination of my employment as a Vice President at Pfizer was subject to intense media interest, partly due to the fact that Pfizer notified the press before they informed me.

Contrary to press reports, however, I have received no severance payments and for the first time in my life I am eligible for unemployment benefits; \$13,078. At this annual income level my family of four would actually fall below the federal poverty level; quite a difference from a year ago when my salary was over half a million.

I'm also uninsured for the first time in my life and I have to pay the full price for drugs, just like 67 million other uninsured Americans. Contrary to many others, however, I do have a choice. In accordance with federal COBRA law, I was offered the opportunity to continue my health care coverage for 18 months. There was only one hitch: I had to pay \$15,269 per year to receive this benefit. I decided that with an income of \$13,078 that didn't make sense.

Clearly the system we have today isn't just broke. The system is utterly and completely sick and our weakest citizens are paying the price, every day. And while I have belatedly been forced to share some of the experiences of our poor, uninsured, and unemployed, my situation doesn't even start to compare with people with no resources, no voice, nowhere to go and no one who listens to them. For those citizens we have something that's called the Government; a government that is supposed to look out for the people who can't look out for themselves, but instead focuses on "pay to play money."

Today's system is built on greed. Greed is defined as an excessive desire to acquire or possess more than someone needs or deserves. Greed is not a corporate executive who builds an organization such as Microsoft, creates a lot of jobs, and happens to get rich. Greed is to become CEO for a drug company such as Pfizer, be responsible for a stock price drop of 40% over his five year tenure, twice as much as the AMEX Pharmaceutical Index, secure a \$100 million retirement package while firing 16,385 Pharmacia and Pfizer employees, and get a 72% pay increase to \$16.6 million as his reward.

According to the New York Times average worker pay has remained flat since 1990 at around \$27,000, after adjusting for inflation, while CEO compensation has quadrupled, from \$2.82 million to \$11.8 million. Our CEO's are in a position in which they can basically use public companies as personal piggy banks. And this is perfectly legal as long as they get someone else to sign their check. Meanwhile, the federal minimum wage has remained at \$5.15 an hour since September 1, 1997. In fact, after adjusting for inflation, the value of the minimum wage is at its second lowest level since 1955.

At the same time, the pharmaceutical industry spends over \$100 million on lobbying activities to stop lower drug prices, according to the Center for Public Integrity. There are 1,274 registered pharmaceutical lobbyists in Washington, D.C. and during the 2004 election cycle, the drug industry contributed \$1 million to President Bush. For an industry that makes \$500 billion on a global basis, spending one million on a president or \$100 million on lobbying is pocket change.

This money was well spent. It stopped legalized import of cheaper drugs and instead we got a new Medicare drug program. This \$720 billion law includes \$139 billion in profits to drug manufacturers and \$46 billion in subsidies to HMOs and private insurance plans. The program has been such a disaster for our poor that at least twenty-four states have enacted emergency measures to ensure access to medications in the last couple of weeks. That's what a million dollars buys in Washington.

So how could this happen? The answer is simple. The American democracy has been stolen by our new class of Robber Barons - the CEO's of our big corporations. A political system dependent on charity from rich men in hand-tailored suits with \$100 million retirement packages is no democracy. It is a kleptocracy. It is not what our founding fathers envisioned.

But we have the power to change this; to free our corporations from sticky-fingered CEO's, to free our elected representatives from "pay to play money and to free our people from all these tyrants. We have the power to be free, at last.

*Peter Rost, M.D., is a former Vice President for the drug company Pfizer. He first became well known in 2004 when he started to speak out in favor of reimportation of drugs and lower drug prices.*

# 'Throw me something, Mister'

By Lance Hill  
Guest Columnist

I attended the second line parade in New Orleans a few weeks ago that was unfortunately marred by a shooting at the end. The shooting overshadowed a much bigger story. By the time the second line had turned down Orleans Avenue off of Claiborne, there were at least 10,000 people marching in the street, a solid mass of people—black people—on Claiborne to Broadway. Near the end of the march they were chanting "we're back," "we're back." A cultural event had been turned into a political protest—in quintessentially New Orleans style. Contrast this outpouring to the poor turnout for recent traditional street protests staged in support of levees (100 people showed up for the protest at the Army Corp). What the second line parade did was what every successful social and religious movement in the past has done: adapt their message to the cultural traditions of a community.

We need to make visible the frustration, anger, and sense of abandonment that has immobilized New Orleans. I spoke at an event the other day and someone asked for a show of hands of people who had seen the "devastation." Most raised their hands. I thought to myself, no you have not seen the devastation. All you have seen is empty houses. The real devastation is in the hearts of hundreds of thousands of people who lost everything and are far removed from family and community. Day by day they are losing hope. One of the ironies of Katrina is that the evacuation has made poverty and the human pain virtually invisible. We have become victims of the television age in which images dominate content. Television shows pictures of empty houses and then cuts away to images of displaced people living well-fed and comfortably in Houston. Bus seldom does the public see the victim on the foundation slab waiting for the mythical FEMA trailer. They don't see the fear of single mothers contemplating what will happen when the FEMA rent runs out and her children have no food or shelter. This is why Bush can dither on his commitment to build a new levee system; he is being asked to protect empty houses, not people. Put families in these empty houses, as the Vietnamese community has done in New Orleans East, and the moral onus will be on Bush to protect people.

We need to surface the pain, suffering, and frustration of Katrina victims for the public to see. What do we want the world to see on Mardi Gras day? Happy, well-fed people having a good time? Fine. But we also should let them see a united mass movement of tens of thousands of determined people from all walks of life who believe the federal government has forsaken them. We can do both. I suggest that after the Rex parade, the crowds lining the streets fall in behind in a massive second line with children, costumes, wagons, and protest signs. The march route would loop around Canal and end at the Federal Building where we would stage a protest—no leaders, no speeches, just people taking a stand before the world. To give voice to those still displaced who deserve to come home, people could bring signs that have the names of people who want to come home, e.g. "My Name is Shirley Breaux and I want to come home to New Orleans" (people could post their names on a web site). It would be a beautiful gesture and show the country we know how to both party and politic. All you need is two feet or a few wheels. And you'd still have time to catch the truck parades. This is New Orleans, after all.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### New voting poll locations have potential to cause problems

There are big potential problems with many of the new polling locations chosen by the current Clerk of Court and the City Council. Many of the established polling locations in "dry" or un-flooded parts of the city have been relocated to over-crowded polling locations in "flooded" areas, in many cases miles from their original, long-established traditional locations.

All six poll locations in the French Quarter, the two polling locations for the Tremé neighborhood, as well as the poll location for most of the Warehouse District, have been moved from their traditional, undamaged polling places to a new location at 225 South Broad Street, which is an old firehouse in a flooded area. This area has very little parking, almost no lighting after dark, and is in a relatively small building that is expected to house a combined total of 22 voting precincts on Election Day. We should probably also expect the 60-plus poll commissioners to take what little parking is available nearby, and we will likely have voters from these precincts walking many blocks from whatever parking is available nearby.

The choices made by the Clerk and the City Council here are very questionable and should be changed immediately - as

we have over 70 days available to find alternative locations, or to return the poll locations to their well-established, undamaged locations. Inquiries made to the responsible officials regarding this potentially huge problem have been met with a lack of satisfaction to say the least. Fatigue in dealing with the polling location responsibilities, as well as a total misunderstanding of the Voting Rights Act, led certain City Council staff to state that they did not believe any adjustments could be made to our polling locations for the April 22, 2006 election, despite the fact that other parishes with April 1, 2006 election dates still have yet to finish choosing their respective locations. Other council members' actions and statements, too lengthy to recount here, give suspicion to less innocent motives in the relocation of the polling locations for the precincts listed above.

Recent conversations with representatives of the U.S. Department of Justice - who oversee changes in polling locations and other election procedures - have been encouraging. The problem can be solved if you and other citizens contact the Department of Justice with your concerns and comments about this problem, which then will allow them to

act to force a quick review and correction of this problem. You should act now to contact the responsible officials listed below.

Aaron Silverman, Dept. of Justice, Tel.: (800) 253-3931, extension 53963; Fax.: (202) 616-2386

Council Member Jay Batt, District "A" - Tel: (504) 658-1010

Council Member Rene Gill Pratt, District "B" - Tel: (504) 658-1020

Council Member Jacqueline Clarkson, District "C" - Tel: (504) 658-1030

Having these, and future polling relocation choices, made in a more sensible and practical manner are important to allow maximum access and voter participation. This is an effort worth making, so please take the time to make your concerns known.

- Nick Varrecchio  
Chairman

Regular Democratic Organization

### We're all in this together

I live in New Orleans east and not unlike many others who have suffered a great loss of direction in our lives. It's a great tragedy that we're enduring and will take a strong person of body and soul to come thru this.

I lost my business and all source of income, but I'm writing to say that we as individuals and as a group of people must not give up. We must join together as community and make what seems as grave situation better.

I'm coming back home to reopen my

business along with my partner and associates. My business was the Sears Authorized Dealers Store located in the Eastlake Shopping Center, the current owner of Eastlake will not redevelop the shopping center so we're having to move to a new location.

It will take the small business owners which is the backbone of most metropolitan city to comeback and reestablish themselves but it will take the community to support them.

- Walter Wilson Jr.

### HIV/AIDS Awareness

As we observe National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, there are certainly reasons to be concerned about the impact of HIV on African Americans. African Americans are more heavily impacted by HIV than any other racial or ethnic group, and HIV remains a serious health threat to African-American communities across the United States.

Blacks account for nearly half of the roughly one million Americans estimated to be living with HIV. In 2004, black women were nearly 20 times more likely than white women to be diagnosed with HIV, and black men were more than six times as likely as white men to be diagnosed. Despite 25 years of scientific and programmatic advances that have dramatically reduced HIV-related disease and death, HIV remains a leading cause of death for African Americans. And far too many African Americans with HIV do not even know they are infected because they have never been tested or have not been tested recently.

At the same time, there are some reasons for hope. A new CDC analysis of data from 33 states shows that the annual rate of new HIV diagnoses fell significantly among both black women and men between 2001 and 2004. But among black

men who have sex with men - the most heavily affected population in the U.S. - diagnoses between 2001 and 2004 remained roughly stable.

Accelerating progress in HIV and AIDS prevention will require us to expand the reach of prevention, testing, and care for all African-Americans at risk. We must scale up the use of proven approaches, while encouraging innovation and the search for new solutions. We must also work together to reduce the burden of other sexually transmitted diseases, which also disproportionately affect African Americans and can increase the risk of HIV transmission. And we must tackle the cultural and personal challenges that place African Americans at risk, from poverty and racism to lack of access to testing and care. Much work is underway, but even more remains to be done.

Ending the black HIV epidemic in America is a daunting challenge, but one that we can meet. National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day reminds us that we must remain committed every day of the year to making HIV and its devastating impact a thing of the past.

- Dr. Kevin Fenton  
NCHSTP Director

### The Fair Act is indeed fair

This week the Senate will have an extraordinary opportunity to break new ground for veterans by passing the Fairness in Asbestos Injury Resolution (FAIR) Act.

Many veterans encountered asbestos while in the military and have contracted potentially fatal diseases as a result. Veterans have never been able to sue the federal government (their employer at the time of the exposure) in court for this exposure because federal law forbids them from doing so.

The FAIR Act would remove the asbestos issue from the courts and allow victims - including veterans - to receive compensation from a victims' trust fund.

Sick applicants would be able to promptly receive just compensation, an option that most sick veterans don't currently have in today's broken down asbestos litigation system.

With the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, our Senators Mary Landrieu and David Vitter will undoubtedly cast scores of votes on issues important to the military and our soldiers. I urge them to honor our veterans and join more than a dozen national veterans' organizations and vote "Yes" for the FAIR Act.

- Tom Kijak  
State Commander  
Louisiana Department of the Veterans of Foreign Wars

### Unity is the key

Re: "The Chocolate City and Vanilla Hypocrisy," by Min. J. Kojo Livingston, Contributing Columnist, in the January 30, 2006 issue

I agree with everything said. I was living in the 9th ward when Hurricane Betsy came and all of the whites on Tennessee sold their homes to blacks and they moved to who knows where.

We need to stop fighting each other and try to figure out what is going on with FEMA and why Blacks are having so much trouble getting assistance and how we are being treated.

I loved my life before Katrina but I have to accept what has been dealt to me.

- Barbara Sumler

### How can people be so hateful?

Re: "Pat Robertson, Ariel Sharon and Hugo Chavez" Op-Ed by Bill Fletcher Jr., NNPA Columnist, from the January 30, 2006 issue  
Pat Robertson ought to be ashamed, I am

in shock! how can so-called people of God be so hateful? I hope Pat Robertson does not suffer from any ailment!!

- Cheryl Wilson

EDITORIALS & OPINIONS

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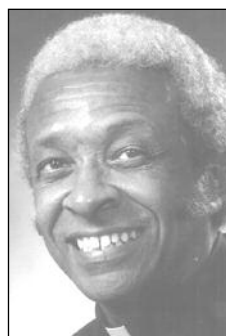
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# Is the law always the law?



LEDoux

By Fr. Jerome LeDoux  
Contributing Columnist

Donald Pirone thought he was being considerate, helpful, Godly, downright civilized when he sold a \$1.75 subway token to a rider who was having trouble with a token vending machine. To his great surprise and shock, he was immediately approached by a transit police officer and clamped with a pair of handcuffs.

"The law is the law," observed transit authority spokeswoman Jocelyn Baker when challenged in an interview, even though she acknowledged that Pirone had not made a profit since he sold the token at face value. The arresting officer who witnessed Pirone selling the token simply "acted within the law," she added.

"What you've got to keep in mind," she continued, "is that fare abuse is a chronic problem. It costs the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) millions of dollars every year. There are customer service phones for people who are having trouble getting tokens out of the machine."

Under a 1992 state law that bars passengers from selling Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority tokens, the transit police officer slapped the handcuffs on Pirone without bothering to give him a warning about the law. Despite the fact that the law is the law, this triggers a slew of questions about extenuating circumstances vis-à-vis the law.

First of all, the millions of dollars lost by MARTA each year have nothing to do with a gentlemanly selling of a \$1.75 subway token to a rider unable to tame a token machine. This is akin to arresting a football ticket scalper who has just recovered the face value of his money, while the big-time scalpers are getting away with grand larceny.

Penny ante enforcement of minor traffic infractions siphons the police away from major criminal acts which seriously impact individuals and people at large. Granted, some minor traffic infractions, such as running stop signs and red lights, can be quite dangerous, even deadly. Yes, some "minor" violations should be regarded as serious.

To save manpower and to document traffic light violations accurately, video cameras are coming into vogue in a number of cities. This is truly a case where the law is the law whose violation is often very tempting but can easily end up in injury and death.

On the other hand, there are so many confrontations and suits involved in parking violations, especially with meter buffaloes (maids), that the situation is often ridiculous. The horror stories go on forever, even documenting city No Parking sign switching from one side of the street to the other within hours of the same day.

Surely, the law is the law, but not all laws are created equal. Selling tokens and scalping tickets are, at worst, victimless crimes wherein the supposed victim is complicit in whatever is going down. However, not even all victimless crimes are created equal, and that brings about huge controversies concerning things like prostitution.

COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) was founded by Margo St. James in 1973 to work for the repeal of the prostitution laws and an end to the social stigma associated with sexual work. The organization is also a service provider to thousands of prostitutes. We can still hear the transit authority's spokeswoman mumbling, "The law is the law."

It is a centuries-old discussion whether the communities of these United States would be better served by legalizing the world's oldest profession. There are many who think outlawing prostitution is having negative effects similar to those of Prohibition. Also, prostitution laws hit the Janes, not the Johns, reducing the law to a half-joke.

While law enforcers in some areas focus on smaller laws, hardened criminals or those apprentices in training are engaged in community-threatening activities such as theft, shakedowns, trafficking in drugs and racketeering of every kind. In effect, some laws, which seem to exist for the moral and physical well-being of the community, do not.

Thus, January 16, 1920 kicked off the Roaring Twenties with the fateful enactment of the astounding Eighteenth Amendment, the National Prohibition Act, or the Volstead Act. This prohibited all importing, exporting, selling and manufacturing of intoxicating liquor; that is, anything with an alcoholic content of more than 0.5 percent.

Of course, Prohibition did not include alcohol used for medicinal or sacramental purposes. We all know now that this was a terribly bad law, spawning Al Capone and the worst of trafficking and racketeering. Somehow, in this case the law was not the law.

It is hard to fathom that Prohibition, the so-called "noble experiment", was undertaken to reduce the consumption of alcohol as well as crime, corruption, social problems, tax burdens from prisons and poorhouses, and to improve health and hygiene. Unfortunately, the next unlucky 13 years accomplished the opposite of all these goals.

The tragedies of Prohibition were relieved only by the comedic antics of people who hid liquor in hip flasks, false books, hollow canes and other devices. Replacing saloons were illegal speak-easies, over 100,000 of which were in New York alone. Crimes of every sort skyrocketed at alarming rates among bootleggers and common folk alike.

Most people at large appear to be opportunists bent on tap-dancing around the law whenever easy, convenient and especially undetectable. Before the cell phone, many circumvented the price of collect calls by saying: "Call yourself when you get there."

There is a rogue-like delight for many people in "beating the system," in finding ways to cheat without getting caught. This explains in part, in addition to impatience, why so few people are content to set their cruise control on the highway speed limit and settle down to a leisurely trip to whatever destination they may have.

This gambling tendency may also explain partially the moth-to-light attraction of casinos, even in large numbers of churchgoing and upstanding people. The spillover goes into tax evasion through cash payments and other forms of deception. Tokens, anyone?



CURRY

# Pulling a 'reverse Robin Hood' on the poor

By George E. Curry  
NNPA Columnist

Both Congress and President Bush have come up with their budget proposals and both sets of figures do the same thing - cut domestic programs that would assist the poor while extending

tax cuts to rich people who need them the least. In other words, they are pulling a reverse Robin Hood by taking from the needy and giving to the greedy.

This is done under the guise that the federal government has gone on a "spending spree" and that domestic programs are the culprit. That might make for good propaganda, but it is far from the truth.

"Overall funding for defense, homeland security, and international affairs (which includes funding for post-war operations and reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan) rose from 3.4 percent of the GDP [Gross Domestic Product] in 2001 to 4.2 of GDP in 2006," an analysis by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities notes. "By contrast ...funding for domestic discretionary programs shrank during this period, declining from 3.4 percent of GDP in 2002 to 3.1 percent in 2006."

Bush is taking from heat, even from some moderate Republicans, for mismanaging the federal deficit.

When he took office, Bush inherited a record \$236 billion surplus. By 2000, a \$158 billion deficit had developed and the White House estimates that this year, the figure will reach \$400 billion.

Some of the deficits can be attributed to Bush's decision to wage war in Iraq and Afghanistan. To a much lesser degree, there was also the unexpected federal expenditures associated with Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. But a large - and avoidable - reason the federal

government is sinking deeper into the hole is because Congress and the Bush administration have enacted a series of tax cuts that favor the wealthy.

The president defends the tax cuts, the first to be enacted by a U.S. president during wartime.

"American families all across this country have benefited from the tax cuts on dividends and capital gains," he said in a Jan. 6 speech to the Economic Club of Chicago. "Half of American households - that's more than 50 million households - now have some investment in the stock market."

As is often the case with politicians, it's what is not said that you'd better examine.

"What this statistic ignores, however, is that nearly two-fifths of this stock is held in retirement accounts, such as 401 (k)s and IRAs," the Center on Budget and Priorities points out. "This distinction is crucial, because capital gains and dividend income accruing inside these retirement accounts are not subject to taxation, and thus would not receive a tax benefit from the reduction in the tax rates on capital gains and dividend income."

So what's the real deal?

More than half - 54 percent - of all capital gains and dividend income go to the 0.2 percent of households with annual incomes of more than \$1 million. By contrast, only 4 percent of this income reaches the 64 percent of households that have annual incomes of less than \$50,000, according to the Center.

An analysis by the Urban Institute-Brookings Institution Tax Policy Center shows that tax legislation that has gone in effect since 2001 has exacerbated the gap between rich and poor. The middle fifth of households received an average after-tax reduction of \$742 or 2.6 percent. Households with annual incomes of more than \$1 million received an average reduction of

\$103,000 or 5.4 percent, more than double the rate for middle-class families.

Yet, Bush brags that "tax cuts are working" by reinvigorating the economy.

The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office disagrees. It observes: "...increases [in the revenue projections] occur mainly because of a rise in projected GDP, which derives from higher prices in the economy, not real economic activity."

Finally, the wealthiest sector of the U.S. population is being showered with favoritism.

"Some of the tax cuts that were enacted in 2001 are still being phased in," stated the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. "These taxes are heavily tilted to those at the top of the income scale. These tax cuts include the elimination of the tax on the nation's largest estates, as well as two tax cuts that started to take effect on January 1, 2006 and will go almost entirely to high-income households."

"The Tax Policy Center reports that 97 percent of the tax cuts from these two measures will go to people with incomes above \$200,000. As a result, the tax cuts ultimately will be even more skewed toward high-income households than they were in 2005."

As usual, that leaves poor and middle-class citizens out in the cold.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com. To contact Curry or to book him for a speaking engagement, go to his Web site, www.georgecurry.com.



EDELMAN

# Remembering Coretta Scott King

By Marian Wright Edelman  
NNPA Columnist

Dignified, elegant, refined, courageous, strong. For more than 50 years these words were used to describe Coretta

Scott King-human rights and peace activist, the wife and partner of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the "First Lady of the Civil Rights Movement." We are hearing them one more time as people around the world mourn her passing. Coretta Scott King was a good, strong woman and keeper of the dream that was Dr. King's and America's dream. She stood by his side through thick and thin and fought tirelessly to keep his legacy alive.

Coretta King said that even as a child, she felt she was going to lead an extraordinary life. Many people might not have expected that from a little Black girl who grew up in very rural Alabama during the Depression, picking cotton and walking several miles each way every day to attend a segregated one-room school. But from the start, she was exceptional. She attended a semi-private high school in Marion, Ala., where she, a gifted young musician, was able to study piano and voice and graduated valedictorian of her class. She got a chance to leave the segregated South when she won a scholarship to join her older sister as one of the few Black students at Antioch College in Ohio.

Coretta King was already politically active. She joined the college's NAACP chapter and Race Relations and Civil Liberties committees, and was a delegate to the founding convention

of the Young Progressives organization. She first majored in early education but was inspired to change her plans after she sang on a program with Paul Robeson at an NAACP event. He encouraged her to study voice full-time and she dreamed of having a career like his that combined music performance with social activism. After college she pursued that dream with a scholarship to the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, where a friend set her up on a date with a theology doctoral student at Boston University named Martin Luther King, Jr.

Coretta King wrote that at first she was reluctant to get married because she knew it would change her career dreams. As it turned out, of course, becoming that young minister's wife gave her the opportunity to serve on an entirely different national and world stage. Less than three years into their marriage, Dr. King was thrust into the national spotlight with the Montgomery bus boycott. Her own activism and deep commitment to civil rights made her an ideal partner as he became the international symbol for the Civil Rights Movement. She often took on a behind-the-scenes role, staying at home with their four children while Dr. King traveled as a public leader. But in the most important battles of the Civil Rights Movement, she was always right by her husband's side.

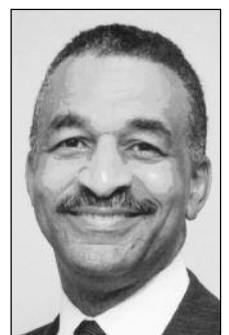
After Dr. King's death, instead of retreating with her young children or into her grief, Coretta Scott King stepped out into the forefront to continue her husband's legacy. She began this the day before his funeral, leading the sanitation workers' march he had gone to Memphis to support. She continued standing up for social justice all the rest of her life. She was

devoted to preserving Dr. King's legacy and fought successfully to establish the King Center and the national holiday recognizing his birthday and became an internationally recognized human rights leader in her own right.

A strong antiwar and anti-apartheid activist, she spoke to audiences around the world, calling for racial equality and economic and social justice and received many honors and awards for her tireless work. Mrs. King was especially passionate about women's rights, and urged women to take their rightful place at the table to create a better nation and world. She once said, "If American women would increase their voting turnout by 10 percent, I think we would see an end to all of the budget cuts in programs benefiting women and children." How true this remains in this era where a Congress of the United States, aided and abetted by a callous administration, has just cut \$39 billion from the budget from programs low-income children and families need in order to give tens of billions of new tax cuts to powerful special interests that don't need it.

Throughout her life, Mrs. King was a lantern for freedom and justice. We will all miss Coretta Scott King's presence but carry her and Dr. King's spirits as we continue the struggle. May she rest in peace and may we work for peace with justice with renewed vigor.

Marian Wright Edelman is President and Founder of the Children's Defense Fund and its Action Council.



CLINGMAN

# Exxon's excessive excess

By James Clingman  
NNPA Columnist

Have you ever made so much money that you were embarrassed about it? I didn't think so; and it's very unlikely you ever will. But in case you do, it will probably

be called excess profit, which means surplus, additional, or extra. I doubt if it will be called excessive profit, which means extreme, unwarranted, unnecessary, and disproportionate. That's the kind of profit posted by Exxon Mobil so far. I would add that the other big oil companies, Dutch Shell (\$25 billion), ConocoPhillips, British Petroleum, Chevron, and the whole gang of outlaws are not so far behind Exxon. They adroitly refused to appear before a Congressional committee to explain their windfalls.

It must be nice for a company to make the most money ever in one quarter, \$11 billion, with a total of \$36 billion in one year, all in the face of disaster, grief, oh yeah, and death along the Gulf Coast. That happens to be where U.S. oil is turned into gasoline and sent on its way to a pump near you. I wonder what it feels like to be able to announce such excessive profits and then thumb your nose at Congress because of your disrespect for that august body, or because you are simply embarrassed to discuss the topic before the public.

I'll cut right to the chase. We have seen all sorts of Gas Out days, Gas Out Weeks, and other campaigns to deal with these oil

thieves, the ones who met with the "vice" president and wrote the nation's energy policy, the ones who named an oil tanker after Condoleezza Rice, and the ones who lie to us on their way to the bank. None of those tactics has worked. So what can we do besides complaining about the high prices at the pump and the excessive profits of the oil barons? Probably nothing that will cause them to hurt at all; so let's just have some fun.

From this day forward, let's stop patronizing Exxon Mobil gas stations. Let's stop patronizing all stations that purchase their gas from Exxon Mobil. I'm sure they'll get a kick out of our meager, insignificant, silly little Davidian plan to bring Goliath to his knees. They'll probably sit back and laugh their heads off at us, just like the Philistine did. After all, we're just lowly consumers, millions of customers who need what they're selling. What could we do to possibly hurt them?

Maybe the reality of the situation is that we cannot hurt them. But let's just keep our money away from them anyway, and spend it elsewhere. Watch your gas tank and buy some gas, not when it's nearly empty, but when you see a gas station that is not Exxon Mobil; buy a few dollars worth.

We have to start somewhere. Unless you are willing to give up your expeditin', escaladin', hummin', and navigatin' ways, and drive something a little smaller and easier on gas, you will be buying gas from one of these companies - just don't let Exxon be your gas of choice.

It is shameful that some companies, such as

pharmaceutical, banking, tobacco, energy, health insurance, and others are so greedy, excessive, and dishonest in their business practices that it would lead their executives to do some of the things we have witnessed in the recent past. A few have gone to jail, but many more are still walking the streets and sitting in the boardrooms not having paid a price for their mistreatment of their consumers - not yet, at least.

Remember: When oil execs did testify in 2005, the Senate Commerce Chairman, Ted Stevens (The guy from Alaska who the bridge to nowhere. Don't they also have some oil up there under the frozen tundra too?), rejected calls by some Democrats to have the executives sworn in, saying the law already required them to tell the truth. Are you kidding me?

But let's concentrate on Exxon for now. We cannot continue to complain about their billions in excessive profits without doing something, whatever we can do, to reflect our outrage. So what are you willing to do about it?

That's my take on it. That will be my little insignificant way of fighting back. But you know what? It may be insignificant to them, but to me it's a tremendous step; it's great for my psyche; it's more than just complaining. And if more of us take a similar action against this behemoth, our collective act of slinging millions of small stones at this giant will have the same effect that David's one small stone had on Goliath.

The ball is in your court. Use excessive restraint to decrease Exxon's excessive profits.

COMMENTARY & OPINIONS



# Future of historic Orpheum Theatre is uncertain, manager says

By Stacey Plaisance  
AP Writer

Fliers for an Aug. 27, 2005, play still hang in the glass casings lining the facade of the historic Orpheum Theater, marking the day Hurricane Katrina brought this city's beloved arts community to a standstill.

Like dozens of performances slated for that Saturday, two days before the storm made landfall, the stage play "Let Go and Let God" had to be canceled just hours before showtime when city officials ordered a mandatory evacuation as Katrina barreled toward the Gulf Coast.

What residents here didn't realize is that many months would pass before arts performances would return and that at the Orpheum, it could take years.

The storm took out all four of New Orleans' major performing arts theaters, severely flooding two of its oldest—the Orpheum and the Saenger, both listed on the national registry of historic places.

But in the five months since Katrina, as renovations have been under way at the Saenger, recovery at the Orpheum—which had no flood insurance—has been all but stagnant. And the future of the 85-year-old theater, which for years has served as home to the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, is uncertain, said Jeff Montalbano, the theater's general manager.

Standing in the lobby that once gave way to an elegant performance hall with rich, burgundy-red carpeted aisles and ornate gold leafing on blue and white walls, Montalbano shook his head as he looked at the post-Katrina destruction.

"I cried," Montalbano said of when he first entered the theater and saw the floodwater. He said it took more than three weeks to pump all the water out.

"I thought we'd have some water damage, but nothing like this," he said.

Floodwater filled the theater's 20-foot basement, wiping out all the electrical and mechanical equipment stored there, and water rose to more

than a foot in the performance hall.

The Orpheum's original oak floors swelled and buckled and likely cannot be salvaged. The stage, which sat under water for weeks, will also have to be replaced, Montalbano said.

Walking on the dingy, now brownish-red carpet, he pointed out the paint flaking from the ceiling from weeks of moisture exposure and the hundreds of once-plush blue seats now almost entirely consumed by brownish-green mold.

Since the storm, only some cleanup has been done. And with no flood insurance, the owners aren't sure how to pay the estimated \$1.5 million to \$2.5 million in damage, Montalbano said.

The owners, a group of private shareholders, bought the theater in the late 1980s. Though they're considering selling it, "they're very committed" to the city's performing arts community and the LPO, the nation's only full-time symphony owned and operated by its musicians, Montalbano said.

"That's why we haven't jumped on the option to sell," he said. "This is such a hard thing. Selling could hurt the symphony, and we want to protect the integrity of what this facility is here for."

The city's decreased population and uncertainty over how soon the economy will recover have made the idea of putting more money into the theater a tough choice, he said. Roughly two-thirds of the city's population is still living elsewhere.

"We know they're coming back, but when?" Montalbano said. "In five years? Seven years? Ten? I don't know how long it's going to take."

More disheartening, Montalbano said, is the Orpheum was gearing up for one of its best seasons in years. Tourist and convention business, which had taken a dive after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, was finally rebounding. Besides its regular LPO concerts, the Orpheum had just hosted 30 acts for a Black Entertainment Television comedy series and a concert by Michael Buble, a nominee for best-selling pop male artist at the

2005 World Music Awards.

"It was going to be a good year," he said.

E.P. Miller, director of operations for the Saenger, said the theater had limited flood coverage with its wind and rain policy, and raising the theater's electrical and mechanical equipment to higher ground will be expensive.

The Saenger's basement flooded, as did its antique organ, which was used to provide "surround sound" during the 1920s silent movie era, Miller said. "It's going to be a major cost just to get that back up and able to be played," he said.

The Saenger's decorative marble statues survived but will need to be cleaned, and the grand chandelier—original to the castle of Versailles in France—was also in good shape, he said. Tapestries, furniture and decorative plaster will need to be restored or replaced.

Robert Lyall, director of the New Orleans Opera Association, said damage to the city's other major theaters—the Municipal Auditorium and Mahalia Jackson theater—wasn't as severe, and he expects them to be operational within the year.

Many in the performing arts community agree that using the city's university theaters is a good alternative in the interim.

"We need to go back to the basics,

and give the arts community something on a smaller scale to get it going again," Montalbano said.

Several big-name musicians have come to the city in attempts to do just that. Folk singer Arlo Guthrie and country legend Willie Nelson performed for a sold-out crowd at the historic Tipitina's nightclub in mid-

December, and jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis performed with a band that included his pianist father, Ellis, at Tulane University in January.

Graham Scott, one of Great Britain's leading pianists, gave a free performance at Tulane on Jan. 25, waiving his fee and donating it to the Music Teachers National Association's

Katrina Relief Fund.

And in March, opera returns to New Orleans with a performance by world-renowned tenor Placido Domingo. Money raised from the concert, which is being held at the New Orleans Arena, will go toward reviving the city's arts community, Lyall said.

## JP Morgan Chase offers scholarships to Louisiana's black students

It's called JPMorgan's Smart Start Louisiana Program.

It is a scholarship program established by JPMorgan Chase that provides monies for undergraduate tuition, books and supplies to qualified African-American Louisiana students who will attend colleges in their home state.

Deadline to apply is Friday, February 17th. Students wishing to apply can do so online at <http://www.smartstartapp.com>. Recipients will be announced in mid-May. To be eligible you must be a graduating senior from a Louisiana high school, is a Louisiana resident who plans to major in one of either business, communications, computer sci-

ence, engineering, liberal arts or social science (life science majors are not eligible). Candidates must also have a minimum of a B average and minimum ACT score of 19. They must demonstrate academic achievement, financial need, motivation, flexibility, maturity, leadership, communication skills and the ability to balance numerous priorities.

The scholarship includes tuition for four years toward an undergraduate degree, while maintaining a 2.5 grade-point average for freshman year and a 3.0 thereafter; \$500 per year for books and supplies; and support networks including mentors, peer advisors and Smart Start Program Management.

In January 2005, JPMorgan Chase disclosed that Bank One, which was bought out by JPMorgan Chase last year, was connected to banks that accepted thousands of slaves as loan collateral prior to the Civil War. The disclosure was made in response to a Chicago ordinance requiring companies doing business with the city to disclose whether they profited from slavery. Bank One officials, in a letter to the company's employees, addressed the issue and announced the establishment of the Louisiana Smart Start Scholarship Program of \$5million over five years.

Legal dependents of JPMorgan Chase employees are not eligible.

## Mayoral candidates lining up

Continued from Page 1

heriff's Office, he can run the City. He is the only candidate that could get both strong white and black support," continued the advisor who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Couhig, a Republican, and Foti, a Democrat, would join an ever-growing field of candidates. Besides Democratic Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu, who still by all reports plans to announce in about two weeks, former Republican at-large City Councilwoman Peggy Wilson declared her candidacy last week. She joined radio personality James Arey, lawyer Virginia Boulet, investment banker Mike Hammer, community activist and former state Rep. Leo Watermeier and lawyer and former Deputy Orleans DA Bill Wessel.

On the cusp of deciding too is Audubon Institute head Ron Forman. As recently as two months ago, Forman said that he would not seek the office. Few insiders expected him to change his mind, especially after Mitch Landrieu indicated he would run. Forman began his career as an aide to Moon Landrieu, father of the Lt. Governor, and it was that Mayor who asked the young staffer "to see what could be done with the Audubon Zoo," at the time an aged and collapsing set of concrete cages with little ascetic value or sensitivity to the needs of the animals.

From that beginning, Forman built what would become one of the top five zoological gardens in the nation—and an ecofoundation that would create an award-winning Aquarium, Wetlands Nature Center, Primate Research Center, and park system. The work of the President of the Audubon Institute, as the ever-growing natural foundation came to be called, was rarely far from politics, as he took state grants and local property taxes and wed them to the largess of an extensive group of financial contributors.

Straddling the line of political and non-profit made Forman a figure to which many listened across the spectrum. Ray Nagin considered the support of the Audubon Institute's President as a key reason for his late campaign surge and victory in the 2002 mayor's race. The incumbent Mayor later hired Forman's wife Sally to serve as City Hall's communications director. She resigned last week when her husband indicated he would challenge Nagin.

Forman's possible change of heart took place over the past two weeks supposedly, as he was courted aggressively by several prominent business and civic leaders looking for a candidate to run a platform that endorses the controversial rebuilding plans proposed by the mayor's Bring New Orleans Back Commission. Although Nagin appointed the committee, he has sent mixed signals on whether he fully backs the plan. It is also alleged that this group now worry that may not be able to convince Landrieu to commit to enacting the commission's plans amidst strong criticism of the commission from many residents and political leaders, including City Council members and state legislators.

Though he has never before sought public office, Forman is no stranger to the political arena. He has told the press that he has more than \$1.5 million in commitments to his campaign.

Could it be déjà vu for Foti and Landrieu?

While man of Forman's backers

normally would contribute to Mitch Landrieu, a real concern for the Lt. Governor is the fear that Charles Foti could do to him again what occurred in the early days of the recent Attorney General's race. It is fairly common knowledge that Mitch Landrieu originally intended to run for Attorney General. He had begun organizing for the race when he heard that the Louisiana Sheriff's Association planned to back Foti for the same job.

Foti was the long serving Sheriff of New Orleans enjoying white-black crossover support that few politicians ever experience. He was considered both tough on crime as the jailer of the City, but was also known as compassionate — mostly due to the Sheriff's acclaimed inmate rehabilitation projects, including the prison art program.

Foti used the creative talents of his prisoners in innovate ways, from creating a yearly spook house at Halloween to decorating City Park for Christmas' Celebration in the Oaks. The Sheriff succeeded in putting several former convicts into high paying jobs after their release, and decorated New Orleans in a way that made him consistently popular with all sectors of the public.

The Landrieu name in New Orleans holds much the same social cache' as "Kennedy" might in Massachusetts, yet neither that political resonance nor Mitch Landrieu's popular tenure in the legislature was enough to stop Foti's candidacy. Less well known by the general public was that Charles Foti is a cousin to the Landrieus, and on a personal level, a brutal political fight against a family member had little taste to Mitch Landrieu. The State Rep. opted to run for Lt. Governor in a race that was almost a coronation.

By all accounts until this week, Landrieu has seemed to be riding an irresistible tide to victory, much like his Lt. Governor's race almost three years ago, but with Charles Foti's interest, could the Lt.

Governor turn away as he once did? In the AG's contest, Foti pledged to run no matter who jumped into the race. This time, the AG qualified his pledge. Will it be enough?

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**Local Student Wins New Scion tC** - As luck would have it Courtney Blackshear-Payne is shown picking up her new Scion tC from Jason O'Neal, manager of All Star Toyota in Alexandria, La. Blackshear-Payne, a Dillard University student, entered the Scion Decoder Challenge online after receiving a game piece from the "Scion Street Team" while walking down Canal Street days before Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast Region. The 20-year student, who had evacuated because of the Hurricane and the eventual flooding of New Orleans, was on a university-sponsored trip to China when she was notified via email of her luck. "It didn't seem real until I got to pick out the car that I wanted," Blackshear-Payne said. Ironically, Blackshear's old car caught on fire days before Hurricane Katrina landed ashore. She is back in New Orleans attending Dillard and driving around in her brand new car.

**JEFFERSON TRANSIT PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE**

**EASTBANK ~ WEDNESDAY, February 15, 2006, 7:00 P.M.**  
East Jefferson General Hospital,  
1st Floor, Esplanade I, 4200 Houma Blvd., Metairie

**WESTBANK ~ THURSDAY, February 16, 2006, 7:00 P.M.**  
Jefferson Parish General Government Building,  
2nd Floor, Council Chambers, 200 Derbigny, Gretna

Both locations are ADA accessible. To request a Sign Interpreter for these meetings, call the Transit Office by Monday, February 13, 2006.

**TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION**

- Proposed Route and Schedule Reductions for Fixed Route Service
- Proposed Service Reductions for MITS Paratransit Service
- Proposed Reduced Service Area for MITS

For more information, please call  
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Mike Palamone, Chair, Transportation Advisory Board  
We invite you to visit our website: [www.jeffersontransit.org](http://www.jeffersontransit.org)

**ORLEANS PARISH**  
*Clerk of Court*  
**Succession Notices**

**CIVIL DISTRICT COURT FOR THE PARISH OF ORLEANS STATE OF LOUISIANA NO. 02-3517 DIV. "B" SECTION 15 SUCCESSION OF ALINE MARY LOMBARD COLLINS NOTICE OF APPLICATION TO SELL IMMOVABLE PROPERTY AT PRIVATE SALE**

NOTICE IS HEREBY given that Shirley L. Stone, the administrator of the Succession of Aline Collins, has petitioned the Civil District Court for authority to sell, at private sale, an undivided 3/16 interest in the following described property. The entire property to be sold for the price and sum of \$31,500.00 buyer and seller to share the costs of the sale on a 50-50 basis.

Property description:  
1. Lot 11, Square 211, Fifth District, 718 Lamarque Street, New Orleans, La.  
2. Lot 15, Square 211, Fifth District, 1234 Vallette Street, New Orleans, La.  
3. Lot 16, in square bounded by Vallette, DeArmas, Lapeyrouse, and Chestnut Streets, 1232 Vallette Street, New Orleans, La.

NOW THEREFORE, in accordance with the law made and provided in such cases, notice is hereby given that Shirley L. Stone, administrator, proposes to sell the aforesaid immovable property at private sale, for the price and upon the terms aforesaid, and the heirs, legatees, and creditors are required to make opposition, if any they have or can to such course, within seven (7) days, including Sundays and holidays, from the day whereon the last publication of this notice appears.

DALE N. ATKINS, Clerk  
Atty: George V. Perez Jr.  
Publication: La. Weekly 1/23/06 and 2/13/06

**CIVIL DISTRICT COURT FOR THE PARISH OF ORLEANS STATE OF LOUISIANA NO. 2004-14839 DOCKET 1 SUCCESSION OF ANDRE J. DEJOIE**

Notice is hereby given to the creditors of this Estate and to all other persons herein interested to show cause within seven (7) days from this notification (if any they or can) why the FIRST AND FINAL account and tableau of distribution presented by the Executor of this Estate should not be approved and homologated and the funds distributed in accordance herewith.

DALE N. ATKINS, Clerk  
Atty: Pamela R. Gibbs.  
Publication: La. Weekly 2/13/06



# Historic Treme parish to be abolished

*Continued from Page 1*

parishes having sustained damage.

According to Hughes, despite its historical significance, the archdiocese can no longer afford to support St. Augustine parish.

The parish's weekly income was an average of \$3,000 said Fr. Jerome LeDoux, SVD, who has served as pastor of St. Augustine for the past 15 years. Reportedly the church sustained at least \$400,000 in rainwater damage.

In response to the decision by Hughes to close his parish, Fr. LeDoux said, "I'm not in his corner, but I will not disobey him."

Located in the Treme neighborhood of New Orleans which abuts the French Quarter, St. Augustine Parish was founded for free persons of color and is the birthplace of the Sisters of the Holy Family, an order of nuns founded by Henriette Delille.

While the church will remain open for weekly services, parishioners of St. Augustine will become a part of the St. Peter Claver Parish, which is pastured by Rev. Michael Jacques.

## The history of St. Augustine Parish

The property on which St. Augustine stands was part of the plantation estate that had been a tiliary and brickyard headquarters built in 1720 by the province of New Orleans' supervisor, the Company of the Indies, as an economic stimulus for the province. After the Company of the Indies left in 1731, the plantation was sold to the Moreau family, eventually coming into the possession of Julie Moreau, a manumitted slave, in 1775. Claude Treme, a Frenchman, married Julie Moreau, thus taking title to the property. Seeing a chance to make a profit, the husband and wife subdivided the estate and sold off many lots on a first-come-first-served basis to free people of color and others pouring in from the Old Quarter jammed with Haitian immigrants fleeing the bloody 1791 revolution in Haiti.

After selling 35 lots, Claude and Julie Treme left their plantation home for a more peaceful life in 1810. In 1834, Jeanne Marie Aliquot purchased the Treme's former home and property from the city of New Orleans and brought in the United States' first Catholic elementary school for free girls of color and a few slaves. This school had been started in 1823 by Marthe Fortier, a onetime postulant of the Hospital Nuns. Jeanne Marie Aliquot became a major catalyst in the origins of St. Augustine Church.

Under economic duress from her social ventures, Jeanne Marie sold the house to the Ursuline Sisters in 1836. They in turn sold the property to the Carmelites in 1840, who then took over the little school for colored girls and merged it with their school for white girls. The Carmelite Sisters used the Treme home for their motherhouse until 1926 when they moved out to Robert E. Lee Boulevard in the West End section of New Orleans.

In the late 1830s, when free people of color got permission from Bishop Antoine Blanc to build a church, the Ursulines donated the corner property at Bayou Road (now Governor Nicholls St.) and St. Claude which they had bought for \$10,000, on the condition that the church be named after their foundress, St. Angela Merici. However, circumstances dictated that the church was named St. Augustine.

A few months before the October 9, 1842 dedication of St. Augustine Church, the people of color began to purchase pews for their families to sit. Upon hearing of this, white people in the area started a campaign to buy more pews than the colored folks. Thus, The War of the Pews began and was ultimately won by the free people of color who bought three pews to every one pur-

chased by the whites. In an unprecedented social, political and religious move, the colored members also bought all the pews of both side aisles. They gave those pews to the slaves as their exclusive place of worship, a first in the history of slavery in the United States.

This mix of the pews resulted in the most integrated congregation in the entire country: one large row of free people of color, one large row of whites with a smattering of ethnics, and two outer aisles of slaves. Except for a brief six-month period when its sanctuary was enlarged and blessed in time for Christmas 1925, St. Augustine Church has been in continuous use as a

place of worship until the present time.

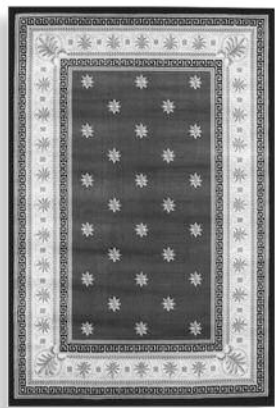
In the midst of all these things, Henriette Delille, a free woman of color, and Juliette Gaudin, a Cuban, began aiding slaves, orphan girls, the uneducated, the sick and the elderly among people of color around 1823. Their particular concern for the education and care of colored children aided greatly in the founding, financing, staffing and administration of the city's early private schools for the colored. At the urging of Jeanne Marie Aliquot and the wise counseling of Pere Etienne Rousselin, the two women knelt publicly at the altar of St. Augustine Church on November 21, 1842 and pledged to live in community to work for

orphan girls, the uneducated, the poor, the sick and the elderly among the free people of color, thus founding the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family, after the Oblates of Providence founded in Baltimore in 1828, the second-oldest African-American congregation of religious women.

Historical figures such as Homer Plessy, of Plessy vs. Ferguson fame from the U.S. Supreme Court decision on May 18, 1896, and Alexander P. Tureaud, Sr., a giant among the civil rights attorneys of the stormy sixties, were members of St. Augustine Church.

*Editor's Note: The history of St. Augustine Parish is a reprint from the church's website: [www.staugustinecatholicchurch-neworleans.org](http://www.staugustinecatholicchurch-neworleans.org)*

It's not just helping a customer.



It's giving them their very own magic carpet.



*Continued from Page 1*

# Ex-judge sentenced

*Continued from Page 1*

trial and had cut bonds for dangerous criminal predators so that Bail Bonds Unlimited could collect hefty fees for guaranteeing their court appearances.

Prosecutors said Green took \$20,000 in cash, golf trips and meals from the bonding company.

Green is the second former state judge to be sentenced to federal prison as the result of an FBI investigation dubbed "Operation Wrinkled Robe," which used court-ordered wiretaps and video cameras secreted in the Jefferson Parish courthouse to root out corruption.

Former state district judge Ronald Bodenheimer is serving a 46-month sentence for scheming to have an FBI informant framed on a drug charge, conspiring to fix a millionaire's child custody case and for his involvement with Bail Bonds Unlimited.

Before he was sentenced, Green, who served 12 years on the bench and was a state prosecutor for six years before that, again denied taking bribes. He said he had allowed himself to be manipulated through a friendship with Bail Bonds Unlimited accountant Norman Bowley, who pleaded guilty in the case. Green did apologize for "impugning the integrity of the bench in Jefferson Parish and the judicial system of the state of Louisiana."

Africk was not impressed.

"It is your conduct that put citizens in danger. Bail Bonds Unlimited saw a for sale sign on your office," Africk told Green.



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# After 38 years, Coretta Scott King finally joins her husband

By George E. Curry  
NNPA Editor-in-Chief

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - With four U.S. presidents in attendance - two Democrats and two Republicans - the 6-hour funeral of Coretta Scott King on Tuesday started out as though it might be a star-studded exercise in political correctness, with speakers gingerly avoiding issues that have sharply divided them in the past.

President George W. Bush, an ardent opponent of affirmative action and other social programs favored by both Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his wife, Coretta, was effusive in his praise of Mrs. King. "I've come today to offer the sympathy of our entire nation at the passing of a woman who worked to make our nation whole," he said. "... This kind and gentle woman became one of the most admired Americans of our time. She is rightly mourned, and she is deeply missed."

Even Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), who frequently spars with President Bush on social issues, focused on his family's long-time personal relationship with the King family.

Noting that Dr. King was given a four-month jail sentence during the early 1960s for a minor traffic violation, Kennedy said: "I remember my brother calling her and saying he would do whatever was necessary," he recalled. "And [Attorney General] Robert called the judge, who fortunately saw the light, and Martin was released."

Rev. Joseph Lowery, who co-founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) with Dr. King, made it clear that he would not bite his tongue simply because President Bush was in attendance.

"She extended Martin's message against poverty, racism and war," he said, referring to Coretta Scott King.

"She deplored the terror inflicted by our smart bombs on missions way afar."

With many already applauding wildly, Lowery turned up the heat.

"We know now there were no weapons of mass destruction over there. But Coretta knew and we knew that there are weapons of misdirection right down here," Lowery said, receiving a standing ovation. "Millions without health insurance. Poverty abounds. For war billions more, but no more for the poor."

Jimmy Carter, former governor of Georgia, credited the Kings with legitimizing him as a national candidate, thus making it possible for a White Southerner to be elected president in 1976.

In an indirect dig at President Bush's fervent support or warrantless wiretapping, Carter reminded the mourners of what the Kings endured: "It was difficult for them personally with the civil liberties of both husband and wife violated, and they became the targets of secret government wiretapping and other surveillance."

As evidence that the struggle for equal rights is not over, Carter said, "We only have to recall the color of those in Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi." After being interrupted by sustained applause, Carter continued, "Those who were most devastated by Katrina, to know there are not yet equal opportunities for all Americans."

The funeral was one of the rare times that four present and past presidents - Bush, Carter, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton - have made a joint appearance.

The elder Bush, noted for his clumsiness, drew laughter when he said, "This may be your lucky day. I lost a page."

If this had been a presidential sweepstakes, Bill Clinton would have been declared the clear winner. He

received a prolonged standing ovation before he uttered a word. And when he did speak, it was with a passion he routinely uses to connect with predominantly Black audiences.

"I don't want to forget that there's a woman in there," he said, pointing to a casket adorned with flowers. "Not a symbol. But a real woman who lived and breathed, and got angry and got hurt, and had dreams and disappointments. I don't want us to forget that."

Clinton continued, "We're here to honor a person. Fifty-four years ago, her about-to-be husband said that he was looking for a woman with character, intelligence, personality, and beauty, and she sure fit the bill. And I have to say, when she was over 75, I thought she still fit the bill pretty good."

The audience laughed in agreement.

The former president observed that instead of remaining in mourning, immediately following her husband's assassination, Coretta Scott King was on a plane from Atlanta to Memphis to continue his work.

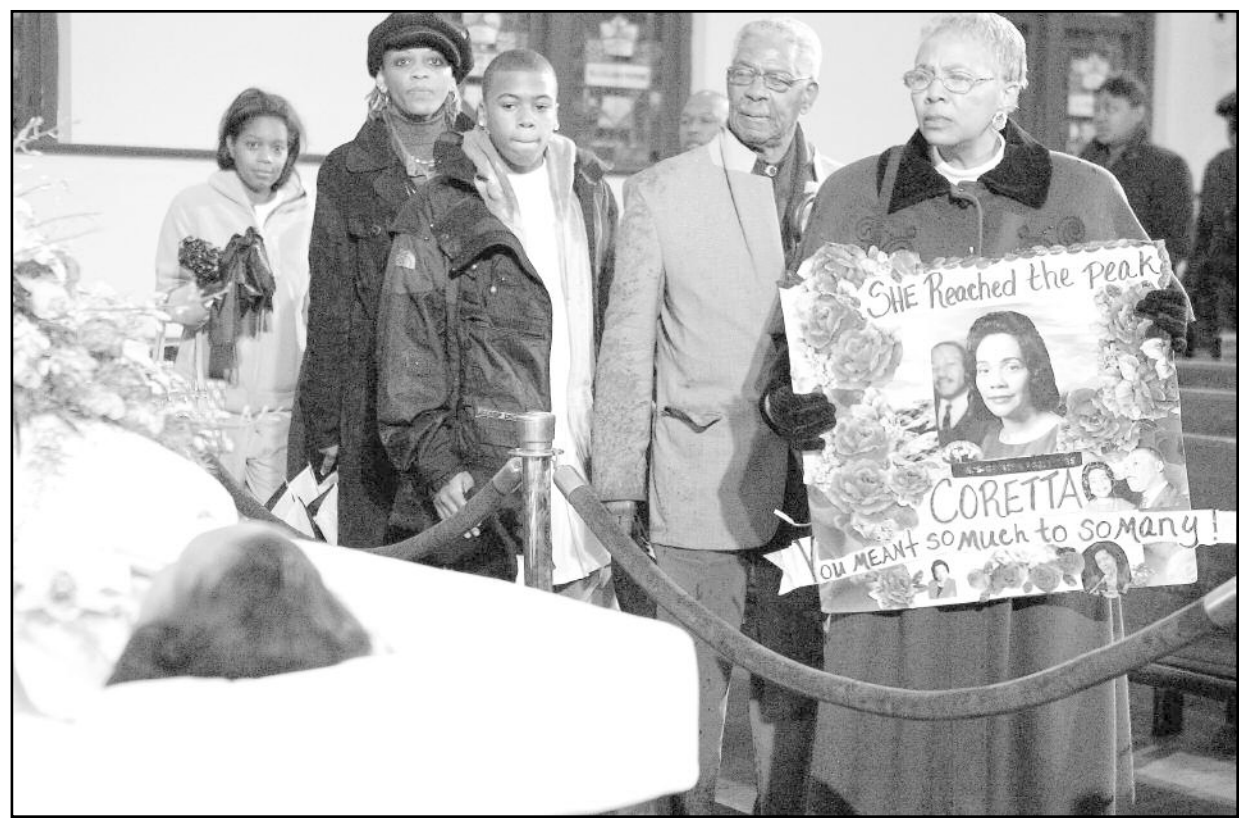
"What are we going to do with the rest of our lives?" Clinton asked. "Do you want to treat our friend Coretta like a model? Then model her behavior."

He issued a pointed challenge to the city of Atlanta, where the Kings spent most of their lives.

"Atlanta, what is your responsibility for the future of the King Center?" Clinton asked, referring to a complex that had been beset in recent years by debt and controversy. "What are you going to do?"

Bernice King, who was 5 years old when her father died, eulogized her mother, who died Jan. 30 of respiratory problems associated with advanced ovarian cancer. She was 78 years old. The youngest child was with her mother when she died in Mexico.

"I'm just here to celebrate," said the



A mourner carries a poster as she views the casket of Coretta Scott King as she lies in honor in the historic Ebenezer Church in Atlanta, Monday, Feb. 6, 2006. Mrs. King was entombed next to her husband on Tuesday, Feb. 7, 2006. (AP Photo)

younger King, an associate pastor at the church. "I don't have to say a word." But she said many words in a wide-ranging eulogy that lasted about 38 minutes. Alluding to a controversy over the funeral being held at New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, Bernice King said, "I said, 'God, why here?' He said, 'It's time for the world to be born again.'"

She urged mourners to live in the present, not the past.

"God is not looking for a Martin Luther King or Coretta Scott King," she said. "The old has passed away; there is a new order that is emerging."

There was some unspoken tension between some who had worked with Dr. King and organizers of the funeral, which was held at the 10,000-seat mega-church in suburban Lithonia, 15 miles east of Atlanta. Jesse Jackson, a former King aide who was with him when the civil rights leader was killed in Memphis, was not allowed to be part of the funeral program. Jackson and other top aides had participated in a service the night before at Ebenezer Baptist Church in the historic Sweet Auburn section of

downtown Atlanta.

Many of those speakers were already upset that the funeral service was being held at a suburban Black mega-church instead of Ebenezer, Dr. King's old church. And few tried to hide their displeasure over Bush being allowed to take part in Coretta Scott King's funeral after opposing most of what she fought for while she was alive.

"We can't let them take her from us and reduce her to their trophy and not our freedom fighter," Jackson said at the Monday night services.

Another top SCLC official, Rev. C. T. Vivian, said: "As we think of Coretta, if she were here right now, she would say the president of the United States is the direct opposite to our public policy that makes people poor. Nonviolence is the root of the matter. If we forget that, we might as well forget the movement."

Former UN Ambassador Andrew Young, another former King aide, said the contrasting services at Ebenezer and New Birth showed that Mrs. King had a foot in each world

"They are both real," he explained to the Atlanta Constitution. "[Monday] was a movement service. It was like a mass movement. It unfortunately was too little about Coretta, but it was about carrying on the movement. Everything we have said about Coretta has been the truth, but she still made sure Nixon helped build the King Center, and she still got Reagan to sign the King holiday [bill]. She was always so humble and graceful, and her protest was so pure. That's why she was so effective."

After the funeral, Coretta Scott King's body was driven to the King Center, arriving at 7:14 p.m. There, the family released seven doves, the symbol of peace. The coffin was placed in a temporary crypt, where it will remain until a permanent crypt is built next to her husband.

Between the tombs is an eternal flame. Inscribed on Mrs. King's crypt, below her name and years of birth and death, is a passage from First Corinthians 13:13, which reads: "And now abide Faith, Hope, Love, These Three; but the greatest of these is Love."

## Fertel's legacy pays off for schools

(AP) - More than \$1.2 million from a foundation established in the will of Ruth's Chris Steak House founder Ruth U. Fertel is going to public, private and parochial schools and educational programs in the New Orleans area.

The grant announcement Friday was timed to commemorate what would have been Fertel's 79th birthday on Feb. 5.

A New Orleans native, Fertel was devoted to the city and to education,

said her son Randy Fertel, president of the Ruth U. Fertel Foundation. His mother, who died in April 2002, held a degree in chemistry and physics from LSU, he said.

Ruth Fertel always claimed that her strength in chemistry lay behind her wizardry in the kitchen, he said. Anyone who ever sat across the gin table from her knows how strong she was in math, he added.

Her son recalled what his mother did after Hurricane Betsy struck

soon after she acquired the original Chris Steak House in 1965. "Faced with no electricity and no refrigeration, mom broiled all those prime steaks and I brought them down to Plaquemines (where she grew up) for evacuees," he said.

The foundation will enable Fertel to help New Orleans recover from the ravages of Katrina by helping its educational institutions recover, he said.

## The White House knew says Brown

Continued from Page 1

Brown suggested the administration's fixation with fighting terrorism may have been to blame, in part, for the slow government response.

Because of a focus on terrorism, natural disasters "had become the stepchild of the Department of Homeland Security," he said.

Had there been a report that "a terrorist had blown up the 17th Street Canal levee, then everybody would have jumped all over that," Brown added.

The storm slammed into New Orleans and the Gulf coast on the morning of Monday, Aug. 29.

Brown said he spoke by phone to a top White House official - he said he believed it was Joe Hagin, the deputy chief of staff - "on at least two occasions on that day to inform him of what was going on."

Hagin was with the president, who began the day at his ranch in Texas then traveled to Arizona and California for policy speeches. Brown was in Baton Rouge, La.

"I think I told him that we were realizing our worst nightmare, that everything we had planned about, worried about, that FEMA, frankly, had worried about for 10 years was coming true," Brown said.

He said he made similar comments in an e-mail message to White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card.

In an appearance before the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee that was at turns both cooperative and confrontational, Brown went far further than he had previously in blaming other elements of the Bush administration for the government's halting reaction to the massive storm.

The Aug. 29 maelstrom killed more than 1,300 people, displaced hun-

dreds of thousands of others, and caused tens of billions in damage, including widespread destruction in New Orleans and other Gulf Coast communities.

"There was a cultural clash that didn't recognize the absolute inherent science of preparing for a disaster," he testified. "Any time you break that cycle ... you're doomed to failure."

He added: "The policies and decisions implemented by the DHS put FEMA on a path to failure."

Earlier, the chairwoman of the panel, Sen. Susan Collins, said that FEMA missed early warning signs that emergency response teams were unprepared to handle a catastrophic disaster like Hurricane Katrina.

Brown, who is widely viewed as the public face of the government's missteps during and after the storm, staunchly defended his role and appeared eager to answer any questions - particularly those that shifted the blame elsewhere.

He insisted he provided information to White House and Homeland Security officials the day of the storm. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff has said he did not know the levees were breached until the following day.

Under pointed questioning by Sen. Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., Brown said several times he could not clearly recall what was said in some of those conversations.

"Do you specifically remember asking Hagin for the White House to take action?" asked Lieberman, the Senate panel's top Democrat.

"Nothing specific - I just thought they needed to be aware," Brown answered.

He said he preferred going right to the White House rather than having to deal with wading through the "additional bureaucracy" of

Homeland Security.

Brown recounted his success in managing previous disasters like hurricanes, tornadoes, fires and the 2003 Columbia space shuttle explosion.

A management audit prepared by Brown months before the Aug. 29 storm showed that the agency had a lack of adequate and consistent situational awareness to size up emergencies, and was unable to properly control inventory and track assets, Collins told fellow committee members.

Collins said the audit also showed that FEMA misunderstood standard response procedures.

Brown's appearance in front of the Senate investigative panel came as new documents reveal that 28 federal, state and local agencies - including the White House - reported levee failures on Aug. 29, according to a timeline of e-mails, situation updates and weather reports.

That litany was at odds with the administration's contention that it didn't know the extent of the problem until much later. At the time, President Bush said, "I don't think anybody anticipated the breach of the levees."

At the White House, press secretary Scott McClellan said Friday that there were conflicting reports about the levees in the immediate aftermath of the storm. "Some were saying it was over top, some were saying it was breached," he said.

"We knew of the flooding that was going on," McClellan said. "That's why our top priority was focused on saving lives."

"The cause of the flooding was secondary to that top priority and that's the way it should be," the spokesman said at an occasionally contentious briefing.



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# BUSINESSSCOPE

THE LOUISIANA WEEKLY - YOUR MULTICULTURAL MEDIUM

## Post-Katrina jobless claims are dropping sharply Time running out on unemployment benefits for some

By Alan Sayre  
AP Writer

The number of unemployment payment claims from hurricanes Katrina and Rita continues to fall after topping out just under 300,000 in November, the state labor department said Tuesday.

As of Jan. 28, the state had just under 126,000 active jobless claims from the storms, down by more than half of the 284,717 in

November.

The drop is not totally due to people returning to work or finding new jobs, the labor department said. Some claimants lost their benefits for failing to file weekly reports that they have been looking for work and are ready to work, while others simply decided to give up the benefits, which can be as low as \$10 per week, the agency said.

After Katrina, the state waived a requirement that recipients report

weekly on their job-hunting progress. That requirement was reinstated on Nov. 27 and the number of active unemployment compensation claims has dropped steadily since.

"Since that time, we have been holding job fairs, offering training programs and using whatever means available to us to get people back to work," state Labor Secretary John Warner Smith said in a statement issued by his

agency.

The labor department said 51% of the active claims had been filed by people living in Louisiana, while 49% were from evacuees living in other states.

Of the claims filed by those in Louisiana, Baton Rouge had the most with 20,671, followed by New Orleans with 13,046 and Lafayette with 11,083, according to labor department figures.

The dropping number of unem-

ployment claims figured heavily in Louisiana's unemployment rate dropping from 12.1% to 6.4% in December. Economists said the addition of 9,500 non-farm jobs during the month was only enough to drop the rate, by itself, a few tenths of a percentage point.

The labor department said a new statistical model used for calculating the jobless rate places more emphasis on the number of claims for unemployment benefits.

March 4th looms as the date that extended unemployment benefits for Louisiana residents ends. Ironically, it is also around that time that those who have filed for unemployment because Hurricanes Katrina and Rita left them jobless become eligible for the extension.

Unemployment benefits, which range from \$10 to 4258 a week, are usually available for collection for up to 26 weeks. In November, Louisiana, struggling economically because of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, qualified for federal assistance to provide another 13 weeks of unemployment benefits with Unemployed Louisiana residents living outside the state qualifying for another two weeks of benefits. That however may not happen.

According to Marianne Sullivan, Louisiana's assistant secretary of labor, the state's insured unemployment rate is expected to drop below 5 percent, triggering an end to the extended benefits. Once a state no longer meets the 5 percent requirement, it can pay out extra benefits for only three more weeks.

As of Feb. 4, the number of active Louisiana unemployment claims resulting from Katrina and Rita was 123,728. Katrina struck 24 weeks ago Monday, on Aug. 29. Those who filed for unemployment after Katrina are approaching the end of the 22 to 26 weeks of benefits.

## Websites hawking phone records shut down

By Jennifer C. Kerr  
AP Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) - Following a wave of negative publicity and pressure from the government, several Web sites that peddled people's private phone records are calling it quits.

"We are no longer accepting new orders" was the announcement posted Wednesday on two such sites, locatocell.com and celltolls.com.

"Thank you for your patronage. It was a pleasure serving you," the sites said.

The Federal Trade Commission this week conducted a sweep of 40 sites known to have been selling private phone records. According to the FTC's Lydia Parnes, more than 20 sites have recently shut down or stopped advertising for new business.

The agency has sent letters to about 20 other sites, warning them that they may be violating the law and should review their business practices, said Parnes, director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection.

Parnes, who testified before a Senate subcommittee on consumer affairs, said the commission also has a number of ongoing investigations

into the sales. She did not elaborate.

While some sites appear to be closing up shop, others have seen a boom in business with the recent media attention, said Marc Rotenberg, executive director of the Electronic Privacy Information Center.

Rotenberg urged lawmakers to ban a practice known as "pretexting," in which data brokers or others call a phone company, impersonate a customer and then persuade the company to release the calling records. Those records usually include whom a person called, who called them and the duration of the calls.

In one case that received a lot of attention recently, a blogger was

able to buy the phone records of former Democratic presidential candidate Wesley Clark. All the site needed, it said, was Clark's cell phone number and a credit card payment of \$89.95.

Pretexting for financial data is illegal, but there's no specific law against pretexting for phone records. Broader fraud laws can be used to prosecute the companies but several witnesses at the hearing suggested a specific law could help halt the shady sales.

Lawmakers in both parties expressed outrage over the practice.

"This is fraudulent and criminal activity that must be prosecuted and must be stopped to protect innocent

people," said subcommittee chairman George Allen, R-Va. Allen and Sens. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, and Mark Pryor, D-Ark., are expected to introduce legislation Thursday that would outlaw pretexting for phone records.

The Federal Communications Commission is also investigating online data brokers. It has subpoenaed about 30 companies for information on how they are obtaining the phone records.

The FCC also is expected to consider whether to tighten rules governing the nation's phone carriers and how they handle customers' calling records.

## Filing taxes without the required W-2 form

W-2s, which are supplied to taxpayers by their employers, may be difficult or impossible to obtain for those who have been affected by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma.

But while the Internal Revenue Service encourages taxpayers to contact employers or former employers and other payers to secure their W-2 or other documents, it also says that if you are unable to make contact, not to fret, you can still file your taxes and in enough time to beat the April 15th deadline.

If a taxpayer cannot obtain the documents after attempting to contact the employer, the IRS says the taxpayer should file Form 4852. Form 4852 is the substitute for Form W-2. It is called "Substitute for Form W-2, Wage and Tax Statement, or Form 1099-R, Distributions From Pensions, Annuities, Retirement or Profit-Sharing Plans, IRAs, Insurance contracts, etc."

When using Form 4852, the Taxpayer will need to refer to pay stubs, bank records, prior year forms or other information to estimate the 2005 Form W-2 data and other information return data.

In cases where the taxpayer worked for the same employer in 2004 and has all the required wage information except for an employer federal identification number, the taxpayer may contact the IRS disaster toll-free number at 1-866-562-5227 and request the employer's federal identification number from the previous year's W-2. Taxpayers who do not have access to the necessary federal identification number should still use Form 4852. However, they will be required to file a paper return.

If last year's information document is needed to determine the current year's income, a taxpayer can call the disaster toll-free number and request a copy of the prior year document.

Taxpayers who have all information required for Form 4852, including employer federal identification number, can e-file their individual income tax returns. Preparers who e-file returns based on the completion of Form 4852 must ensure that the W-2 record be marked "non-standard."

The IRS generally will not accept Form 4852 until after Feb. 15, 2006. However, those affected by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma may submit the form prior to Feb. 15.

## Google is offering new search feature

By Michael Liedtke  
AP Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) - Google Inc. is offering a new tool that will automatically transfer information from one personal computer to another, but anyone wanting that convenience must authorize the Internet search leader to store the material for up to 30 days.

That compromise, sought as part of a free software upgrade to be released Thursday, might be more difficult to swallow now that the Bush administration is demanding to know what kind of information people have been trying to find through Google's search engine.

Google is fighting the Justice Department's subpoena in a federal court battle that's focusing more attention on the risks of personal information held by Internet companies being turned over to outside sources, including the government.

Yahoo Inc., Microsoft Corp. and Time Warner Inc.'s America Online already have surrendered some of the information requested by the Bush administration. All three companies have said their cooperation didn't violate users' privacy.

The ability to search a computer remotely is included in Google's latest upgrade to its software that scours hard drives for documents, e-mails, instant messages and an assortment of other information.

To enable the computer-to-computer search function, a user specifies what information should be indexed and then agrees to allow Google to transfer the material to its own storage system. Google plans to encrypt all data transferred from users' hard drives and restrict access to just a handful of its employees. The company says it won't peruse any of the transferred information.

Once another computer participating in a user's personal network is turned on, Google automatically transfers the information so it's available to be searched.

Google intends to delete the information shortly after the electronic handoff, and will never retain any-

thing from a user's hard drive for more than 30 days, said Sundar Pichai, director of product management.

Despite the privacy concerns likely to be raised, Google executives are confident the product will appeal to many people wanting a way to use a home computer to hunt data stored on an office computer, or vice versa.

"We think this will be a very useful tool, but you will have to give up some of your privacy," said Marissa Mayer, Google's vice president of search products and user experience. "For many of us, that trade off will make a lot of sense."

Besides empowering computer-to-computer searches, the improved software allows users to set up an array of mini-applications, sometimes called "widgets," to monitor topical information such as weather, stock quotes or news stories.

Google's revision also enables the widgets and other information to be shared with friends and co-workers, continuing the search engine's efforts to encourage more of the social interaction that has helped draw more traffic to its biggest Internet rival, Yahoo Inc., as well as other sites like MySpace.com.

Responding to complaints about its earlier versions of desktop search, Google's update provides password protection to make it more difficult for intruders to access the software.

The package, which can be downloaded at <http://desktop.google.com>, represents another significant building block in Google's attempt to create a computing platform to challenge Microsoft's Windows operating system, said Gartner analyst Allen Weiner. The software will work only with Windows XP or Windows 2000 Service Pack 3.

"This is another way for Google to gain more control over the (computer) desktop and the consumer experience," Weiner said.

The computer-to-computer search feature could provide a stepping stone for Google to distribute a wide variety of digital media,

## Poor work performance blamed on Internet

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) - About 20 percent of government staff in one Malaysian state use the Internet for personal activities including downloading pornography, music and games, the national news agency reported last week.

This was one of the main causes of poor work performance in Johor state, Bernama said quoting a top state official, Norsiah Harun, adding that large file downloads also considerably slowed the state

government's computer system.

Norsiah said the government viewed the matter seriously and would enforce the relevant regulations soon. She reminded all department heads to be firm in tackling the problem and to remind their staff of their responsibilities, Bernama said.

"Government staff are also reminded not to take too long during morning and afternoon breaks," she said.

including music and video, to mobile devices as well as other computers, said Greg Kelsey, a search engine analyst for the Kelsey Group.

Weiner agreed. "I think Google has a clear vision and realizes that access to anything from anywhere is going to be pretty valuable."



She took a stand

by taking a seat >>>

**Rosa Louise Parks**  
(1913-2005)

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks boarded a bus in Montgomery, Alabama near the intersection of Commerce and Montgomery Streets after working for eighteen hours. Her courageous act in refusing to give up her seat on a bus she had paid to ride sparked the modern-day civil rights movement and led to the breakdown of segregation in the United States.

BellSouth salutes Rosa Parks and thanks her for sitting even in the face of danger.

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# HEALTH & HEART

THE LOUISIANA WEEKLY - YOUR MULTICULTURAL MEDIUM

## One's own stem cells may treat Lupus

By Lindsey Tanner  
AP Writer

CHICAGO (AP) - For all of her 20s, when Edjuana Ross should have been relishing the thrill of early adulthood, she was instead in and out of hospitals, battling a disease that attacked her skin, brain and heart.

Now, at 33, she has her life back, thanks to a stem-cell transplant from her own bone marrow, a drastic, experimental treatment that could be promising for patients with severe lupus.

Ross' illness is in remission for the first time since her diagnosis shortly after high school graduation.

"I'm just trying to get used to being well, and it's a very weird feeling," Ross said.

The Park Forest, Ill., woman is among 48 patients with severe lupus who had the treatment at Northwestern Memorial Hospital. Thirty-three patients have had no disease symptoms for up to more than seven years following their transplants, said Northwestern's Dr. Richard Burt, who led the study.

Six patients died from causes unrelated to the treatment.

The probability of disease-free survival for five years was 50 percent, encouraging for those who failed more conventional treatment for the most severe form of lupus, a disease in which the body's immune system attacks its own organs and tissues.

"It turned out very well, showing that we could do this safely," Burt said.

The study appears in Wednesday's Journal of the American Medical Association. It expands on short-term results with fewer patients the same researchers reported in 2000.

The definitive test will be a randomized study Burt's team is planning that will compare results for stem cell transplant patients with those given standard lupus treatment.

About 1.5 million people nationwide have lupus, 90 percent of them women. Most are diagnosed during early adulthood.

Classic symptoms include rashes, joint pain and fatigue. Some patients have only mild cases, but many develop debilitating disease that randomly attacks vital organs. For about 5 percent, lupus is life-threatening and doesn't respond to conventional treatment.

Ross was one of these patients. Her symptoms persisted despite massive doses of the steroid prednisone. They included scarring rashes, joint pain, extreme fatigue, migraine headaches when lupus attacked her brain and a lupus-induced heart infection.

Prednisone can have severe side effects, including weight-gain, thinning bones and tooth damage - all of which affected Ross. She says the drug also gave her diabetes.

She had the stem-cell bone marrow transplant in 2003, a procedure similar to that used to treat some forms of cancer. Despite the treatment's risks, which include severe infection and even death, Ross said she felt she had no other choice.

"I was sick and tired of being sick and tired," she said.

She was hospitalized for more than two months for the procedure. It involves doctors isolating stem cells from blood withdrawn through a catheter in the patient's neck. That's followed by several days of high-dose chemotherapy, which virtually shuts down the immune system.

The cleansed stem cells are returned to the body, and if the treatment is successful, they will regenerate a healthier immune system, Burt said.

A JAMA editorial says the results "do not necessarily represent 'cure,'" and it warns that many patients likely will have late relapses. But as a last-resort treatment, "the therapy offered substantial benefit," said the editorial by Drs. Michelle Petri and Robert Brodski of Johns Hopkins University.



A male patient enjoys acupuncture treatment near Common Ground Clinic in New Orleans.

## Acupuncturists help ease post-Katrina stress

By Richard Muhammad  
Contributing Writer

(KIN) - The idea that pins and needles could help people may be a revelation for many, but "Acupuncturists Without Borders" is using the ancient healing art to soothe the stress, aches, pains, tired minds and muscles of residents, relief workers and National Guardsmen struggling under the weight of surviving and rebuilding a

still devastated New Orleans, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita.

Not as well known as the doctors' group with a similar name, "Acupuncturists Without Borders", founded after Katrina hit New Orleans, has been working in New Orleans since October, 2005. Rotating teams of volunteer acupuncturists from across the country come to offer their unique services with free community-style

acupuncture provided in health clinics, food distribution centers, Red Cross shelters, mobile units, churches, and the tent cities and hotels housing relief workers.

"New Orleans remains a very difficult place to live and work. People are under tremendous pressure to keep things together and we are doing what we can to help. We also bring a different understanding to what 'put a pin in it' means," said Diana Fried, executive director of Acupuncturists Without Borders.

Done in groups, community-style acupuncture can help break the isolation often felt after traumatic events.

"The treatments support rebuilding strength and resiliency that is essential for the recovery process. Acupuncture treatments have a calming effect and help those struggling with anger, hostility and frustration," said Fried.

People are open to the treatments, though most patients don't know much about acupuncture, said GERALYNN "GIGI" FELICETTA, an acupuncturist from San Diego. "There is so much spirit, the spirit cannot be broken," she said.

The aim of Acupuncturists Without Borders seemingly is to tap into that spirit and offer relief.

Acupuncturists Without Borders volunteers travel in teams throughout the city and nearby towns. They have served everyone from volunteer homebuilders with Habitat for Humanity, and Red Cross workers, to Latino immigrants and Vietnamese and Black residents in New Orleans East.

Treatments usually last from 30-60 minutes.

## CDC report says fewer blacks contracted HIV from 2001 to 2004

By Sherrel Wheeler Stewart  
Contributing Writer

(Special from BlackAmericaWeb.com) - Throughout the country Tuesday, as support groups and health educators are observing National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day with programs and seminars to help reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS, results from a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say that the number of black men and women diagnosed with HIV from 2001 to 2004 has declined.

Still the rate of HIV diagnosis among blacks is more than eight times the diagnosis rate of whites, the report stated.

The rate of HIV diagnosis (diagnoses per 100,000 population) declined 6.8 percent annually among black women and 4.4 percent annually among black men, between 2001 and 2004, according to the report led by Tonji Durant of the CDC.

"There has been a level of complacency that has helped the epidemic spread," Deborah Levine, vice president of community development for the National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS, told BlackAmericaWeb.com.

"We want to raise awareness. For those who find out they are positive, we want to get them into care. For those who are negative, but are involved in high-risk behavior, we want to get them into prevention programs so that they learn to keep themselves safe," said Levine. "Unfortunately, there are too many people out there who don't think they are at risk."

The National Black Leadership Commission partners with several community leaders and organizations today and throughout the year to boost awareness of HIV/AIDS, Levine said.

In New York, free HIV/AIDS testing will be offered in all five boroughs Tuesday in conjunction with the city's department of health. Also leaders of the organization will be on radio stations and television stations providing information.

According to a recent article in The New York Times, about 50 percent of AIDS-related deaths in the city occur among blacks, who account for 25

percent of the city's population. In addition, black women account for 34 percent of the city's new AIDS cases-an increase from 12 percent 20 years ago-and approximately one in five black men ages 40 to 49 living in the city is HIV-positive.

California Legislative Black Caucus Chairman Mervyn M. Dymally, D-Compton, calls HIV/AIDS a health crisis in the black community.

"More than 55,000 citizens of California are living with AIDS and 19 percent of them are African-American," Dymally said in a prepared statement. Also, 57,000 citizens in Los Angeles County have HIV or AIDS, and 24 percent of those afflicted are African-Americans, Dymally said.

Throughout California and other states, community and health organizations will be sponsoring free AIDS/HIV testing Tuesday and offering programs on the disease and its impact on the black community.

"There is still that disbelief that it can't happen to me," Jasmyne Cannick, a California-based columnist and author who works to educate people on HIV/AIDS, told BlackAmericaWeb.com. "When we talk about prevention and messaging, we have to ask if we are messaging the right groups."

Studies show that the rate of HIV/AIDS remains disproportionately high among black teens and heterosexual young adults.

Black teens between the ages of 13 and 19 represented 15 percent of the U.S. teens in 2001, but they accounted for two-thirds of all new AIDS cases among teens in that year," Levine said.

Other information in the new CDC report included:

- The sharpest decline in HIV diagnoses was among injection drug users.
- Heterosexual black men and women also experienced

declines in HIV diagnoses from 2001 to 2004, though black gay and bisexual men-the group most heavily impacted by HIV-experienced continued stability in diagnoses

• HIV diagnosis among black female injection drug users declined an estimated 9.8 percent. There was a 4.2 percent annual decline in diagnoses was among black heterosexual women.

• HIV diagnosis among black male injection drug users showed a 9.7 percent decline. The diagnosis rate among black heterosexual black men declined a 4.9 percent.

"Too many people still think that this is just a gay, white disease," Levine said. "They think if they are not an IV drug user, and the man they are kicking it with is not a drug user, then they are not at risk."

The declining numbers of diagnoses, although hopeful, Levine maintains, are not a sign for blacks to become complacent.

"There are not enough of us out here educating people," she said. "We must continue working to make sure the community stays healthy and that we bring awareness."

## Rare chlamydia strain is infecting gay men

By Lauran Neergaard  
AP Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) - A particularly bad strain of chlamydia not usually seen in this country appears to be slowly spreading among gay and bisexual men, an infection that can increase their chances of getting or spreading the AIDS virus.

Called LGV chlamydia, this sexually transmitted disease has caused a worrisome outbreak in Europe, where some countries have confirmed dozens of cases. Diagnoses confirmed by U.S. health officials still are low, just 27 since they warned a year ago that the strain was headed here.

But specialists say that's undoubtedly a fraction of the infections, because this illness is incredibly hard to diagnose: Few U.S. clinics and laboratories can test for it. Painful symptoms can be mistaken for other illnesses, such as irritable bowel syndrome.

And because LGV chlamydia doesn't always cause noticeable symptoms - right away, at least - an unknown number of people may silently harbor and spread it, along with an increased risk of HIV transmission.

"My feeling is that what we're seeing now is still the tip of the iceberg," says Dr. Philippe Chiliade of the Whitman-Walker Clinic in Washington, D.C., which diagnosed its first few cases of LGV last month and is beginning to push for asymptomatic men to be screened.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention already was counting an 8 percent increase in HIV among gay and bisexual men between 2003 and 2004, before LGV's arrival was recognized.

"We are really concerned about this," says Dr. Catherine McLean of CDC's HIV and STD prevention program.

Three weeks of the antibiotic doxycycline effectively treats LGV. But patients have to know they're at risk, and then find a test.

Chlamydia, caused by bacteria, is among the most common sexually transmitted diseases. As many as 3 million Americans a year may become infected with common strains, best known for causing infertility in women if left untreated.

This more virulent strain is called "lymphogranuloma venereum," or LGV. It's not a new form, but one rarely seen outside of Africa or Southeast Asia.

Symptoms differ from regular chlamydia: swollen lymph nodes in the groin; genital or rectal ulcers; and painful bowel movements and other gastrointestinal symptoms that may mimic inflammatory bowel disease. Such symptoms leave patients particularly susceptible to HIV infection if they also encounter that virus.

LGV can infect both sexes, although new cases diagnosed so far are among men having sex with men.

Screening requires nucleic acid testing, a complex type of genetic testing not yet commercially available for rectal use.

Because testing is difficult, no one knows how prevalent LGV truly is. In a surprise finding last fall, Dutch scientists tested some tissue samples stored in San Francisco since the 1980s, and found evidence that today's LGV strain had gone unrecognized at the time. So has it been simmering here all along, or is it on the rise?

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