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A SPECIAL NORTHSTAR INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

With Enough Black Murders To Fill A City, What Should We Do?

By Hazel Trice Edney

NNPA Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - The number could fill a city the size of Orlando, Fla.; Little Rock, Ark.; Springfield, Ill. or Pasadena, Calif. It's larger than the population of Durham, N.C.; Jackson, Miss.; Hartford, Conn.; Augusta, Ga. or Chattanooga, Tenn.

This number is 195,757. And that's how many African-American males have been victims of

homicide since the Federal Bureau of Investigation began keeping detailed statistics by race in 1976. That figure does not include the 56,776 murdered African-American females, which brings the total Black homicide count over the past 27 years to 252,533 - larger than the populations of Louisville, Ky.; Akron, Ohio; Rochester, N.Y. or Scottsdale, Arizona.

With a White homicide toll at 275,529 over that same time period,

the Black rate is more than six times higher, about 20.5 to 3.3 per 100,000.

"Essentially, what you first see is a rather strong correlation

between the city's homicide rate and the percentage of population that's Black," explains James Fox, a criminal justice expert at Northeastern University in Boston.

"However, when you introduce into the analysis those other factors, particularly the children in broken homes and poverty, that's really what's underlying those homicide

rates."

Fox says the booming economy in the 1990s contributed to the reduction in homicides because it

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Coalition Demands More Jobs And Contracts For Blacks And Low-Income On SHA Projects



Members of a community coalition hold up a banner in protest of the Seattle Housing Authority's distribution of contracts and jobs to African Americans and low-income residents in Seattle. (L-R): Michelle Bradford, Robert Collins, Eddie Rye, Jr., Pastor Ricky Willis, Verlene Wilder, Todd Hawkins, and Harold Wright. Staff Photo/Chris B. Bennett.

By Chris B. Bennett

Publisher/Editor

Community and religious leaders came together to call on the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) to adhere to federal guidelines and provide jobs and contracts to low-income residents, the homeless, and residents who live in or around the Hope VI Redevelopment projects of New Holly, Rainier Vista, High Point, and Yesler Terrace.

Under the Hope VI grants awarded to SHA, SHA is required to provide employment and training for low and very low-income persons. And according to Section 3 of the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Act of 1968 the following groups have a right to a job in rebuilding their communities: Residents of public and assisted housing, residents of the surrounding neighborhoods, youth enrolled in certain training programs, and homeless individuals, something that community activists and organizers say is not happening.

The community coalition, led by the A. Phillip Randolph Institute, is asking that fifty percent of all construction hours at New Holly and Rainier Vista be worked by unemployed and low-income workers from the community.

"We want a community that we can live in, that we can work in, and be afforded the same economic opportunities afforded to other communities," said Verlene Wilder, western regional director and Seattle chapter president of the A. Phillip Randolph Institute.

In addition, community organizers want SHA to designate one apprenticeship training position - to be filled by low-income youth, people of color and women - for every five jobs at Rainier Vista and New Holly; all non-construction jobs - receptionist, office assistant, expeditor, etc. - to be filled by low-income workers from the community; the establishment of a racially and ethnically diverse community oversight committee to

monitor the community hiring plan; and funding set-aside for childcare, clothing, tools, ESL classes and other services that will help members of the community succeed in these jobs.

"Our people make up thirty-seven percent of your residents, and we aren't even getting one-percent of the jobs," said Carl Livingston, associate pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist church, at SHA's commission meeting Monday night.

"People in our community are struggling to find a job, they are going to the food bank and everything else, and they shouldn't have to when there is all this money coming into our communities," said pastor Ricky Willis of True Vine Missionary Baptist Church.

SHA officials maintain that they are complying with federal guidelines, and are committed to going the extra-mile to assist low-income residents to compete successfully for jobs related to their current redevelopment projects.

"There is no question that we are in compliance with the federal law," said James Fearn, general counsel for SHA.

"The law is not the issue, the federal law does not require what you are suggesting," said Fearn as he addressed members of the community coalition.

SHA made available a 12-page document that outlined the employment history and guidelines associated with their Hope VI Redevelopment Projects, but community organizers said this document, while compelling, does not effectively respond to the concerns that they have.

"It doesn't matter how many pieces of paper they give us, because when we go by these sites we don't see any of our people working," said Wilder.

According to Wilder, there are more than enough qualified individuals from the community looking for work on these projects

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Sound Transit To Receive \$75 Million For Light Rail

Sound Transit Board Chair and King County Executive Ron Sims announced that a conference committee made up of House and Senate lawmakers settled on a \$75 million fiscal-year 2004 appropriation for Central Link light rail - the full amount requested by Sound Transit and the Bush Administration.

"Once again, Sen. Patty Murray has come through for the people of our congested region," said Sims. "Once again, she has demonstrated her ability to work across party lines and deliver results. She is our hero."

Sen. Murray, a member of the conference committee, played a key role in bridging the gap between the full \$75 million proposed by the Senate and a lower appropriation of \$15 million that was earlier proposed by the House.

Sen. Murray and other members of Washington's Congressional delegation joined Sound Transit in celebrating the beginning of light rail construction on Nov. 8. Among those on hand was Rep. Norm Dicks, D-Tacoma, a senior member of the House Appropriations Committee who also played a pivotal role in securing federal support for the project.

"The people of Washington are truly fortunate to have champions

like Sen. Murray and Rep. Dicks," Sims said. "Time and again, their stature and influence translate into real benefits for all of us."

The conference agreement will go back to each house of Congress for approval before it goes to President Bush's desk for his signature. In February the President included the \$75 million in his proposed 2004 fiscal budget.

The Federal Transit Administration on Oct. 24 executed a \$500 million full funding grant agreement (FFGA) for Central Link following an extensive Congressional review and U.S. Department of Transportation Inspector General audit. The \$75 million represents the 2004 installment of the FFGA, bringing the total federal contributions so far to \$166 million. The remaining \$334 million is scheduled to be provided in future years.

Central Link light rail has the highest rating possible from the federal government and is an ideal technology for moving people between their homes, jobs and other destinations amid the region's challenging geography of hills, valleys and water. Central Link's initial segment will move more than 42,000 people a day by 2020.

Military Reservist Economic Injury Loans Still Available

WASHINGTON - Small businesses with essential employees called to active duty may still apply for Military Reservist Economic Injury Disaster Loans (MREIDL) from the U.S. Small Business Administration.

For the last two years, the MREIDL program has provided loans to eligible small businesses to cover operating costs that cannot be met due to the loss of a key employee called to active duty in the reserves or National Guard.

"Many small businesses have had to cope with the loss of know-how, and have been hurt financially by the absence of a key employee during the recent call ups," said SBA Administrator Hector V. Barreto. "This loan program has helped many businesses survive, and the SBA will continue to support these dedicated men and women who have made such a great sacrifice in the course of serving their country."

Small businesses may apply for MREIDLs of up to \$1.5 million if they have been financially impacted by the loss of an essential employee. These working capital loans may be used to pay necessary operating expenses that could have otherwise been covered. The loans cannot be used to refinance debt or expand the business. The current interest rate is 3.1 percent, with a maximum term of 30 years. The SBA determines the amount of economic injury, the term of each loan and the payment amount based on the borrower's financial circumstances.

The MREIDL filing period ends 90 days after the date the business owner or key employee is discharged from active duty.

To download an application, visit the Web site at www.sba.gov/disaster. Businesses can also contact the SBA disaster area offices to obtain an application. In Washington, Idaho and Oregon, call 1-800-488-5323.

Congressional Committee Earmarks More Than \$100 Million For King County Transportation Improvements

A joint congressional conference committee has approved 15 transportation projects totaling \$106 million for King County. As part of that package, King County's Department of Transportation will receive a \$13.1 million appropriation to support transportation improvements such as the purchase of new King County Metro Transit hybrid electric buses, countywide signal synchronization projects and the replacement of the South Park Bridge.

"I would like to thank Senator Patty Murray and other members of our congressional delegation for their continued commitment to support these transportation improvements that are so vital to the future of our region," King County

Executive Ron Sims said. "This funding is particularly important in light of the revenue losses we currently face in transportation. Any federal investment that enables this region to move ahead with some improvements is greatly appreciated, especially during these times."

The appropriation earmarks \$5 million to help support the purchase of more than 200 new hybrid articulated buses beginning in 2004. Each bus will carry up to 60 passengers while emitting fewer pollutants than any comparable transit fleet anywhere in the world. In King County, it will mean the linking of cleaner air with efficient transit operations that will cost up to 50 percent less to run than the

agency's current dual-mode fleet of buses. The clean air buses will also accommodate the operation of both buses and light rail in the downtown Seattle tunnel.

The measure also sets aside \$1.5 million to synchronize signals in urban areas throughout King County. This work will improve traffic flow in key corridors clogged by local congestion. An additional \$2 million will help keep replacement work moving on the South Park Bridge in the Duwamish industrial area.

An additional \$3.6 million has been approved for the construction of a transit center/park-and-ride garage on Seattle's First Hill as part of Swedish Hospital's expansion of its Providence Campus. Another

\$1 million will provide partial funding for the continuation of passenger only service between Vashon Island and downtown Seattle.

This funding is part of a larger appropriations package totaling \$106 million for projects in King County. Other projects receiving funding include money for Sound Transit light rail and corridor improvements on I-405.

The appropriation now goes to the full U.S. House and Senate for final passage, which is expected to occur within a few days. King County expects to begin receiving these transportation revenues early next year.

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