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A Data News Weekly Exclusive

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Congressman Richmond Travels to Africa with President Obama



Louisiana Congressman Cedric Richmond stands with an African elephant during his recent visit to Kenya accompanying President Obama during his historic visit to his ancestral nation as well as Ethiopia and Italy.

By Marion Hercyl

Louisiana Congressman Cedric Richmond along with a group of twenty lawmakers travelled with President Barack Obama to Kenya and Ethiopia recently in what was the president's first trip to his ancestral homeland since being elected.

The White House invited a large contingent of lawmakers, prominently members of the Congressional Black Caucus, to join him on the Africa trip. Reps. Karen Bass (D-Calif.), Cedric Richmond (D-La.), G.K. Butterfield (D-N.C.), Charlie Rangel (D-N.Y.) and Emanuel Cleaver (D-Mo.) among others made the historic trip.

The trip marks the first time a sitting president has traveled to Ethiopia. While in that country, President Obama attended the 2015 Global Entrepreneurship Summit and met with and delivered a speech the African Union leaders. While visiting Kenya, the president met with Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta.

Remarking on the importance of the trip for Louisi-

On the Cover: Members of the Congressional Black Caucus during their recent trip to the African nations of Kenya and Ethiopia with President Obama.

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Join The Movement To “Kick Obesity Out Of America”

The Fourth Annual The Legend Of LIONMAN One Million Kick Challenge, September 17, 2015 – November 17, 2015

Data News Report

In recognition of National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month in September, LIONMAN Foundation will kick off The Fourth Annual - The Legend Of LIONMAN One Million Kick Challenge on

September 17th. This year, registered participants can do their kicks everyday through November 16th. Kicks performed and recorded on November 17th will go into the count to set a New Guinness Book World Record during a Mardi-Gras style celebration

all across the country.

Obesity is a national epidemic, particularly among children and adolescents. Approximately 1 in 3 youths are overweight or obese. In addition, there has been an increase of chronic obesity-related health problems such as high blood pressure, cancer, diabetes and asthma among American youth.

LIONMAN Foundation recognizes that many of those illnesses including obesity can be managed and prevented with simple lifestyle modifications. To that end, The Legend Of LIONMAN One Million Kick Challenge aims to “Kick Obesity Out Of America!”

LIONMAN Foundation is proud and excited to wel-

come new partners SHAPE America and SparkPE in addition to long time partners The President’s Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition, First Lady Michelle Obama’s “Let’s Move!” initiative, the Presi-

dent’s Challenge Program, the Presidential Active Lifestyle Award, and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

LIONMAN Foundation wants you to “Show Your Kicks!” Share pictures and videos of you and your team kicking. Like and share with LIONMAN Foundation Inc. on Facebook, tweet us at @LegendLIONMAN, or upload your photos on Google+.

Participants of The Legend Of LIONMAN One Million Kick Challenge also will qualify for the Presidential Active Lifestyle Award (PALA). Join The Legend Of LIONMAN One Million Kick Challenge group at www.PresidentsChallenge.org and record your daily physical activity.



I WOULD DO ANYTHING FOR MY PARENTS, BUT I COULD USE A LITTLE HELP.

If you are caring for an older parent or loved one, you’re probably feeling the weight of the time, money and stress involved in this labor of love. Join AARP and other family caregivers to discuss the challenges you face, and learn about the resources available to you. Together, we can work toward some commonsense solutions—like instruction, help at home, and other tools—that will make a world of difference.

I ♥ Caregivers

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Living Longer, Living Smarter	10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.	Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2015
Medicare for Caregivers	10:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon	Thursday, Oct. 22, 2015

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Cover Story, Continued from page 2.

ana, Congressman Richmond said, "I look forward to joining President Obama and my fellow members of Congress on this momentous trip to Africa, I anticipate learning from our overseas colleagues and developing relationships that will further global cooperation and prosperity."

Richmond continued, "The 2nd District is home to some of the largest ports in the world that ship American products across the globe. Expanding our access to new markets would benefit our workers and grow the economy. It is as important as ever to engage with our international partners around the world to enhance security and spur the global economy. I share the President's desire to work with our partners in Africa and around the world to benefit us here at home."

Congressman G.K. Butterfield said he planned to use the trip to stress to Kenyan and Ethiopian officials Congress' commitment to them as trade, national security and diplomatic partners.

"Kenya is a strategic partner and they have some unique challenges and certainly Ethiopia does too. They need to be reassured that America is an ally and that we care about the continent in its entirety," said Butterfield, who chairs the CBC.

The presidential delegation included just one Republican: Sen. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.), who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs.

Flake has been an ally of the Obama administration on restoring diplomatic ties with Cuba and is one of a handful of Republicans who are still on the fence about the nuclear deal with Iran.

Two Democratic senators also



Members of the United States Congress visited with Italian officials during their recent trip to Italy which included former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (center) and Louisiana Congressman Cedric Richmond (far right).

travelled with the president: Chris Coons (Del.) and Ed Markey (Mass.), the ranking member of the African Affairs subpanel.

All 17 House Representatives who accompanied the President on the trip are members of the Congressional Black Caucus, including the group's chairman, Rep. G.K. Butterfield (D-N.C.).

Rep. Karen Bass (D-Calif.), the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Africa and global health, is part of the group.

Despite the breakdown of Obama's delegation, administration officials have stressed that U.S. policy toward Africa generally en-

joys bipartisan support.

"President Obama is building on what has been a strong bipartisan

tradition of U.S. support for Africa," national security adviser Susan Rice said this week.

He departs for Ethiopia on Sunday, becoming the first sitting president to visit the country. He plans to give a speech to the African Union.

Below are the names of lawmakers who travelled with the president.

Rep. Karen Bass (D-Calif.)
Rep. G.K. Butterfield (D-N.C.)
Rep. Emanuel Cleaver (D-Mo.)
Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.)
Sen. Chris Coons (D-Del.)
Sen. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.)
Rep. Marcia Fudge (D-Ohio)
Rep. Al Green (D-Texas)
Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)
Rep. Robin Kelly (D-Ill.)
Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)
Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.)
Sen. Ed Markey (D-Mass.)
Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-N.Y.)
Rep. Gwen Moore (D-Wis.)
Rep. Donald Payne (D-N.J.)
Rep. Charlie Rangel (D-N.Y.)
Rep. Cedric Richmond (D-La.)
Rep. Terri Sewell (D-Ala.)
Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-Miss.)

Ava Duvernay
Arts & Entertainment
(not shown)

Jeff Johnson
Trailblazer

Marc Morial
Humanitarian

Carolyn Hunter
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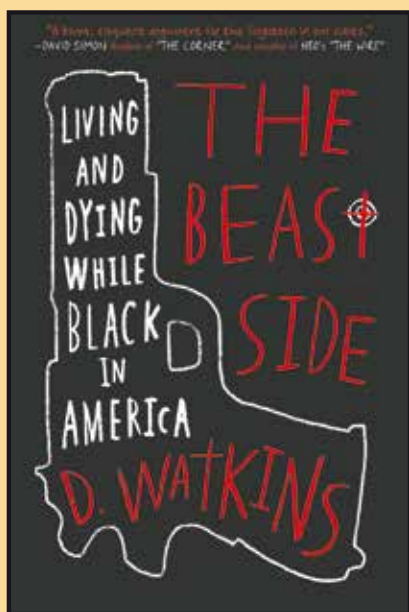
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The Beast Side

Living (and Dying) While Black in America



*The Beast Side:
Living (and Dying)
While Black in America*
by D. Watkins
c.2015, Hot Books
\$21.99 / \$27.99 Canada
176 pages

By The Bookworm Sez

Bang.

That's all it takes to snuff out a life. One bang, though there are usually more before someone is dead: Freddie Gray, Michael Brown, Tamar Rice, Jonathan Ferrell, how did we get to this point? Better yet, as D. Watkins ponders in his new book "The Beast Side," how do we get out of it?

The list of the dead literally grows every day: statistically, an African American citizen is murdered by white cops, black cops, or neighbors every 28 hours. It's war out there for Black America, says D. Watkins, and he's tired of it.

His idea for ending violence and injustice is unique, but meaningful.

Watkins says that reading absolutely changed his life by teaching him to think critically, and it saved him. Literacy, he says, opens lines of communication, while sharing individual stories can educate and can make people eager to read. "The Beast Side" is, therefore, a book of stories.

How does it happen, for example, that a black writer from Baltimore – a city that's sixty percent black – finds himself speaking at a large event where there are few black people? The reason: there are two Baltimores and the split is sharp. Before college, Watkins had little contact with whites. Do white people know what's happening in east Baltimore? Not many do, he says and when folks learn, they're usually surprised.

It's almost hard to grasp how many of Watkins' friends and family have died by violence. He was only a boy when he wit-

nessed a murder; crime was that common. He watched people on his street do anything to make a buck (they're the hardest working people in the nation, he says); he sold drugs, hustled, and carried a gun (mandatory, he claims), but his brother wanted him off the streets.

Watkins went to college to become a professor and a teacher. His stories help black men understand why they should respect black women more; they explain why Watkins doesn't recite the Pledge of Allegiance, how black people are left out of pop culture, why reading is essential, and how eating poorly could be Black America's worst habit. And they show how, deeply and despite the rift in this country, we really aren't so different after all.

Is that such a surprise?

At the risk of sounding Pollyanna-ish, no. But can that hope change the way things are, as reported in "The Beast Side"?

That, I think, will depend on your POV: author D. Watkins says things that many people don't want to hear and his words fairly seethe with anger – yet, pages later, those stories seem almost warm before abruptly turning to outrage and anger again. Hope followed by persistent reality is what you get, then, along with a lingering sense of rightful unease, inability to stop pondering, and a need to become much, much more educated.

Though its subject matter can be harsh, I think "The Beast Side" is appropriate for older-teens-to-adults, particularly if recent news stories disturb you greatly. If that's the case, then aim to read it.

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Mixing Veggies and Ornamentals

By LMG Calla Victoria
Data News Weekly Guest
Columnist

With the cool fall breezes thankfully upon us, it is time for a little pruning. Trim back your rose bushes by 50% to ensure thick healthy foliage and lots of blooms in November.

If you only have one or two rose bushes by all means use your pruners, but if you have lots of rose bushes use a hedge trimmer and get the job done.

You can prune most of your other shrubs as well, but be careful with camellias, as they have set bud for their blooms already, so you do not want to cut off your buds thus decreasing your blooms. This is also the best time for planting trees and shrubs because, as the major growing season is over, the energy goes into building a strong root system as the plant is



not actively growing or blooming.

By all means make room from some cool weather veggies in your garden this fall. Arugula, which grows rapidly and is one of my favorite veggies, is a great

cool weather crop. And if you let it go to seed, it makes the most beautiful delicate, intoxicatingly fragrant white flowers that are delicious in salads. Other cool weather crops to consider include broccoli, cau-

liflower, beets, cabbage, collars, mustard greens, lettuce, chard, and Pak choy (Bok choy).

You do not have to set aside a designated area for you veggies, they can be mixed in with the ornamental plant material. Most veggies thrive in the same conditions that roses thrive in, well-drained soil with full sun exposure. You can research "companion planting charts" online to find out what ornamentals work best with the veggies you want to plant. Edible landscaping is a good thing, and rapidly growing in popularity. There is nothing more gratifying than going out to your garden and picking fresh veggies for your dinner table.

Check out my "Gardening Tip of the Week" at www.thegardeningdiva.com

Remember, never get too busy to stop and enjoy the beautiful flowers!

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Another Government Shutdown?



Julianne Malveaux
NNPA Columnist

Congress must approve a budget by October 1, or our government will shut down. That means that people will not be paid and technically, government departments will cease to operate. Social Security payments, veterans' benefits, and more will cease to be paid. Literally, government will shut down.

Whenever we get to this brinkmanship, Congress approves a continuing resolution that provides temporary funding at current levels, or enforces an across the board reduction of a certain percent. Sometimes the cuts are established so that the military takes smaller cuts than other de-

partments. The bottom line is that lawmakers figure out how to apply a Band-Aid to a hemorrhaging leg. The bad news is that the problem does not go away. The good news is that it keeps us going for a few minutes.

Why are House Republicans so determined to have a budget showdown? Part of it is their determination to end federal funding for Planned Parenthood. They refuse to understand that, in addition to providing abortion service, Planned Parenthood provides basic women's health services, including gynecological examinations. They are providing these health services in areas where they are not available.

Abortions represent just a fraction of what they offer. But, based on a set of bogus videos, some Republicans are using those videos to posture about abortion. Somebody needs to speak up for Planned Parenthood, but unless they do, this is going to be a rook on the shutdown chessboard.

Then there is the issue, always,

about budget cuts and the difference between domestic spending and military spending. In order to accept the Obama budget, Congress will have to lift the debt ceiling. They don't want to. The Republican rap is we need more fiscal discipline. Many of these folks will take to the floor of Congress or of the Senate to rail about irresponsible spending. Their drama impedes the October 1 deadline, and they know it.

This is an opportunity for many Republicans who are presidential candidates (Ted Cruz, Jeb Bush, Donald Trump, and Ben Carson to name a few) to show their stuff. They want to stand out from their opponents, as well as from this administration. They hope like hell that C-SPAN or some other media is there to capture their vapid remarks. They pray that their passionate nonsense will make the evening news. If they have the slightest bit of sense, they will help pass this budget. Perhaps, after they've blown off enough steam, they will.

The discussion about the debt

ceiling and the division between domestic and military spending is a recurrent one. Some members of both Congress and the Senate have mixed feelings around the deal that our country has cut with Iran. We have limited Iran's ability to manufacture nuclear weapons, and we have imposed some checks and balances to keep them to their word. How do you cut a deal with the devil? Can we really trust Iraq? For the longest time I have had mixed feeling about the deal, mostly because I really think that part of the deal should be to release American citizens, like the Washington Post reporter Jason Rezaian, who are being held in Iraq. After much contemplation, I am persuaded that the Iran deal is better than anything we've had until now. We're going to deal with a free-lance devil, or a devil with a contract. We can't verify a thing with the freelance devil. We have significant, though not perfect, limits to Iran's arms accumulation, so we've cut a deal with the devil with a contract. That's not perfect but it is better than nothing.

ing. Would we prefer the Donald Trump nonsense of "I can negotiate with anyone? Somebody would negotiate his comedic idiocy out of the room.

It is almost impossible that Congress will pass the twelve bills that are part of our budget. Give that, the next best choice is to maintain the status quo, or impose a percentage cut until a budget deal is cut. Planned Parenthood and Iran should not even be part of the conversation.

The deadline, however, has seemed to collide with the drama. There are folks who understand that the budget, or some version of it, needs to be approved by October 1. They just don't plan to sacrifice their dramatic moment by doing the right thing. Will government shut down? Only if these presidential postures decide that their drama trumps an important deadline.

Julianne Malveaux is a Washington, D.C.-based author and economist. She can be reached at www.juliannealveaux.com

Black Votes Matter



Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.
NNPA Columnist

As we enter the 2016 political campaign season with numerous candidates for president of the United States in the Republican and Democratic parties, it appears once again that the political and economic interests of Black America are not being adequately addressed by either of the major political parties. It is as if the Black American vote is being taken for granted.

The Black vote is important first to the Black community and sec-

ondly to American democracy. The right to vote and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 did not come about without a struggle. Many brothers and sisters went to jail and paid a heavy painful price to acquire the right to vote. Some even died in the struggle to advance Black political and civic participation.

In the Civil Rights Movement, voting rights were deemed precious and a sacred moral responsibility to everyone of voting age. Today, there is need for the Black community to reassert the value and strategic leverage of the Black vote. It is one thing for the status quo to ignore the political interests of the Black community, but it is another when so many of us are missing in action on Election Day.

According to the United States Elections Project, Black voter turnout has been significantly increasing steadily from 48.1 per-

cent in 1996 to 52.9 percent in 2000 to 61.4 percent in 2004 and peeking at 69 percent in 2008 when Senator Barack H. Obama was elected president. In 2016, we should have no less than a 90 percent Black turnout. If that happens, the Black vote, more than any other single voting group in the U.S., will determine the outcome of the elections.

We should recall that in the 2012 elections, for the first time in history, Black voter turnout was higher than White voter turnout – 66.6 percent to 64.1 percent. Why do all these voting statistics matter? The short answer is because if we can continue to increase our voter turnout we will be better positioned to advance the interests of the Black community.

A few weeks ago, the Pew Research Center reported that for the first time in history, there are

at least 364 counties, independent cities and other county-level equivalents in the U.S. that did not have a White majority population – "the most in modern history, and more than twice the level in 1980." Ninety-two of the 364 counties are predominantly Black. This is leading to the election of more Blacks as county sheriffs, county chief executives, and other high public offices at the county and regional levels.

Some would say it is poetic justice, but it is a rapidly changing racial demographics reality in terms of population density increases and Black elected officials are on the rise particularly in the 11 states that once made up the old Confederacy: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. That's not surprising when you consider that 55 percent

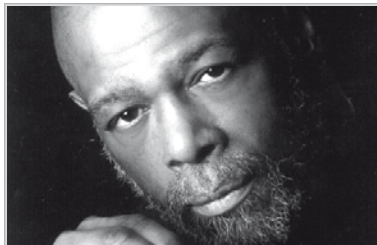
of all African Americans reside in the South, up from 53.6 percent in 2000.

It's not surprising that some of the most intense efforts to suppress the Black vote is taking place in the South.

Yes, Black Lives Matter! We must do whatever is necessary to improve the quality of life for our families and communities. Do not fall into the cynical attempts to persuade us that our votes do not count. Our votes do count and do make a big difference for the betterment of Black America. Yes, Black Votes Matter!

Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. is the President and CEO of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) and can be reached for national advertisement sales and partnership proposals at: dr.bchavis@nnpa.org; and for lectures and other professional consultations at: <http://drbenjamin-fchavisjr.wix.com/drbcfc>

Rumor Has It, They Knew You When



James Washington
Guest Columnist

I'm not sure whether or not I've talked about my faith walk from the point of view of those individuals who have tracked my progress from the beginning until now. They seem to have fallen into two quite different categories. The first group who noticed included those Christians around me, who like me, rejoiced in my rebirth. A lot of the columns I've written were about those who prayed and rejoiced and breathed a sigh of relief at the mere thought of a new beginning for me. Discovery would be an appropriate word to use here. I know as a result, I've discovered more about people I thought I knew after being saved than I ever thought possible before I was saved. My analogy is that I saw the world and my friends as old black and white movies. Now they come across in technicolor and surround sound. It seems that being kindred spirits in Christ, we got it like that now.

Now the second group included those individuals who couldn't and still can't relate to me now. There were and are so called friends of mine in this group too. It's hard to explain but bible study, tithing, regular church attendance, prayer, praise and I guess an honest attempt at wholesome living can bring out an unusual reaction in some folk. I know because I used to be one of those people who avoided anyone and anything that invited God into my life. I wasn't malicious or anything. It just wasn't part of my

program. So I understood the reaction I was getting from those in this group. Some thought it was a phase, others addiction and still others felt I was on some kind of moral guilt trip that I'd just get over. Many couldn't see the serious nature of my transformation because they too saw me only in terms of black and white. Others just refused to accept God as the reason that my behavior changed. There just had to be another reason. I must have a hidden agenda. Salvation and eternity are vague concepts. What does eternity have to do with right here, right now? What is so easy to acknowledge in church and in bible study is at times impossible, difficult at best, to communicate elsewhere to people who knew you when and did all those things with you that you don't do anymore. It can be tough. If it were not for those Christians who can and do relate to



this, those who know where they are today compared to where they were yesterday, I might still see the world as only black and white filled with a bunch of gray people. Believe me, technicolor is better. That's why it is so easy for me to relate to Paul. You want to talk about a transformation! It's a wonder Paul

lived to tell anyone about Jesus. His life before the road to Damascus enlightenment is a testament to what I'm talking about. Why should anyone believe anything that came from Paul's murderous mouth? I suppose the answer in hindsight is a pretty good one. The words that came out of Paul's mouth were in-

deed put there by Jesus; the same Christ who knocked me down and picked me up as He also did Paul. I've changed because I had no choice in this matter. And if you're saved, you don't either. But don't worry about it. This is a new me and a new you with a new life and new responsibilities. It is our willing obligation to at least give the Lord our best shot. As the commercial goes, 'just do it.' I think you'll find as Paul did that the point is who you have become and not how others view you. Sooner or later they'll come to understand the change is real and they'll just have to adjust to you or disappear. If they don't, you will. It's not easy but nobody said it would be.

May God bless and keep you always,

James

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Back to School Stress Problematic

By Stacy M. Brown
Special to the NNPA from

Stressed-out students in England recently received a little help with their anxiety after school officials bought in several pooches in training to become guide dogs to help take the students' mind off of deadlines and assessments.

Reportedly, officials said it's been scientifically proven that puppies help to de-stress individuals.

While it's unlikely that students locally will get puppy love, the beginning of a new school year often arrives with apprehension and a bit of anxiety – something with which educators in the Poconos and around the nation are well aware.

"We teach all seventh graders the '7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens' based on Stephen Covey's best-seller, '7 Habits of Highly Ef-



lying and unrealistic expectations for performance, can create undue stress and anxiety, he said.

"The key is to create an environment where children can ask questions, initiate a dialogue that addresses their anxiety and concerns and [allows them to] feel safe to interact with their peers, teachers, parents and the community in which they reside," he said.

Kristen Lee Costa, a licensed social worker and the lead faculty for behavioral sciences at Northeastern University in Boston, said the transition back to school and during various juncture of the school year can be bumpy for many children.

"When apprehension intensifies, it can lead to anxiety and adjustment challenges. It's important for parents and educators to be mindful that this type of stress can not only impede learning, but can also cause unhealthy emotions and behaviors," said Costa, who authored the 2015 motivational book, "Reset: Make the Most of Your Stress."

It's important to help children learn how to focus on the positive, establish strong reuniting routines and rituals and realize that not all challenges are negative or bad," Costa said.

So what can a parent do to contribute to their child's personal and academic success?

Health News Service Project officials advocate looking for negative changes in the student's health, behavior, thoughts, or feelings and to be aware of how a student may interact with others.

The organization suggests watching for overloading, helping students learn stress management skills and being supportive and to encourage involvement in sports and other pro-social activities.

Wilson also offered tips to help manage stress, including:

1. Get organized and take better control of the way your time and energy is spent.
2. Control who you surround yourself with and what you are surrounded by.
3. Give yourself positive feedback.
4. Reward yourself by planning leisure activities.
5. Exercise.
6. Get the right amount of rest. Eat right.

fective People, to help kids be proactive, put first things first and begin with the end in mind which is to develop a plan to tackle homework, study, chores and sports," said John Bell, a school superintendent in Pennsylvania.

"We've had this in place for two years," Bell said.

"We will be adding a high school component this year as part of a new course called 'Freshmen Seminar' which helps ninth graders learn to deal with the move to high school and all of the accompanying issues like stress, more homework, higher expectations in the classroom and more responsibility," he said. When stress gets beyond normal levels or beyond the parental comfort level, a school counselor or child and adolescent psychiatrist should be consulted, said officials from the Health News Service Project which consists of 20 state-based medical and specialty associations and societies.

"Growing up can present many situations that are stressful to children," said Dr. Robert E. Wilson, a member of the Health News Service Project.

"There is pressure on students to succeed or adapt to new situations," Wilson said.

Often, events beyond the student's control occur, such as bul-

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Black Women Mobilizing for 2016 Vote

By Jazelle Hunt
NNPA National Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) – As the 2016 election cycle ramps up, Essence magazine and the Black Women's Roundtable have teamed up to mobilize and re-energize Black women voters.

The partnership hopes to raise the profile of the already-powerful Black women's vote. In the 2008 and 2012 elections, Black women had the highest turnout of any group, with 60 percent of 18- to 29-year-old Black women hitting the polls in 2012 despite a national decline.

"When we're engaged and folks address our issues, we turn out [to vote]. In turning out, we want to make sure our needs are met," said Melanie Campbell, president and CEO of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, and convener of the Black Women's Roundtable, a national civic engagement network.

She continued, "So we wanted to...get this information out early enough that it can resonate in the election cycle."

One way the partnership plans to do this is through its Power of the Sister Vote poll, which Essence launched with its readers last month. The results from more than 2,000 respondents were released this week as part of the Congressional Black Caucus Annual Leadership Conference in Washington, D.C.

"This year is the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act, and we should not take that for granted," said Essence Editor-in-Chief Vanessa De Luca. "I wasn't sur-



Black Women's Roundtable convener, Melanie Campbell (left) and member, Avis Jones-DeWeever. (Jazelle Hunt/NNPA News Service)

prised at all at how enthusiastic [readers] were about the survey. Unfortunately, it's so seldom that people ask. We got the opportunity to share our opinions."

Campaign season began early and under unconventional circumstances. Several candidates for the Republican nomination are pulling significant interest, making it difficult to identify a clear frontrunner and causing quiet divisions within the party. The Democrats have twists of their own – among them are an email controversy surrounding Hillary Clinton that threatens her run for the White House.

One advantage to this lengthy and uncertain election season is that Black women can better position themselves as a crucial

voting bloc.

"What I do know is that I haven't seen us come together enough to leverage our political opinion. We need to get the sense of the timing. You always hear about [our high turnout] once the election's gone down the road," Campbell said. "It's to the benefit of our communities to make sure our communities are respected in 2016, and that our issues are elevated and addressed."

The Shelby v. Holder Supreme Court ruling, which nullified the Voting Rights Act's (VRA) protections against voter discrimination, has also helped create a unique political landscape for 2016. The states flagged for continued voting rights violations are home to a majority of Black women – without Sections 4 and 5 of this key civil rights legisla-

tion, these states have already begun redistricting communities and tightening voting requirements.

"The voting rights issue is definitely something Black women are concerned about. That issue will resonate not just as a policy issue, but a practical issue as well," Campbell stated, adding that without Congressional intervention, voters "will go into election season in January with people changing the rules willy-nilly."

She continued, "We don't have the same level of [voter] protections we once had. It's new territory."

Voting rights is one of many issues affecting Black women in political discourse today. With topics such as criminal justice reform, fair wages, and weakened access to women's health care in the public spotlight, De Luca pointed out that there's much for Black women to say.

"There's so much more at stake that is of concern to our community. And it's not just a presidential election year, it's also a Congressional [election] year," De Luca said, adding that the absence of President Barack Obama does not necessarily spell Black voter disinterest.

"That's a fallacy. People may think, 'it's not going to be Obama so what does it matter'... but I'd argue it matters more than ever."

Aside from rallying Black women to wield their political power, Essence has also joined the BWR's Healthy, Wealthy & Wise Empowerment Tour. The multi-state tour, which ends at the end of the month, addresses income inequality, health justice, criminal justice and retirement security; its final stops are Orlando, Fla., Atlanta, Ga., and Detroit, Mich.

Ultimately, De Luca and Campbell hope the partnership empowers Black women and girls in a variety of levels.

"It's key for Black women to elevate ourselves, and in a way that our voices are heard," Campbell said, adding that the actions send a positive message to Black women voting for the very first time, and those who may be feeling jaded.

She explained, "We want to make sure we're encouraging the power of our vote to still resonate. Black women have to start leveraging our opinions, and if we can do that, we can definitely make change."

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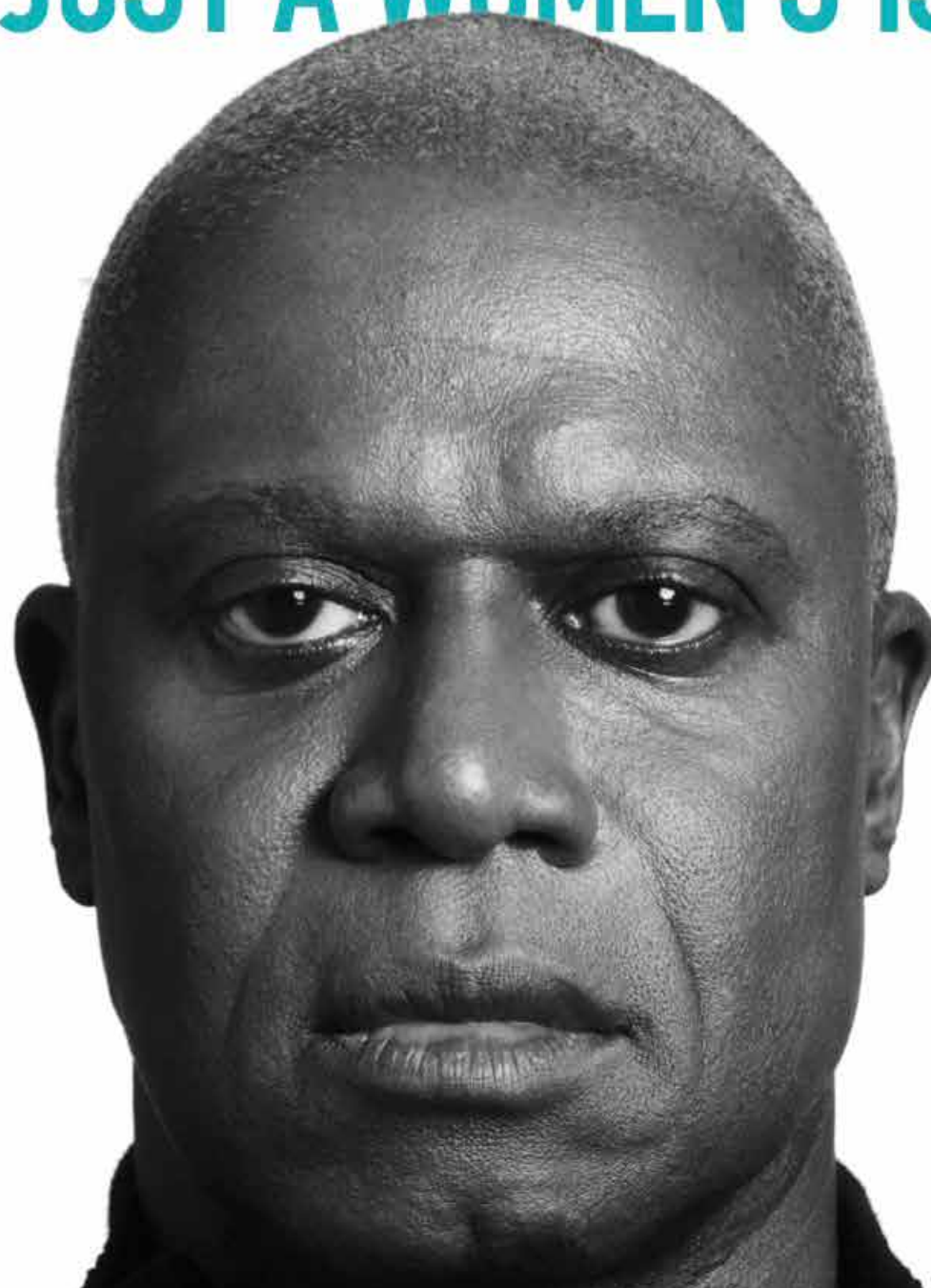
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