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Gulf Coast Officials Go on Spending Spree with BP Oil Spill Funds

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Gulf Coast Officials Go on Spending Spree with BP Oil Spill Funds



By: Data News Staff Reporters

Outrage is beginning to surface throughout the Gulf Coast as reports surfaced this week that officials along the coast have gone on a spending spree with BP money, dropping tens of millions of dollars on gadgets, vehicles and gear – much of which had little to do with the cleanup, an Associated Press investigation shows.

The April 20, 2010 explosion on the Deepwater Horizon rig killed 11 workers and caused the nation’s worst offshore oil spill. As BP spent months trying to cap the well and contain the spill, cities and towns along the coast from Louisiana to Florida worried about the toll on their economies – primarily tourism and the fishing industry – as well as the environmental impact.

The Scandal Breaks

The shocking AP investigation has shown that BP paid state and local governments more than \$754 million in the year since the Gulf Oil Spill. And many coastal politicians squandered tens of millions of dollars on gadgets,

vehicles and gear that had little to do with the cleanup.

BP opened its checkbook while the crisis was still going on. Few conditions on how states could use the money were set, only that cash should go toward mitigating problems from the spill.

As reported this week, in Ocean Springs, Miss., Reserve Police Officers got Tasers. The Sewer Department in nearby Gulfport bought a \$300,000 vacuum truck that never sucked up a drop of oil. Biloxi, Miss., bought a dozen SUVs. A Parish President in Louisiana got herself a top-of-the-line iPad, her spokesman a \$3,100 laptop. And a county in Florida spent \$560,000 on rock concerts to promote its oil-free beaches.

In every case, communities said the new, more powerful equipment was needed to deal at least indirectly with the spill. In many cases, though, the connection between the spill and the expenditures was remote, and lots of money wound up in cities and towns little touched by the goo that washed up on shore, the AP found in records requested from more than 150 communities and dozens of interviews.

Florida’s tourism agency sent chunks of a \$32 million BP grant as far away as Miami-Dade and Broward Counties on the state’s east coast, which never

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Cover Story, Continued from previous page.

saw oil from the disaster. Some officials also lavished campaign donors and others with lucrative contracts.

All told, BP PLC says it has paid state and local governments more than \$754 million as of March 31st, and has reimbursed the federal government for another \$694 million.

How did this happen?

BP set few conditions on how states could use the money, stating only that it should go to mitigate the effects of the spill. The contracts require states to provide the company with at least an annual report on how the money has been used, BP spokeswoman Hejdi Feick said. But it's unclear what consequences, if any, the states could face if they didn't comply.

Some of the money BP doled out to states and municipalities hasn't been spent yet, but the AP's review accounts for more than \$550 million of it. More than \$400 million went toward clear needs like corralling the oil, propping up tourism and covering overtime.

Much of the remaining chunk consists of equally justifiable expenses, but it's also riddled with millions of dollars' worth of contracts and purchases with no clear connection to the spill, the AP found.

William Walker, Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, said it's clear now that communities bought more equipment than they wound up needing. But he doesn't regret handing out BP's money freely.

Waste in Louisiana

When oil from the ruptured Macondo well began to lap at Louisiana's marshes, BP deployed an army of workers to sop it up and hired contractors who specialize in disaster cleanup.

Even with BP and the federal government taking the lead, many communities weren't content to rely on equipment they had before the spill.

Lafourche Parish President Charlotte Randolph billed BP for an iPad, saying she needed it in addition to her parish-paid BlackBerry to communicate with staff and other officials during the crisis. But she didn't buy the iPad until Aug. 26, a month and a half after the well was capped and several weeks after the federal government said much of the oil had been skimmed, burned off, dispersed or dissolved.

"Just because it wasn't streaming from the well any longer doesn't mean it wasn't approaching our shore," Randolph told the AP. "My work is very important. Perhaps one day you could follow me somewhere and learn what my work involves. I must be in contact at all times."

Lafourche Parish spokesman Brennan Matherne, who bought a new Dell laptop and accessories for \$3,165, said working on the spill had worn out the computer he got just a year earlier for \$2,700.

Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama each got an initial \$25 million

from BP, followed by the array of payments for tourism marketing, seafood monitoring and cleanup programs.

Louisiana doled out its initial \$25 million to state agencies, including \$10 million for the Attorney General's Office to devise its legal case against BP and the companies involved in the spill. State agencies spent nearly \$9 million more on equipment, including boats, air monitoring units, mobile radios and life vests.

Local government leaders in Louisiana were left to lodge their requests for money directly with BP. Gov. Bobby Jindal's top Budget Adviser, Paul Rainwater, said the state's deal with BP specified that the money Louisiana got wasn't meant to replace anything that was supposed to go to the parishes.

Blue-collar Plaquemines Parish, which has absorbed some of the spill's worst environmental damage, has received slightly more than \$1 million in BP money, of which \$998,405 went to cover oil-related overtime and other payroll expenses.

"I didn't run up bills. I treated their money like I treated our own," said Plaquemines Parish President Billy Nungesser, an outspoken critic of BP and the federal government's response to the spill. "Maybe down the road I'll look and say we should have stockpiled."

When BP was heavily under attack from the top down for its response to the rapidly growing environmental disaster, the company started throwing huge sums of money at the problems it had in the water and on land. Cutting checks to governments along the coast addressed both issues, even if it meant waiting until later to figure out details like how officials would have to account for the cash.

"We recognized the importance of getting funding to the states, parishes and counties quickly, and therefore provided advance funding to help kick start their emergency response," Feick, the BP Spokeswoman, said in an email.

"Whether the funds could be perceived as being wasted or not really reflects on the organization accepting the money rather than BP," a BP Spokesperson stated.

Doing the Right Thing

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries spent \$5 million for 22 boats and the accompanying trawls, nets and hauling vehicles. "Nobody asked me for a space shuttle or anything," said Wildlife and Fisheries Secretary Robert Barham.

BP money will cover the costs of maintaining the vessels, leasing dock space and buying fuel for at least three years, he said. Whether taxpayers will be forced to pick up these costs after that hasn't been decided.

"They don't run for free," Barham said.

Associated Press and other sources cited for this story.

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State Democrats Move to Halt Jindal's Redistricting Plans

Party Chair Reaches Out to Citizens to Appeal to the Governor

In response this week to Republican Gov. Bobby Jindal's attempts to maneuver redistricting the State Legislature which would favor his party, the Chairman of the State Democratic Party called on Bobby Jindal to end the political posturing.

In a letter to party officials and supporters, Claude "Buddy" Leach called on Democrats to call Jindal's office at 225.342.7015 "and tell him that secret deals and closed-door meetings are unacceptable."

Referring to a meeting that Jindal's aides held with members of the Republican Legislative Delegation Monday, Leach's letter pulled no punches. According to some who attended the meeting, Jindal's aides reportedly pressed lawmakers to maximize GOP Districts and subsequently delete a 30th minority district that had been created in Caddo Parish.

The governor's office also is backing an amendment to the House remapping plan that would reduce the number of Democratic House seats in New Orleans and



Governor Bobby Jindal



Claude "Buddy" Leach

give one more to mainly Republican Jefferson Parish.

Leach said in the letter that Jindal's speech opening the special session stressed that lawmakers

should think of themselves as "Louisianians first and leave partisan politics behind."

"That's what the governor said, but unfortunately that's not what he is doing," Leach said.

Jindal said he has no regrets about getting involved in the redistricting process. "We ... made it very clear we're very happy to provide input and guidance, especially when asked," Jindal said.

"(If) we see an opportunity to improve these bills we absolutely have an obligation ... to speak up in detail how we think these bills can be improved."

The Governor's Chief of Staff, Timmy Teepell, attended the closed-door meeting, and said Monday that the administration favored the repeal of the minority district because of a push-back from GOP lawmakers and a minority lawmaker in Shreveport who could be hurt by creating a new majority African-American District in the same city.

Gov. Jindal said Teepell would be happy to meet with Democrats if they invite him to do so.

Responding in the letter, Leach said that Democrats will not allow "a process so fundamental to representative democracy to turn into a childish partisan food fight. That's why I am asking you (Democrats) to call Gov. Jindal's office right now and tell him to knock it off."

Leach said that "serving the needs of Louisiana families is more important than serving the needs of his party."

The New Orleans Association of Black Social Workers and the National Association of Black Social Workers return to New Orleans

Members and Prospective members of the NABSW will gather for four days of workshops, meetings and service projects in New Orleans April 19 for the NABSW National Conference. This will be the 43rd Annual Meeting for NABSW. Over 37 local chapter members will participate in the events of the conference. The city and state governments will recognize the event with welcoming gestures. Members will have opportunities to gauge the progress of post Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) is mandated by our mission to advocate for Black people. The position papers are our important tool for NABSW Membership and the broader community to be informed on the issues from NABSW's perspective. Local chapters are encouraged to utilize these papers to advocate for policies and procedures that preserve African-American families.

The last meeting held in New Orleans in 2005 reached record-high attendance numbers. This year is expected to be even larger, and is set to generate millions of dollars in economic impact.



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Anthony Bean Community Theater Icon Award Recipients Harold X. Evans and Gwendolyne Foxworth on the Importance of Black Theater

By Edwin Buggage

The Anthony Bean Community Theater for over a decade has become one the premier venues for theater showcasing the talent of many of the city's finest actors. More than just an artistic endeavor it also serves as a place where the plays presented reflects on community uplift. Gwendolyne Foxworth and Harold X. Evans, two of the players from his regular troupe of actors are being honored as the first recipients of the ABCT Icon Award for their service to the New Orleans Theater Community.

Evans is a veteran actor who's worked in film, television and theater. He's received numerous awards for his service and as one who is committed to helping people and serving his community, for Evans this is what initially drew him to Bean's burgeoning theater company. "What really made me interested and impressed me about Anthony was his work with young people," remarks Evans. "And I wanted to contribute to what I felt was a noble mission of preparing the next generation to pursue excellence."

Foxworth is an award-winning actress who has acting in her blood. Her mother was a drama coach directing and writing plays in addition to being a French teacher in her home town of Rowland, North Carolina. "I was around the theater, but would have never thought I would be on the stage, but it has now been



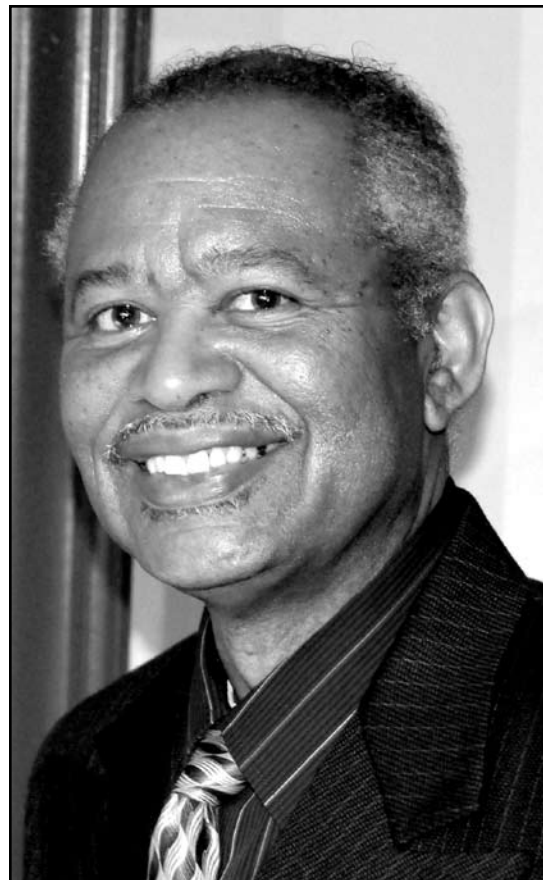
GWENDOLYNE "GIGI" FOXWORTH

Gwendolyne Foxworth

thirty-years I've been involved in theater and it has been a great experience," says Foxworth. Her first encounter with Bean was when she enrolled in an adult acting class over three decades ago, "I was new in town and didn't know anyone, so I enrolled in a class taught by Anthony Bean and made friends with people who are still my friends today; and also I feel fortunate to have played roles

that have touched people's hearts and be part of the great tradition of theater in New Orleans."

Being a native New Orleanian Evans feels the Crescent City is filled with a rich cultural heritage and that the African-American experience is a rich wellspring of stories that often does not get told and feels that taking part in the works of ABCT he is part of the preserving and archiving history.



Harold X. Evans

"I believe that in many instances our stories are not told or given the same attention as others, but with this company we celebrate ourselves; and I feel that we serve a larger purpose in the productions we put on at ABCT and that we are an asset to the community," says Evans.

Gwendolyne Foxworth is a Nurse Practitioner who calls acting her avocation, "It is something

I love and is an extension of what I do in helping people." She feels that Community Theater is an important place to groom talent and feels if it were not for it she would not have been able to explore her artistic expression. "I think ABCT is a great place and serves a vital purpose in the community where people can come to plays and experience theater that reflects who they are."

Today the City of New Orleans and its cultural and artistic future is a much discussed issue and the continued relevance of African-American traditions and institutions are being questioned. Evans feels that artistic expressions of culture and the telling of the stories of African-Americans is an important part of not just preserving, but revering a part of the city that gives the city its heartbeat. He feels ABCT has become an essential part of this movement, "What this theater has been able to do is to give a slice of Black life, of who we are and an example of our values our existence and our contribution to New Orleans and to the world," says Evans.

Harold X. Evans and Gwendolyne Foxworth has throughout their lives been advocates for change and helping people and through their work continuing to be a driving force playing socially significant roles. Today they are being honored as recipients of the Anthony Bean Community Theater Icon Award.

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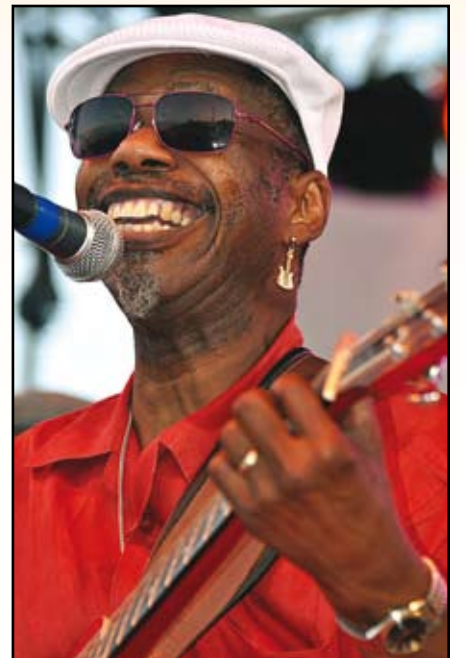
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Data Around Town

The Spring festival season has officially begun and New Orleanians gladly came out to enjoy the fun at the French Quarter Festival and the Strawberry Festival and Data was there.

French Quarter Festival

Photography by Christopher Mercadel and Kichea



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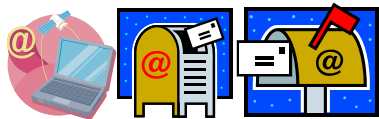
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Should Members of Congress With Shoddy Finances Lecture Us on Fiscal Responsibility?

By Keli Goff
Contributor, TheLoop21.com

A question for you: A poor woman of color arrives at the office of her Member of Congress to ask for help, explaining that she is nearing a financial breaking point. Barely able to support herself, she is finding it nearly impossible to support her family of seven, comprised of six kids – including one newborn infant – and her partner who has only worked sporadically in recent years, due to a combination of the economic downturn and their family's desire to have at least one parent available to provide hands on childcare for their growing brood.

Now if her Member of Congress happens to be a conservative Republican what reaction do you think she will be met with? My guess is she will be given the number to a local food pantry and a tough love lecture on the importance of "personal responsibility," as it pertains to having more children than you can afford to support. But what if the Member of Congress giving the lecture happens to be in the same boat? Only instead of being a poor woman of color from a background of limited opportunity, he is White, male and well-educated – and as a member of the governing body of our country has far more power than this poor woman ever will.

Welcome to the world of Sean Duffy.

I couldn't help but laugh when I read that

the freshman Congressman has emerged as one of the GOP's "Young Guns" with fiscal responsibility being cited as one of his signature issues.

Duffy has taken quite a beating in progressive circles lately, but from my vantage point for all of the wrong reasons. Progressives had a field day when video surfaced of Duffy lamenting how tough it is to raise a family on his congressional salary, which happens to be three times the salary of the average family in his Wisconsin Congressional District. I felt that those targeting Duffy actually missed an opportunity to target him for something much more egregious than whining: being a hypocrite.

Contrary to the criticism, I don't believe Duffy was whining at all. I believe him when he says his family is struggling to make ends meet. His financial disclosure forms certainly seem to confirm this. But much like Newt Gingrich, Bob Livingston and others who criticized President Clinton for an affair, despite having had their own, Duffy and some of his conservative cohorts are attempting to lecture the rest of us on our lack of financial discipline, poor personal choices etc., when they are far from fiscal role models themselves. (Click here to see the most financially challenged Members of Congress.)

See, Sean Duffy is financially strapped because he made the choice to have a vacation home and six children – children that,

financially speaking, he is not prepared to care for. If goodness forbid he lost his job tomorrow or was rendered incapable of working, as things stand now, we taxpayers would be left subsidizing his family, in the form of federal programs and that doesn't even include their college educations. (It's worth noting that one of Duffy's fellow conservative Congressmen, Rep. Denny Rehberg, has likened Pell Grants to welfare yet Duffy's children will most likely have to rely on them to obtain college degrees unless Duffy hits the lottery in the next few years.)

Which brings me back to the imaginary mother introduced at the beginning of this piece. Rarely do I hear of poor parents celebrated for the decision to have families, particularly large ones, or for their decision to "choose life" and most of all, forgo birth control. Instead they seem to be under constant attack for their lack of "personal responsibility." (And if a poor woman were to say publicly that she wishes to forgo work to be a full-time, stay-at-home mom – forget about it. She would immediately become the poster child for the next Republican Revolution.)

Yet for some reason when members of Congress – White, male, educated Members of Congress – make the same decisions, they are celebrated, even though in both cases we taxpayers will be the ones left footing the bill. The only difference is

Duffy, and others like him, actually know better, or rather should, and yet they sit around lecturing the rest of us on fiscal responsibility despite it being something many of them seem to know very little about.

Here's my question. Is living a fiscally responsible life something that is supposed to be limited to poor, uneducated people? The ones conservatives are convinced are responsible for their own foreclosures, and bankruptcies (even those caused by medical emergencies), and who are supposedly bleeding us dry through "entitlement programs?"

Does Duffy believe that Members of Congress should be exempt from practicing what they preach?

He and his buddies remind me of those hairdressers who try to charge you an arm and a leg for their styling expertise despite their own hair looking jacked up.

What's even more confusing is that Duffy opposes federal funding for Planned Parenthood, despite the fact that, to put it bluntly, he is one kid away from living in a cardboard box himself.

I guess this is yet another example of conservatives, from Newt Gingrich, to Larry Craig – the list goes on – wanting us to do as they say not as they do.

This post originally appeared on TheLoop21.com for which Goff is a Contributing Editor.

Jobs Returning to Cities



Judge Greg Mathis
NNPA Columnist

Mathis' Mind

President Obama has taken a lot of flack

from Republicans for his "failure" to create jobs and get millions of unemployed Americans back to work. To hear his critics tell it, the President has done little to nothing in the way of job creation. However, recent statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor paint a different picture, one that shows the President has kept his word and that, slowly but surely, Americans are finding jobs.

More than 200,000 jobs were created in February and March 2011 – the most jobs created during a two-month period since 2006. Big cities, which need jobs the most, are fairing very well. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, more than 75 percent of America's 372 cities reported lower unemployment rates in February 2011. Among those cities that saw a drop

in unemployment claims are Los Angeles, New York, and Miami.

This is good news for African-Americans, who primarily live in large cities and struggle to find work more than other ethnic groups during economic recessions, and for the nation as a whole. Continued job growth – no matter how slowly it happens – is a sign that our economy is, indeed, rebounding.

President Obama recently launched his bid for re-election. With Republicans, and even some Democrats, constantly taking shots at his Presidency, Obama is in for what will arguably be one of the hardest fought campaigns of his political career. One of his key messages on the campaign trail should be that his approach to job creation is working.

Republicans, with all their spin and fear mongering, will try to convince the voting public that there are no jobs and that America is worse off than it was in 2008. President Obama has the data to prove that he delivered on one of his biggest campaign promises. He has to make sure that his messaging rises above the conservative noise and that, despite push back from political opponents, he is working in the best interest of the average American.

At the same time, elected officials at both the national and state levels must continue to ramp up job creation efforts. Re-election or no, getting Americans back to work is one of this country's top priorities. Those in power should make sure they are doing everything possible to ensure that the unemployment rate continues to fall.

Overcoming the Shame and Stigma of HIV

By Tamara E. Holmes

For years, Del'Rosa Winston-Harris kept her HIV diagnosis a secret. When she was seeking HIV/AIDS resources, "I went to places that were way outside of where I lived so no one could identify me," she says. When a friend ran into her at the hospital and asked why she was there, "I said, 'I'm here to get my cancer checkup,'" the 49-year-old recalls. "My biggest concern was that I couldn't tell anybody."



A fear of disclosing one's HIV status is not unusual, since there is a stigma surrounding HIV and AIDS that is ingrained in American society, says Bambi W. Gaddist, Ph.D., the Executive Director of the South Carolina HIV/AIDS Council. Most people would rather look the other way than acknowledge how many people are living with HIV, Dr. Gaddist says. "After 30 years of AIDS, people are still asking, 'Is AIDS a problem?'" "And, unlike diseases like cancer and Alzheimer's, there's the often unspoken rationalization that those with HIV brought the disease upon themselves.

"HIV is a human immunodeficiency virus that's causing a fight inside of my body, yet people have made it about lifestyle," says Elveth Bentley, 46, of Atlanta. As a result, many women hide their HIV status, fearing that people will judge them for having sex or succumbing to an addiction.

But, AIDS activists are hoping to change that. In March SisterLove, an Atlanta-based Reproductive-Health Organization that focuses on HIV/AIDS, launched a mini documentary series called Everyone Has a Story, which features interviews with Black women who have HIV, who are

sharing the realities of life with the disease.

"We want to get more HIV-positive women talking and disclosing and really stepping into leadership where HIV/AIDS is concerned in the community," says Tiffany Pennick, a Spokeswoman for SisterLove. The documentary series is part of the organization's 20/20 Leading Women's Society Program, in which 2,020 HIV-positive women will be trained during the next decade to help women across

the world better manage their sexual and reproductive health.

The Power of Disclosure

Both Winston-Harris and Bentley participated in the documentary series, which covers such experiences as disclosing HIV status to family members for the first time, finding a support network, and dealing with strained family relationships. While both women are now more comfortable sharing their status with loved ones and strangers alike, the documentary gives them an even larger audience for their stories.

Winston-Harris began the process of disclosure after watching a friend who'd kept her diagnosis a secret die alone. Realizing how isolating the stigma of HIV could be, she had an epiphany. "The idea of dying alone is one thing, but living alone is another," she says. "I realized somebody had to speak up and let people know this is a disease that anyone can get."

For Bentley, the road to disclosure began as she noticed how damaging shame could be. "You lose your sense of identity when you begin to buy into the stigma," she says. "You let the disease define you." She also saw that self-defeating behaviors often accompanied shame, such as avoiding

the doctor's office or HIV clinic because of a fear of being seen.

Since disclosing their HIV status, both women have felt empowered and seen their lives improve. "I've learned how to communicate and socialize with any kind of person," says Winston-Harris. I can meet people where they're at now. Pre-HIV, I didn't know how to do that."

Bentley agrees. "If I tell you [about my HIV status] myself, I've taken the power from you to say anything about it. What can you really say that I have not already said?"

There's also a political benefit that comes with sharing one's struggle with HIV. "When we get more women to do that, then we will see a social movement like we've seen with breast cancer," says Dr. Gaddist. "Until we get to that, we'll never have a social change. We'll never see financial investment in this issue domestically."

For those who are struggling to move past the stigma of their diagnosis, Winston-Harris and Bentley share some of the insights that have helped them overcome the shame.

Forgive yourself: Before you can learn to ignore others' judgments, you have to get past your own, says Winston-Harris. "I can remember being so angry with myself," she recalls. Once she stopped blaming herself for her HIV status, talking about it became easier.

Find purpose in your story: Whether you're using your voice to educate others about HIV or to build intimacy in your personal relationships, understand why it's important for you to share your story with others, says Bentley. When you feel fearful about opening up, let that purpose motivate you.

Know it's a process: While disclosing your HIV status will likely get easier over time, "it's still uncom-

fortable," says Bentley, particularly when you're talking to people whose opinions matter to you. "The unknown is always uncomfortable, but you find your voice

more and more each time."

Tamara E. Holmes is a Washington, D.C.-based Journalist who writes frequently about emotional health and wellness.

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Biodistrict Urges Mid-City Neighborhood Organization To Continue Dialogue In Order To Reach Common Ground On Economic Development

BioDistrict New Orleans President and CEO today called upon the Mid-City Neighborhood Organization to continue its dialogue in order to provide leadership and guidance to the city for badly needed economic development projects. Earlier, the Mid-City organization announced its vote of no support for the BioDistrict.

In reviewing the specific concerns of the Mid-City group, I believe we have an opportunity to overcome objections and to address problem areas. Like Mid-

City, we want to maintain the architectural fabric, including one-and-two-unit housing stock, within the District. As for matters related to zoning, land use and streets, it is important that everyone understand those are city, not BioDistrict issues. We have attempted to clarify the mission, role and scope of the BioDistrict, and we will continue to explain its benefits to Mid-City residents, said James P. McNamara.

The BioDistrict represents New Orleans best chance for

economic development and innovation, especially in conjunction with the construction of the Veterans Administration and University Medical Center Health Facilities. We have an opportunity with the two new hospitals and the surrounding BioDistrict to establish an internationally competitive industry that emphasizes technology, education, research and state-of-the-art healthcare, said McNamara. When it is fully realized, this district has the potential for 20,000 high-paying pro-

fessional careers and we need to take advantage of it.

McNamara said he will take the Mid-City organization at its word, especially the support for new industry and jobs within the bio-sciences. We have been clear from the beginning that we do not intend to interrupt life in Mid-City. Rather, we would like to manage the emergence and growth of this new industry first in the historic medical district and then toward the light industrial areas of the district.

BioDistrict New Orleans (www.biodistrictneworleans.org)

BioDistrict New Orleans is a 1,500-acre region spanning the downtown and Mid-City areas of New Orleans. It is focused on the development of a life science industry in the city that will provide world class biosciences research, local, regional and global health-care delivery and stable, high paying jobs for professionals, managers and workers representing a wide range of skills.



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Regional Transit Authority to Renovate Riverfront Streetcar Shelters

The Regional Transit Authority (RTA) will begin a renovation project to repair all shelters on the Riverfront Streetcar Line. The project will begin on Thursday, April 14, 2011 and continue through early August 2011. Shelters will be sanded, painted, and repaired as a part of this renovation. In order to accomplish this work, the RTA must cut power to segments of the streetcar line while renovation is in progress. Riders can expect some stops to be unavailable and short delays in the schedule. The project will consist of the following four phases;

Phase-I: April 14 – Mid-May : Church Hill Station to Canal Street

Service will operate from Canal St. to French Market.

Church Hill Station – Out of Service

Julia Station – Out of Service

Hilton Station – Out of Service

Phase-II: Mid-May – Mid-June: French Market to Ursuline Service will operate from Ursuline Stop to Church Hill Station.

French Market Station - Out of Service

Phase-III: Mid-June – Mid-July: Canal to French Market

Service will operate from Canal to Church Hill.

Ursuline Station- Out of Service

Dumaine Station- Out of Service

Toulouse Station- Out of Service

Bienville Station- Out of Service

Phase-IV: Mid-July – Mid-August: Church Hill to Bienville

Service will operate from Bienville to French Market.

Canal Street Station - Out of Service

All work dates are projected and are subject to change. For more information contact the RTA Ride Line Customer Care Center at 504-248-3900 or visit us online at www.norta.com.

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- Candidates MUST have at least 2 years of Administrative experience
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- Experience supporting a sales team and executives

Power in Action

President Barack Obama addresses National Action Network Confab



President Barack Obama pictured with NAN President Rev. Al Sharpton - Obama went to New York last week with a renewed vigor to address the National Action Network's Annual Gala.

By Cyril Josh Barker
New York Amsterdam News

NNPA Newswire - President Barack Obama went to New York last week with a renewed vigor to address the National Action Network's Annual Gala. He hit on several key points as he praised the organization's 20 years of existence. The now-confirmed candidate for the 2012 presidential election gave a rousing speech that was well received by the nearly 1,200 people (mostly Black) in attendance.

After a gracious introduction from the Rev. Al Sharpton, the President received a standing ovation. He opened his speech by acknowledging Rep. Charles Rangel, former Mayor David Dinkins, and the 20th Anniversary of NAN, praising its continuing relevance.

"The National Action Network has not changed its commitment in the last two decades," he said. "Not only in the lives of African-Americans," but for the broader American family.

Making little mention of his 2012 run, Obama highlighted his own achievements along with commending his supporters for their work and loyalty to him. "If you stand with me and believe in what we can do together, if we put our shoulders to the wheel of history, we can move this country

to the promise of a better day," he said. "What I could commit to was telling you the truth even when it was hard. You made our campaign your own," he said.

The President also highlighted some of the things he has been criticized for, and that many forgot the good that he's done. When it came to jobs, he noted how General Motors recently announced its plans to rehire all of the people the car manufacturer had laid off, showing signs that the economy is on its way back.

Obama noted that a half million jobs were created in the first three months of this year.

"We're making progress, but we are not there yet. I will fight for jobs and I will be in the fight for opportunity," he said before getting a rousing applause. "We are going to keep fighting until every family gets a shot at the American dream."

Specifically noting the joblessness rate in the Black community, Obama also mentioned the passing of his Health Care and Wall Street reforms, which, he says, were beneficial to Black Americans.

Obama topped off his speech by speaking about education, citing that every child deserves the right to a good education and that race should not be a factor when it comes to education reform, be-

cause it's an American problem. He also set a goal to make every child a college graduate while re-investing in HBCUs and community colleges.

In his parting words, Obama gave inspiring words to the audience about the future.

"The American dream is in reach for everybody," he said. "I know there are times when the work is frustrating and it's hard, and change can seem slow to come by. I am living testament that change is possible."

Several notable people were in the audience for the speech, including many elected officials. Most agreed that the President's speech was effective.

"I think this speech help set the record straight, because if you watch the media, you would have thought the deficit started in 2009 and the deficit started in 2001 when President Clinton left," said former New York Gov. David Paterson.

State Sen. John Sampson described Obama's speech as "phenomenal," and said it served as a reminder of the work Obama has done and will continue to do.

Said Sampson, "Don't forget what his Presidency has done over the last two years. It has put America back on track and he deserves another term."



One year later.
Our commitment continues.

Soon a year will have passed since the Deepwater Horizon accident in the Gulf. From the beginning, we have taken responsibility for the cleanup. Our commitment to the Gulf remains unchanged, as does our responsibility to keep you informed.

Committed to the Gulf

No oil has flowed into the Gulf since July 15th. As our efforts continue, nearly 100% of the waters are open and the beaches are clean and open. To ensure its safety, Gulf seafood has been more rigorously tested by independent researchers and experts than any other seafood in the world. To date, BP has spent more than \$13 billion in clean-up costs.

Restore the Environment

An additional \$282 million has been spent on environmental issues, including wildlife rescue and restoration of wildlife refuges across the region. We have also committed \$500 million to the Gulf of Mexico Research Institute to fund scientific studies on the potential impact of the spill.

Help to Rebuild the Economy

\$5 billion in claims have already been paid. We've committed \$20 billion to an independent fund to pay for environmental restoration and all legitimate claims, including lost incomes. More than \$200 million in grants have been made to the Gulf Coast States to promote tourism and seafood.

Learn and Share the Lessons

This was a tragedy that never should have happened. Our responsibility is to learn from it and share with competitors, partners, governments and regulators to help ensure that it never happens again.

We know we haven't always been perfect but we are working to live up to our commitments, both now and in the future.

For more information, please visit bpamerica.com.

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