

# Caucus wants input over rebuilding

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Katrina, even though a large percentage of hurricane victims were black.

"It would be the height of irresponsibility on the part of the president, on the part of this Republican-led Congress, not to make sure that the

Congressional Black Caucus has a seat at the table as a strong, genuine partner," said Rep. David Scott, D-Ga.

The bill would create a victim restoration fund, modeled after the one for terror victims, in which a special master would evaluate how much

each victim should be paid in order to rebuild his home to "pre-Katrina condition."

It also provides for grants that would help rebuild medical facilities and small businesses, pay a year's worth of health insurance for each victim and pay all education

expenses for local school districts that take on new students.

Also included is a measure proposed earlier by Rep. Artur Davis, D-Ala., that would let displaced hurricane victims vote absentee through the 2008 elections.

# Suburbs' concerns shaped bond debate

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140 of 195 precincts voted no to the bonds. A \$66 million referendum to buy land for schools and county projects was also defeated.

"The people who voted no weren't responding to the money (the Chamber) spent endorsing the bonds," said Daniel Hoffman Ph.D., a Johnson C. Smith University political science professor. "It appears people voted no for different reasons. People in the inner city felt their needs weren't being addressed. People in the suburbs felt their needs weren't being addressed. If you add those two groups together, you get a negative result."

Republican county commissioners wasted little time pushing for Certificates of Participation, or COPs, to build or expand schools in north and south Mecklenburg. The commissioners - Bill James, Dan Bishop, Jim Puckett - propose \$254 million in COPs as the best way to alleviate overcrowding in the suburbs they represent.



Bishop

Republican plan as unfair to schools - mostly in the inner city - that require immediate maintenance.



Mitchell

"We hope that upon reflection a majority will decide not to punish voters for the message they sent (Tuesday) night, but rather take it to heart," Bishop wrote in a letter to board Chairman Parks Helms. "We look forward to join (sic) you in making a new start, exercising good stewardship of scarce taxpayer dollars and furnishing a permanent seat for every child in our public schools."

Commissioner Norman Mitchell, a Democrat, said COPs are more expensive and should be rejected as an alternative. Using the 2001 Charlotte referendum for arts and an uptown arena as a backdrop, Mitchell said commissioners should stand behind the voters' decision.

"We put the bonds on the ballot and they said no," he said. "When the public says no, that means no."

While suburban concerns about fiscal stewardship and crowded campuses carried the referendum debate, it doesn't signal a shift in political power, UNC Charlotte

political scientist Ted Arrington said. When all is said and done, there are more voters in Charlotte than the outlying towns combined.

"I wouldn't make too much out of this," he said. "What we're seeing is there's more (growth) in the small towns, but the city of Charlotte is still 80 percent of the county."

And as vocal as suburban interests were over schools, inner city activists were also stumping for the bonds' defeat. Their reasoning may have differed, but ultimately, black voters, who have historically backed bonds, were split, Arrington maintains.

"(The suburbs are) getting the attention, but somebody's going to have to pay attention to the inner city," he said. "If African Americans had been unified, maybe the bonds could have squeaked by. Bonds in this community don't pass unless the African American community votes for it."

That may happen as early as next year should commissioners stand firm against COPs and CMS makes another proposal. But with Helms and fellow Democrats Wilhelmina Rembert and

Jennifer Roberts up for re-election next year, the options are politically tricky. All three campaigned to relieve overcrowding and support student achievement in CMS. How to fund

those changes without drawing voters' wrath will be difficult.

"We'll put another one out there next year, but this time next year, who knows?" Mitchell said.

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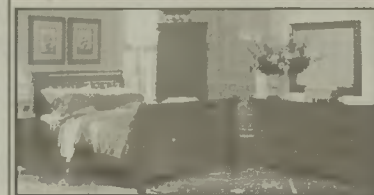
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