

Gas no deterrent to rally faithful

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to the track on Sunday," Grissett said.

According to the Fuel Cost Calculator on the AAA web site, the round trip cost of a beach trip is \$55.60 in a 2006 Ford Explorer. That price could vary depending on the make and model of the vehicle and if the driver is hauling bikes, like Grissett. And it doesn't take into account the stop and go traffic and riding

around Myrtle Beach. Figuring that the gas prices were going to be higher this year, Grissett said he put extra money aside. That's what the city of Myrtle Beach spokesman Mark Kruea expects beach visitors to do.

"Gas prices have been high for a while. Maybe (visitors) have adjusted their budgets," he said. "I expect it to hold steady."

Lamont Goings, who plans

to head to Myrtle Beach even though he doesn't own a bike, said he's not worried about high gas prices because once he gets to the beach, he'll be parking his Honda Accord.

"Some people have been saving up their dollars since the day after Memorial Day last year," Goings said. "People would still go down there even if gas was \$4 a gallon."

In his car, Goings can

expect to spend \$33.76 to get to the beach and back to Charlotte.

Gas prices aside, every year the Atlantic Beach rally is a source of controversy. Last year a judge ordered that the same traffic practices must be used during the Harley Davidson Bike Week, which is primarily a gathering of white riders, and the Atlantic Beach Bike week, which is historically black. It didn't happen due to a last-minute order from an appeals court. The NAACP set up a hot line for black bikers last year to report instances of mistreatment. However the organization hasn't disclosed the number of calls or types of complaints that they received last year.

A man who answered the hotline number said that he didn't have a comment on the NAACP's involvement in this year's rally.

Atlantic Beach Bike Week gets started May 24 and runs through May 29.



U.S. Rep. Mel Watt (D-N.C., on right), chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, was arrested during a protest at the Sudanese Embassy in Washington Tuesday.

Activism for Darfur missing African American presence

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Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-Texas), Gwen Moore (D-Wisconsin), Al Green (D-Texas) and D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton in calling for an end to the genocide and displacement of millions by violence in Sudan.

"The situation in Darfur has deteriorated significantly," Lee said. "People are dying and are in misery. Countless women and girls are raped daily, there is no food, conditions or unsanitary and there is an inadequate supply of water in the region."

and others in the African Diaspora. In a display of irony, images of black Darfurians on a large projector screen were juxtaposed with mostly white protesters.

One of a few hundred black people in the wave of more than 10,000 bodies, Haitian-American Marie Auguste was there. She had taken a train from New York to participate in the rally. Holding a sign with the message "President Bush You Said Not On Your Watch. It Is Happening, Do Something About It," Auguste bumped into Prisca Doh, a native of Ivory Coast in West Africa, who had been using the poster as shade from the smoldering sun. They became engrossed in conversation about the lack of black faces in the lines of protesters.

believes that blacks in various religious communities would follow suit if the political will existed in their mosques, temples, or churches.

Not another Rwanda

Pat Evans, an African-American management consultant based in Fairfax, Va., also wondered why the average black person hasn't joined the movement to push for a robust international intervention in Western Sudan. Jewish groups have compared the crisis in Darfur to the Holocaust, leaving Evans and others questioning what it's going to take to get blacks on board.

"There's a very thin line between us here and blacks on the African continent. Katrina taught us that they react to us the same way—with inaction," said Auguste, alluding to the importance of solidarity among Africans on the continent and Africans of the Diaspora. She continued, "If we can't be like the Jewish people and demand things for people that look like us, we're never going to progress."

"I don't know if it's that we don't feel connected to Africa," she said.

Evans became interested in Darfur while on a trip to the U.N. headquarters in New York last February. When Evans returned to D.C., she immediately began sending out missives to black organizations about doing something, but no one responded. Disappointed, she reached out to what appeared to be unlikely allies—mostly Jewish organizations that have since joined the Save Darfur Coalition.

Auguste was moved to action by the countless images of women and children who suffer most "Because these are black people, the world has looked the other way," said the New Yorker about the three-year genocide that started when rebels in Darfur sought political independence by challenging the Khartoum government.

"I'm really committed to stopping another Rwanda," said Evans. "It's going to take commitment from other African states such as Egypt and Algeria," she added. Her advice to blacks who missed the memo about Sunday's rally is "start educating yourselves about what's happening."

The size of Texas, Sudan is a telling example of the 19th century "Scramble for Africa" by European colonialists that meshed together semi-autonomous groups—like Darfurians—into arbitrarily formed nation states.

Black politicians came out, but their constituents were missing in action. Al Sharpton, who visited Sudan in 2000, said leaders within the civil rights community were committed to putting the spotlight on genocide. He admits that despite ideological differences, Americans refuse to remain divided on Darfur.

Spilling into neighboring Chad with an influx of refugees, the Darfur genocide has left 200,000 dead and hundreds displaced. The U.N. World Food Program announced on Monday that it was cutting food rations. Responding to the magnitude of the situation, Auguste encouraged her friends in New York to attend the rally but heard only excuses.

"We know that when Americans come together, we can change anything in the world," he said.

She denounced black clergy who have been silent on the issue.

"I find it unconscionable that black churches are not talking about what's going on," said Auguste, who

The Rev. Gloria White Hammond, an African-American liaison to Sudanese communities in the U.S. and an organizer for the Save Darfur Coalition, said more than 760,000 signatures were collected for an online petition for the Million Voices for Darfur Campaign (<http://www.millionvoicesfordarfur.org/>).

Herbert L. White of The Charlotte Post contributed.

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