Caucus eyes new clout

Continued from page 1A

Christiansen are just a few bills that have been largely ignored on the House or Senate floors.

That could soon change. If Democrats win a majority during November's midterm elections, Black Caucus members could seize chairmanships of at least four major congressional committees, 15 subcommittees and the post of majority whip, giving CBC members unprecedented control over committee agendas and the ability to forward legislation never fully entertained by Congress.

"The CBC has very dynamic leadership right now. And I think that a lot of the cheer you're going to see in this CBC weekend is going to be attribute to the hopefulness of having more of the people that the CBC wants to see elected," says Hilary Shelton, who works closely with the CBC as director of the Washington Bureau of the NAACP. "It means the sensibilities and sensitivities that they hold and the concerns of our communities would be more front and center as they chair these very strategic and important committees. Indeed, they will be the gatekeepers. They will be the ones who will largely determine which bills will get a hearing and which will be marked up."

By seniority, a Democratic majority would likely mean Rangel as chair of Ways and Means; Conyers as chair of the Judiciary Committee and Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-Miss.) as chair of Homeland Security, which oversees emergency preparedness.

Taking a bite from urban core

Continued from page 1A

Bobcats game,'" said City Council member James Mitchell, who represents northwest Charlotte. "The professional African Americans are saying 'We get it and we want a piece of that'"

Mitchell

Neighborhoods along the northwest corridor, such as McCrorey Heights, Washington Heights and Biddleville are seeing an explosion of new residents. Some longtime neighbors, however, are concerned that a growing tide of middle-class gentry – black and white – could drown the tradition and flavor of historically-black working class communities.

Isley

"Myths and realities is what we're dealing with, so we're trying to bring some truth, enlighten some folks and educate some folks on what's going on," said Gwen Isley, executive director of the Northwest Corridor Community Development Corp. "We want to make sure that while we have our older residents and older cultural values and ways, it's OK for new people and new social values to take place in these neighborhoods. We want to welcome them, but we don't want to lose the old."

Which suits Jones just fine. As a real estate professional, he's aware of the possibility of gentrification, but those concerns are alleviated by the energy of new residents, who also attract infrastructure and services to support growth.

"It's not so much a fear of gentrification," he said. "You have issues when there's income disparity."

Nationally, major cities are wrestling with a 21st century version of urban renewal. Inner city communities once left to blight and crime are being rehabilitated for young professionals and families. The downside: Residents who can't afford to keep up with rising tax rates are often pushed to the side. It's a concern in Charlotte, where neighborhoods from Cherry near Myers Park to Wesley Heights near Beatties Ford Road are undergoing a construction boom.

"When you look at the history of gentrification, it only happens in your poor African American neighborhoods," Isley said. "The more they build up uptown, the more they have to find places for these folks to go because what's affordable to us now is becoming affordable to other people, too. It's not just affordable to blacks, it's affordable for whites who can't buy $300,000 condos."

"You can see the winds of change," Jones said. "A lot of what I'm hearing is if you can see the skyline, you have value, and this part of the city has the best view of the skyline."

To alleviate potential friction between old and new, community development organizations work with residents on issues ranging from home ownership to safety. Isley, NWCCDC's director, said homeowners have an equal stake in healthy neighborhoods.

"When you say threatened, I think people look at somebody else getting rich off the backs of the people who were here first," she said. "A lot of our neighborhood leaders spend a lot of time revitalizing these neighborhoods behind closed doors we don't see, so they tend to think that when they get it to halfway decent stage ...now you want to come in and build, build, build and say 'you turned our neighborhood around,' but it started at the grassroots level, not when non-African Americans moved in."

"Gentrification has its good and it has its bad," Isley said. The good is that some of these neighborhoods are not going to be brought back on line without it. The bad is that we may lose some history and we really have to figure out how we get both, how we balance it."

The Charlotte Post

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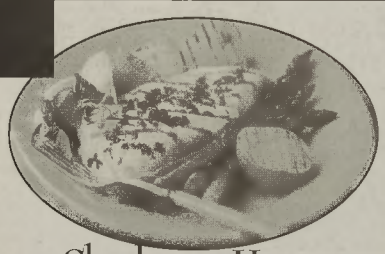

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