

January forum to tackle Charlotte disparities

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U.S. Rep. Mel Watt was also at the press conference, as honorary chair of CM3A.

"My involvement goes back about two years," explained Watt, "not on the local level, but on the national level when I became chair of the Congressional Black Caucus."

While working on the agenda for the CBC, which focused on closing and eliminating disparities facing

African Americans nationally, Watt received a call from national syndicated radio and talk show host, Tavis Smiley. The discussion with Smiley involved the initiative he was involved in, which would be included in the book, The Covenant with Black America.

The Covenant "was developed by people through out the country," said Watt. "[CM3A] is Malcolm's and our community's initiative to translate the national initia-

tive into the local community."

"It's more important for us to focus on what our local needs are," said Watt. "I am excited about the summit... [and] confident this will focus on what those needs are."

In addition to Graham and Watt, CM3A is made up of ambassadors, honorary ambassadors, and steering committee members, who have committed to support the CM3A initiative. Honorary Ambassadors

include state representatives, judges, school board members, City Council members and County Commissioners.

The two day event will include speakers, performances, and small discussion groups.

Journalist/author Juan Williams has been confirmed to open the conference on Friday, while Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin has been invited to discuss public policy. Other speakers will be announced, as they are added. CM3A has launched a website for residents to register to attend, as well as get

updates on the event and communicate on the message board about issues prior to the town hall meeting.

Graham said residents should expect an opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns.

"This is an opportunity to talk to decision makers and leaders," said Graham. "I always say we have a lot of leaders here...what we need is leadership. I believe it's time we have a meeting of the village. [Residents] will have an opportunity to voice opinions on issues most important to them." Graham

emphasized that as Charlotte continues to grow, it can't afford to fall behind in addressing disparities.

"Every voice is needed, every voice is wanted," Graham said. "We want people to be ready to come to participate."

For information on to register for the conference visit www.cm3a.org.



PHOTO/ERICA SINGLETON

N.C. Sen. Malcolm Graham (left) shares a laugh with U.S. Rep. Mel Watt Wednesday at a press conference announcing the Charlotte Mecklenburg African American Agenda town hall meeting January 5-7 in Charlotte.

Rate of women inmates rising

By Sommer Brokaw
THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

The majority of North Carolina's prison inmates are black, even though African Americans make up only 22 percent of the state's population.

While black men far outnumber black women in prison, women are the fastest growing population.

Sabrina Cates is director of the Durham County Teen Court and Restitution Program.

Ten Court is for first-time misdemeanor offenders, and the program also uses teens to work in the court and deliver judgments. Cates said over the past few years, the number of black girls coming into the court has remained consistent.

Cates said girls are getting more involved in gangs, and that is one factor leading them to get into trouble.

"The girls are a little more active in gangs than they used to be," she said.

Former Wake County Sheriff John Baker has noticed the number of black female inmates climbing.

"If we're not careful, the black females will catch up with the males," he said.

The latest report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics revealed that the population of the state and federal prisons rose to a record 1.47 million in 2003.

Victoria Peterson, a Durham activist, said that prisons are big business. "Correctional Enterprise made \$84 million out of working inmates last year," she said. "Much of that money went back into the prison system. Here they are working prisoners in this state and very little of those dollars are coming back to the community."

Baker said the saddest part is those women who enter the system pregnant. A pregnant inmate can have her child taken away within 24 hours, and research shows that children of incarcerated parents are six times more likely to

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