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## Bus tour seeks to educate on perils of voter ID bill

by Andy Phelan

**John Evans** of Lithonia worries history is repeating itself. One look at House Bill 244, the voter ID bill signed by the governor last month and waiting Justice Department approval, and he gets a little queasy.

"They're turning back the clock," said Evans, president and CEO of Operation LEAD (Leadership To End All Discrimination) and former president of the DeKalb County NAACP. "It's upsetting because it appears to be in violation of the Voting Rights Act and reminds me of the poll tax and other devices used to deny Blacks the vote."



Butler

If given the OK by Washington, the new law will require Georgians to get government-issued photo identification to be eligible to vote. It reduces the number of IDs a voter can use from 17 to six. Its proponents say it fights voter fraud, but its opponents say it will affect a disproportionate number of elderly and minorities.

That's why Evans is riding with State Sen. **Gloria Butler**, D-Stone Mountain, on a Civil Justice Summer Bus Tour put on by the Legislative Black Caucus to educate people on the proposed law.

The tour, dubbed "a fight for our rights" journey, will kick off with a rally at the Capitol at 9 a.m. Friday, June 24, then head through Morgan, Putnam, Hancock and Washington counties, stopping at community churches and civic buildings to tell people how the law will affect them. On Saturday, the tour will swing through Dublin and Savannah before returning to Atlanta at about 3:30 p.m.

"Twenty Democrats walked off the floor the day they passed

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## MARTOC members grapple with transit funding

by Andy Phelan

With the ink still drying on MARTA's \$323.5 million 2006 operating budget, representatives from the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRETA), MARTA and the public presented their take on the state of the financially troubled transit system to state legislators last week.



Chambers

Metro Area Regional Transit Oversight Committee (MARTOC) Chair, Dist. 81 State Rep. **Jill Chambers**, R-Atlanta, who represents parts of DeKalb County, presided over the six-hour meeting meant to help the group get a better grip of the bottom line and the system's long-range plans. MARTOC must file an annual report on the transit system to the General Assembly.

"In the past, MARTOC meetings addressed para-transit and safety among other issues but never really touched on operating

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## A rose grows on Memorial Drive

by Brian Egeston

When rapper **Tupac Shakur**—known to many simply as Tupac—was gunned down in Las Vegas in 1996, ripples spread across the rap community and throughout the world. After his death, there were accusations of crime and corruption in the rap industry, and there was an alleged retaliation murder against rapper **Biggie Smalls**. Now, as a lasting Shakur legacy, friends, family, and supporters have opened the Tupac Amaru Shukur Center for the Arts (TASCA) at 5616 Memorial Drive in Stone Mountain.

Saturday, June 11, approximately 500 people of different races, genders and ages gathered under heavily overcast skies. The threat of bad weather was no deterrent for diehard Tupac fans, many of whom traveled great distances to take part in the opening ceremony.

**Alexis Lemay** and **Danny Côté**, dressed in sagging shorts, oversized sports jerseys and baseball caps cocked to the side, drove 24 hours from Quebec, Canada, to take part in the ribbon cutting ceremony. When event organizers arrived, they found the two Canadians in the parking lot waiting eagerly to help set up for the event. "We've been listening to Tupac for more than seven years," said Côté through a heavy French accent. "When asked to name his favorite song, Lemay laughed. "There are so many to choose from. I really like *Mama's Just a Little Girl*," said Lemay. Côté cast his vote for Tupac's *Still Ballin'* as his favorite song.

Saturday marked the first phase of a three-phase plan for the TASCA, which will include a performing arts theater, museum, art gallery, community meeting space and classrooms. Attendees were given a tour of the visitors' center and peace



Afeni Shakur sits under a portrait of her son Tupac inside the new Performing Arts Center. Photo by Brian Egeston.

garden, a 6.5-acre site, which Tupac Amaru Shakur Foundation (TASF) representatives describe as a place of reflection and mediation. Hand-carved wooden benches are throughout the garden next to cascading water fountains on the property. In the center of the garden is a large fountain in the shape of the gothic cross, a symbol often associated with Shakur. Different varieties of landscaping line the short walking trails on the property. All trails lead to three secluded artists' pavilions nestled near the back of the property. When surrounded by the wooded

area, visitors have to keep reminding themselves this really is Memorial Drive.

The once-thriving area for retail business has seen a steady decline over the years. Now replete with weekly-stay hotels, check cashing and package stores, the area seems an odd choice for the center. Tupac's mother, **Afeni Shakur**, explained the choice of location, "When we were living in L.A., we visited Georgia and this is where Tupac said he felt like he had found some peace. And we have deep roots in the South. The space was good for us,

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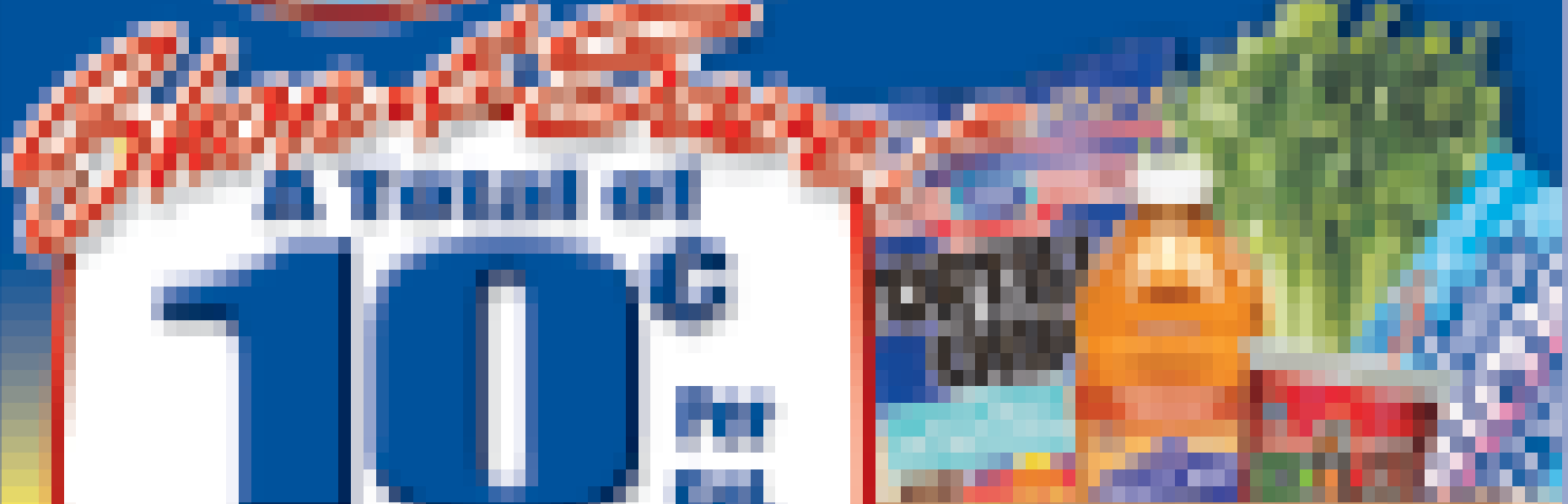
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# Fulton County lags at following courthouse recommendations

by Greg Bluestein

ATLANTA (AP) Fulton County officials have been slow to implement courthouse security improvements, raising concerns among members of a committee recommending numerous changes at the site of a bloody rampage, the panel's chairman said.

The county has yet to upgrade the doors of holding cells and has not attached several cameras to a power source despite being urged to do so weeks ago, U.S. Marshal **Richard Mecum** said June 10.

"It's frustrating," said Mecum, who heads the panel that made the recommendations to Fulton County Sheriff **Myron Freeman** in a May 23 letter.

Freeman has acted on some of the suggestions, such as putting leg irons on all

inmates entering the courthouse. High-risk inmates are now being escorted by more than one deputy. Only one deputy escorted **Brian Nichols**, the suspect in the March 11 courthouse shootings, before he allegedly escaped and killed four people, including a judge.



**DeKalb County Sheriff Thomas Brown said he had to use "truth verification technology" to ensure the deputies told the truth.**

Nichols, who was on trial on a rape charge, is accused of shooting Superior Court Judge **Rowland Barnes** and court reporter **Julie Ann Brandau** in the courthouse and sheriff's Sgt. **Hoyt Teasley** outside the building. The fourth victim, federal agent **David Wilhelm**, was killed later in the day. Nichols was captured the

following morning.

Freeman formed the panel in April to assess shortcomings in courthouse security, but the project got off to a bumpy start.

Some of the law enforcement officials and other members selected didn't even find out they were on the panel until contacted by a newspaper reporter. Others didn't know the task force's agenda, or when or where they would be meeting.

When panel members finally did get together, some were initially delayed by frightened deputies who often couldn't get their stories straight, Mecum said. DeKalb County Sheriff **Thomas Brown** said he had to use "truth verification technology."

Once the panel produces a report—which is expected to take a few more weeks—it still must pass through several bureaucratic layers.

The entire panel must

endorse each suggestion before sending the report to DeKalb Senior Judge **Hilton Fuller**, the judge presiding

over Nichols' case, who will decide whether releasing it to the public will affect the criminal proceedings.

## MARTOC

Continued from Page 1A

costs and the budget," Chambers said. "This gives the committee a better understanding of finances and how assets are allocated." MARTA will have to dip into its reserves to cover an almost \$16 million shortfall in this year's budget.

While riders got good news June 7 that fares will remain at \$1.75, baseball and music fans who take MARTA shuttles to Turner Field or HiFi Buys Amphitheater will have to pay an extra \$1 fare each way. A new smart-card fare collection system set to roll out next year could also help streamline the authority by being able to charge customers fares based on the distance they travel. Over the past few years, more than 700 jobs and 15 percent of bus routes have been modified.

"MARTA is going in the right direction," said District 39 Sen. **Vincent D. Fort**, D-Atlanta, who represents parts of Atlanta and East Point. "I don't see a lot of fat here. The big hole in the system is the lack of state funding."

District 43 Sen. **Steen Miles**, who represents parts of Decatur and all of Lithonia, also sits on the oversight committee. As former MARTA director of media relations, she has more insight than most. "MARTA is the spine of transit in this area," she said. "Equitable funding in this region is a priority."

Disputes over funding have arisen because DeKalb, Fulton and Atlanta city residents have paid the one-cent sales tax for more than 30 years to help operate the system, while outlying counties, which also rely on MARTA, have not.

"Clayton and Gwinnett have a seat on MARTA's board, but don't pay to help operating costs," said **John Evans**, president and CEO of Leadership to End All Discrimination or LEAD. "I say we get rid of those positions until they're ready to pay taxes to support the system. It's clearly representation without taxation."

The state of Georgia also has three seats on the MARTA Board but does not help fund operating costs.

For Decatur resident **Paul McLennan** of Jobs With Justice, the hearings showed there is going to be a showdown in the not-too-distant future over who controls the federal funds. "MARTA's been around and proven," he said. "If there is going to be regional transit, then MARTA should get the funding to be what it was originally intended to be."

**John Keys**, who presented GRETA's position to the oversight committee, said Chambers is making a clear break from business as usual. "We've never really had an active oversight MARTA committee," he said. "They're delving into issues in a much more substantive way." The next MARTOC meeting will be Aug. 18.

## Voter ID

Continued from Page 1A

this bill to make a statement," Butler said. "There was no reason for this legislation. It's wrong. It's the cruelest voting bill in the U.S."

Butler said 36 percent of Georgians older than 75 don't have the kind of identification that will be required to vote. More than 150,000 Georgians over the age of 60 who voted in the 2004 elections, and countless minorities, young people and poor people do not own photo identi-

fication. The law will be particularly bad for rural voters because only 50 of Georgia's 159 counties have DMVS offices where acceptable photo IDs can be obtained, she said.

Voting rights is what pushed Butler, who has been in the Legislature since 1999, into public life. "This is how I got involved in politics," said Butler, who hopes to reach thousands through the tour. "I helped register more than 5,500 people back in 1992 during a voter registration drive. I couldn't believe how many people weren't registered.

I gave up six months of Saturdays, but it was worth it."

"If this does pass, and we have to operate under the assumption that it will, we must educate the people," Evans said. "The hypocrisy of it all is that lawmakers are saying you don't need an ID for an absentee ballot. It's contradictory."

Children's health care, wages, redistricting and open record issues will also be addressed on the tour. For more information, call Butler's office at 404-656-0075.

## Rose

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then the space next to it became available, then it was a no-brainer." Shakur said she hopes the center will spark an economic and social boom in the area.

Congresswoman **Cynthia McKinney**, who attended the event, predicted that the center will be good for Memorial Drive. "This is going to become a tourist attraction that will attract visitors from around the world. Tupac is, was an international phenomenon. And to have a memorial to his creativity, to his intellectual prowess, his political insight and to his tragedy is very profound for us and for the young people." On a program filled with impromptu speakers, McKinney's comments raised thunderous applause as she called Tupac the leader of "our children." She also announced plans to conduct a hearing at the Congressional Black Caucus concerning counter intelligence programs against cultural icons such as **Paul Robeson**, **Jimi Hendrix**,

**Bob Marley** and **Tupac Shakur**.

**Donald Hicken**, Tupac's teacher at the Baltimore School for the Performing Arts, where Tupac studied acting and ballet, said to the crowd, "Creativity is a muscle. It must be exercised daily. This center will exercise creativity for young people." Hicken told a story of how Tupac, at the age of 14, created a dance movement to *Starry Starry Night* because the song was about **Vincent van Gogh** and how he was trying to discover himself and a place to express himself and find an audience for his work. Hicken explained that Tupac had said he understood van Gogh's frustration.

Though much of Tupac's work was categorized as gangster rap and criticized for its profanity, violence and sex, the grand-opening audience reflected a vast array of listeners. Six-year-old **Tariq Strickland** stood clinging to his father as they watched the ceremony. "I like the Tupac song *Me Against the World*," said Strickland. "I like the center. It's good for us kids

and we need it." **Milton Dotson**, a 48-year-old Tupac fan said he likes Tupac because of his honesty. "He brought it to people straight up. He didn't try to sugarcoat it. He told it like it was and when you tell the truth, you're gonna make a lot of enemies."

Shakur founded TASF in November of 1997, but the center remained dormant for years. Funded by Tupac's earnings and donations from family and friends, the facility finally opened with **Tré Maxie** as the project manager.

"Fundraising is always a challenge," said Maxie. "People were concerned that this would be another club on Memorial Drive and when they heard the name Tupac, they associated it with rap. But after we reached out and told them what we were trying to do and told them it was for the kids, they embraced us."

Maxie said the \$12 million complex initially met with zoning complications, but DeKalb County eventually became excited about the project. CEO **Vernon Jones** was also on hand for the event. "This brings more jobs,



Ceremony visitors stand around the gothic cross fountain in the center of the peace garden. Photo by Brian Egeston.



Alexis Lemay and Danny Côté watch the ceremony after a 24-hour drive from Quebec, Canada.

more activity to this corridor," said Jones. "This is incredible. It's part of quality of life—having an opportunity for kids to take their talent they're born with and see those talents develop." The TASCA will also sell \$100 engraved bricks to the public, which can be placed in the peace garden.

Amaru Entertainment Inc., founded in 1997, released a double CD of 24 songs from more than 150 unreleased works recorded by Tupac. According to a press release issued by the center, the record sold a half million copies in its first week, then six more

records were released, all executive produced by Shakur. The company reports that the posthumous albums have exceeded 20 million worldwide.

Shakur published her son's poetry in a book with Simon & Schuster. The book's title, *The Rose That Grew From Concrete*, comes from a poem of the same name in which Tupac talks about a flower growing from a crack in the sidewalk proving to the world that it could survive despite its environment.

Visit <http://www.tasf.org> for more information.