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Citing atrocities, citizens want county jail reform



Panel for community hearing on county jail: [L-R] Fred Ward, James Hardiman, Sarah Gelsomino, and Rev. Eugene Ward.

By Taru Taylor
Special to The Real Deal Press

Sparked by the deaths of seven inmates this year at the county jail between June 10 and Oct. 2, an ongoing FBI investigation, and the investigative report of jail conditions released last month by the US Marshal's Office that detailed inhumane conditions and the routine violation of inmates' civil rights, a coalition of community groups sponsored a community meeting this past Thursday.

The 6p meeting, billed as a community hearing on the county jail, was co-sponsored by the Cleveland NAACP, FIINPAC [Formerly Incarcerated Individuals Political Action Committee], and G-PAC. It was held at Mt. Sinai Baptist Church on Woodland Ave.

There were about 45 people in attendance at the start of the program, a number that swelled

to over 100 by evening's end.

The hearing featured four panelists who dealt with the Marshal's 52-page report that uncovered routine inhumane treatment of inmates, including denial of food, water, and constitutional rights. Fred Ward, president of FIINPAC, James Hardiman, president of the NAACP, Sarah Gelsomino, partner of the law firm Friedman & Gilbert, and Rev. Eugene Ward Jr., bishop of Greater Love Missionary Full Gospel Baptist Church, were the panel members.

In his introductory remarks, local judge and former local NAACP president Michael Nelson talked about his Oct. 2 announcement that he would no longer send people to jail for nonviolent offenses after the death of the sixth inmate. He went on to describe a young man who had been transferred from the East Cleveland city jail to the coun-

“If there is a presumption of innocence, what we are doing to the most vulnerable of us is criminal.”

ty jail downtown. He said that the young man's broken jaw went untreated for three weeks and became infected, which Nelson said was typical of the horror stories in our jails.

Responding to a question from local radio host Sam Sylk, who served as moderator, about the jail being over capacity by more than 600 detainees, Rev. Ward suggested that Ohio's jails and judges were in “partnership” and that big money is the real reason why Ohio's Supreme Court voted against bail and bond reform. Hardiman emphasized that many detain-

ees were neither charged nor convicted, but merely awaiting pre-trial. He said, “to be put in jail is to be put at risk.”

Fred Ward said the judicial system has moved from bail to bond in a way that has very little to do with bail's original purpose of deterring the risk of flight. Gelsomino explained that the bond commissioner is totally impersonal, and emphasized that after only three days in jail, people regularly lose their homes, their children, their jobs. She also said prosecutorial overcharging aggravates the problem.

For the rest of the night, community testimonials dominated the hearing as a baker's dozen citizens spoke their truths, mostly recounting horror stories of being locked up in county jail.

Cecil Flugler, a former inmate, spoke of being denied medical treatment, maggots in

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The Word on Small Business

How to Face a Possible Storm

By Kirby Freeman

In the last column, I reviewed a few market trends that could portend a possible economic downturn within the next year to 18 months. Indeed, over the last few weeks, the stock and bond markets have experienced a great deal of volatility.

Some of the most recent news events include:

- Just within the last few days and weeks, the Dow Jones Industrial Average has had 1-day swings of 700 to 800 points, showing increasing volatility;
- Several investment banking institutions – such as Morgan Stanley, JPMorgan Chase & Co, and Citibank – have recently predicted a sustained drop or “correction” in stock markets, based on expectations of higher interest rates, fears of a trade war with China, or slowdown in economic activity;
- Recent reports by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York of a decline in loan applications by consumer borrowers due to higher mortgage interest rates, and a sharp rise in credit card rejections and closing accounts by lenders.

To be sure, most bankers and economists do not make good prophets. It has often been said that most economists have predicted 10 of the last two or three recessions!

But the increase in short-term interest rates by the Federal Reserve in recent months, the fact that the current economic expansion – which has lasted since 2009 – is seen to be in its later stages, and current eco-

nomie weakness in Europe and East Asia, has convinced many market observers and economists that the future is about to get more complicated.

To be sure, it is normally far easier for small businesses to grow when the rest of the economy is growing, than during times of stagnation or even recession. When customers begin to have fears about their economic future, they begin to pull back on buying goods and services sold by all businesses.

A chillier environment makes banks and other lenders a lot less willing to lend money at low rates to most small businesses. In coming months look for commercial banks, online lenders, and credit card companies to begin reducing or completely cutting credit accounts based on your credit record. According to the Federal Reserve, many entrepreneurs and individual consumers have lately had their credit lines suspended without warning, solely based on late payments on monthly bills.

Entrepreneurs simply have to take a more defensive-minded posture when the economy becomes more uncertain and

volatile. The name of the game for all individuals and businesses going forward will be to **MAIN-TAIN OR GROW CASH.**

For one, business owners have to take a much closer look at their operations to find ways to maximize cash on hand. Business advisors provide a wide range of strategies for what entrepreneurs need to be doing at this stage of the economic cycle. But, probably the most effective steps business owners need to take in the short-term include:

- **Prioritize Costs and Expenses.** Aggressively look over the last one or two months of expenses. Quickly identify and weed out unnecessary costs that you and/or the business can live without. You may find a significant savings from this simple exercise.
- **Aggressively focus on collections.** If you are a business that relies on customers who do not fully pay at the point of sale, or makes delayed payments, make sure you quickly identify customers who are late-payers and ramp up their payment schedules.
- **Look for creative ways of allocating staff time.** In down times, small business owners

have to closely identify the unique talents of their employees, while optimizing strengths and hours on the job.

- **Strengthen your banking relationships.** Understand this. Just as you, as a business owner, are reviewing your weaker and slow-paying customers, your banker is checking his or her list of borrowers to see which ones are likely to default (or defer payments) on their loans or lines of credit. You need to know where you stand with your banker, and shore up your lines of capital.
- **Look for unique opportunities to expand your customer base.** Hard times have a way of highlighting the most creative impulses in business owners. The sharpest entrepreneurs are those who figure out marketing strategies to attract new customers – either through catchy sales promotions or enhanced services or products.

Over the next few months, I plan to devote additional time and space in this column to provide more specifics regarding these and other tips to starting and growing a small business in more difficult times.



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Exec's Role Fueled by Faith and Preparation

By R. T. Andrews
Editor

Jacklyn Chisholm arrived well before most of her audience this past Friday for her keynote talk, "Grace for the Fire", at the 7:30a Faith and Finance Breakfast series, produced quarterly by the Christian Business League. As she later shared, "I prepare for everything I do."

Chisholm is president and CEO of the Council for Economic Opportunity of Greater Cleveland, a private nonprofit that is, among other things, the largest Head Start agency in Ohio. It is a little understood, largely unappreciated, but increasingly visible social service provider, especially after the notoriety brought to the agency first, by Chisholm's predecessor, whose misuse of federal funds landed her a prison sentence, and second, by a very public power struggle eighteen months into her tenure.

For Chisholm, choosing even to apply for the job after she returned to Cleveland in late 2014 from a brief work interval in Atlanta was a decision she made with great reluctance and, she told her audience, multiple conversations with God. She had spent more than a quarter century at highly structured organizations in the corporate, higher education and civic spaces, so the prospect of entering the strange and messy world of social service enterprise did not seem like a natural fit.

Nonetheless, after a family intervention and six interviews, Chisholm accepted the job leading an agency of 450

employees and a \$40 million budget. Shortly after assuming the helm in May 2015, she learned of a projected \$1 million deficit looming in the next fiscal year, and shortly after resolving that crisis, discovered that the agency had been misusing federal funds.

A forthright resolution of that crisis — notifying the Feds and repaying the money — precipitated another issue: confrontation with a majority faction of her board of trustees that in October 2016 voted to fire her.

Chisholm, who earned master's and doctoral degrees in psychological anthropology at Case Western Reserve University, said the confrontation created an "Esther" moment for her: she refused to vacate her office and devised a plan of resistance, all the while maintaining services to the 25,000 people who depend on the agency.

Eventually, she prevailed, thanks in part to the ineptitude of her opposition. Today, she said, in a public moment of vindication, none of the eight trustees who voted to fire her are still on the board.

Notwithstanding that moment of personal privilege, Chisholm made it plain throughout her talk that there is no account of her life and work that does not have God as the central character. Her audience, which included a healthy dose of bankers, social workers, contractors, business owners, lawyers, clergy, social workers, and nonprofit executives, was clearly both entertained and inspired by Chisholm's account, rising as one to give her a standing ovation.



After speaking at the Faith & Finance breakfast at Mt. Zion UCC, CEOGC president and ceo Jacklyn Chisholm, center, stands with [L-R], business owner Ariane Kirkpatrick, Rev. Cheryl Lindsay, husband Robert Chisholm, and retired banker and philanthropist Bracy Lewis. PHOTO CREDIT: Joyce Shinn



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High Crimes, Low Accountability is not a formula for Equity

This has been a tough week to be a Clevelander. The city is still reeling from the tragic loss of Aisha Fraser, allegedly at the hand of her estranged and likely deranged husband, Lance Mason, a former judge who was once the protégé of one Congressperson and a favorite of her successor. His status helped blind the community to the absolute danger he so clearly posed to Aisha, as so clearly pointed in [this letter](#) from an author-ity on domestic violence.

In her expert opinion, she skewers the judgment and the behavior of two of Cleveland's top political leaders, Congresswoman Marcia Fudge and Cleveland mayor Frank Jackson, as well as the numerous judges and others who wrote character references in Mason's unsuccessful attempt to avoid his law license for life.

Fully understood, the letter points out how out of touch and reactive we are as a community.

Combine this sad situation with the deplorable state of our county jail. The inhumane — and unconstitutional — conditions and practices of that building stand in stark contrast to the new county-funded hotel directly across the street [perhaps the reason certain

interests are advocating for a new Justice Center somewhere else, but that's a story for another day]. It is the fate of our community that until we bring up the standards of our poorest and most vulnerable neighbors, we are going to stand indicted by the gaudiness of what we spend on baubles like Quicken Loans Arena.

Right now it appears that race, our community's Achilles Heel, is impeding efforts to improve jail conditions. The jails are in sorry shape because we don't care enough about the black people who are their predominant occupants. And the black politicians who are concerned that the black sheriff might lose his job, to be replaced by a white one, should ask themselves what difference that makes

to the detainees whose lives, health, spirits and safety are at constant risk in a county-run facility. The jail is not run down because the sheriff is appointed rather than elected. In fact, if county council were doing its job in this matter, they would be holding the county executive's feet to the fire, rather than praising him for inviting outside investigators in to tell him what he should long ago have heard from his own administration.

Run tell that. Finally, those who will be gathering this week in the top-down Appreciative Inquiry quest into how to bring economic growth and greater equity to our community might start with the understanding that our public budgets are moral documents.

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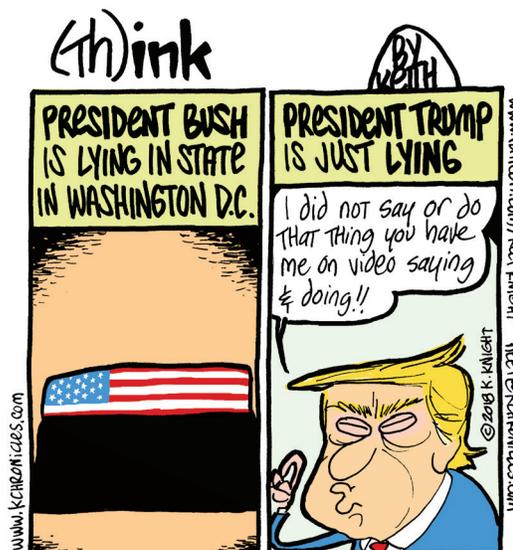
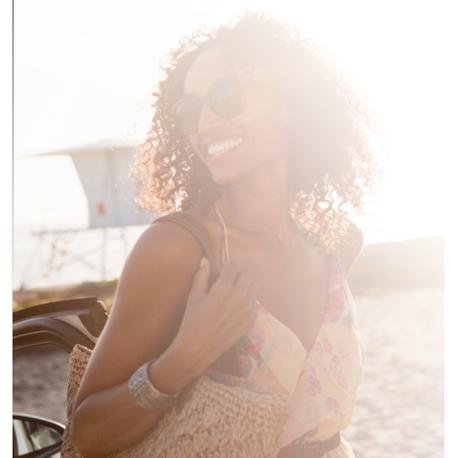
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Sponsored Content

ACE Family Day

By Lewis Rice,
Freelance Writer



(Left to Right) Nate Phillips speaking to attendees. Students and parent visiting booths of colleges, architecture, construction, and engineering partners. Jordan Davis, Carnegie Mellon senior architecture major with College Now and Getting Our Babies to College exhibitors

If the true measure of a mentoring program is the strength of the testimony of its graduates, then the ACE Mentor Program is the equal of a Super Bowl victory for its mentees.

A virtual parade of students took to the Mic on ACE Family Day on Saturday, December 1, 2018 to share in their own words how their high school experiences as ACE mentees had helped them become better students, clarify their career goals, accelerate their academic progress, and give them a leg up on their peers who did not have the benefit of the ACE experience.

Family Day serves as a recruiting tool for students and their families who are considering participating in the program, which has now grown to include 11 sites, with this year's addition of Ted Ginn Leadership

Academy and John Marshall High School. Ten of the eleven sites are within the Cleveland Metropolitan School District; the other site is Warrensville Heights High School.

Each student in the program is paired with a mentor, a professional in the Architecture, Construction or Engineering field. The 150 industry professionals are all volunteers, and the relationship forged between student and professional typically extends beyond career assistance into life assistance,

Greg School of Cleveland State University's Washkewicz College of Engineering, shared a vignette in his welcome to Family Day that showed perfectly the value and scope of the program. He told the story of Jamar, who he recalled as a very curious student who participated in a lunar

roving robot competition many years ago. Today, he is a mechanical engineer for Hawaii Public Power in Oahu, and the bonds between the two remain strong.

Today's ACE students include Taylor Watson, a senior at the University of Akron, who participated in ACE for three years at Rhodes High School. She said her ACE participation led her to switch from planning a career in marine biology to her expected degree next spring in construction engineering technology.

Bakari Ballard, a sophomore at Kent State, gives his ACE mentors credit for more than changing his major. ACE mentors, he said, "helped change my life." He stays in touch with his mentors even from campus because, he says, "they are like phone books, they are like dictionaries."

Bacardi, who spent three years in ACE while attending John Hay HS, also took advantage of opportunities to intern at both Stark Enterprise and Next-Gen Construction.

TyJuan Swanson, told the Family Day audience that belonging to ACE "has done wonders for me." He calls himself "still a novice" although he will be graduating from Kent with a degree in architecture next spring.

Family Day serves to enlighten and further engage students and their families. Nearly 200 high school students participate and nearly 100 college students are currently receiving scholarships from ACE and its college partners.

The deadline for entering the next ACE class is March 20, 2019. To enroll or gather more information, visit www.acementor.org.

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the food, and food trays that reeked of foul and mold. He said he had “witnessed so many brothers getting beat down by men in black,” — a reference to the jail’s Special Response Units in riot gear — an account confirmed during many other testimonials that identified the attacks as a tactic to force inmates to plea bargain.

Jacqueline Jackson read her sister’s account of the death of her sister’s son in jail. Robert “Ding” Sharp died in custody March 24, 2015 from a heroin overdose. According to the letter, the jailers should have sent him to the hospital, but they let him die in his cell. They never called Linda Ruffin, his mother, to inform her about her son’s death. She found out about it from a third party.

Marvin Cross, a retired police officer, introduced Monte Roberts, who described his 12 days in jail. Roberts said he was forced to lie on the floor for 23 hours a day in the “red zone”, despite having told jail officials about his recent testicular surgery. Doctors refused to believe he needed medical attention despite his pleas of excruciating pain. Not until Roberts depanted himself to reveal his condition did officials relent and give him two morphine shots.

Several others described personal horror stories. Brenda Bickerstaff, a private investigator who has registered many official complaints with Cuyahoga County, said she has witnessed deputy sheriffs beat detainees. Echoing a recurrent theme of the evening, she said that the violence perpetrated against inmates was designed to “break you to make you take a plea.”

Rev. Ward was critical of judges and jailers who act as if the courts and the jail were private provinces. “The courts belong to us taxpaying citizens”, he said. Attor-

ney Hardiman said people running for judge usually have the prosecutor’s office for their training ground and almost always take a “tough on crime” platform. He said the deprivation of inmate constitutional rights was routine in county jail.

Julia Shearson, executive director of the Cleveland Council on American-Islamic Relations (“CAIR Ohio”), read excerpts from several letters CAIR Ohio has received from inmates. She framed the letters in terms of “400 years of bondage and the continuation of Jim Crow.” One letter described uncooked chicken patties served to inmates. Another claimed to have been the victim of a hate crime, having been choked and body-slammed by a corrections officer because they wanted to pray to Allah.

There were some dissenters to the evening’s theme of unabated mistreatment. David Lozada, a Corrections Supervisor at Cuyahoga County, said it was unfair to paint all officers with the same brush. He said that his colleagues, for the most part, “come to work and do their job with compassion.”

As audience members began to rebuke Lozada from the floor, the moderator stood firm in support of Lozada’s right to speak. Sylk said people needed to listen in the interest of productive dialogue. But when panelist Fred Ward asked Lozada if he had read the U.S. Marshal’s report and to account for the seven dead bodies in as many months. Lozada failed to answer.

Vincent Montague, president of Cleveland’s Black Shield police union, said that several county correctional officers had reached out to his union with concerns about seeing people get assaulted but feeling

unable to intervene. Montague said Black Shield would be meeting with them soon.

A planned protest was announced for 4:15p this coming Tuesday outside the County Administration Building at East Ninth and Prospect, in advance of the county council meeting. Protest organizers include the Puncture the Silence-Stop Mass Incarceration Cleveland, Cuyahoga County Progressive Caucus, Standing Up for Racial Justice, and Black on Black Crime, Inc.

Panelist Sarah Gelsomino addressed the plight of women inmates who are now being denied sanitary pads and treatment for yeast infections. She said they are being told to “bleed on your rag or in your underwear.” She said her firm, Friedman & Gilbert, is preparing a federal civil-rights class action lawsuit against Cuyahoga County and jail administrators.

Panelist James Hardiman seemed to put the situation in perspective when he said, “If there is a presumption of innocence, what we are doing to the most vulnerable of us is criminal.”

Panelist and Glenville area Fred Ward implored the community to use our power to elect judges that have our values. He concluded: “We don’t have to ask. We can demand a comprehensive plan to fix these atrocities.”

When asked afterwards for his views, former Ward 2 councilman Zack Reed quoted Romans 3:23: “for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Reed went on to say that all of us deserve to be treated with “dignity and respect,” adding “The only way ... this horror story is going to be solved is through the grass roots. It must be solved from the bottom up, not the top down.”



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