


TAVIS SMILEY PRESENTS
NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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**TAVIS SMILEY'S 2008 SYMPOSIUM TO FOCUS ON DEMOCRACY & ENGAGE 1,000
VOLUNTEERS TO REBUILD POST-KATRINA NEW ORLEANS**

LOS ANGELES (November 28, 2007) — Tavis Smiley's annual "State of the Black Union" (SOBU) symposium will cast its lens on the role African Americans will play in the 2008 elections and mobilize 1,000 volunteers to rebuild some of the poorest areas devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

The 2008 State of the Black Union weekend kicks off in New Orleans with SOBU Builds on Friday, Feb. 22, with volunteers working at six simultaneous community service projects in the Upper Ninth Ward, the Lower Ninth Ward, Central City, Hollygrove, New Orleans East and Broadmoor.

Then, Smiley will host a conversation with 24 noted politicians, educators, social scientists, business leaders and clergy on, "Reclaiming our Democracy; Recasting our Future," from 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. CT Saturday, Feb. 23 at the Ernest E. Morial Convention Center.

Participation in the service project and attendance at the panel discussion is free and open to the public. Advanced free registration is required at www.tavistalks.com. All registered attendees will receive a DVD of Jonathan Demme's documentary *Right to Return: New Home Movies from the Lower 9th Ward* courtesy of ExxonMobil.

"Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath provided a portrait of disenfranchisement at its worst. The service we will provide to so many still in need on Friday sets up the conversation on Saturday on what leadership must look like for the next four years. If we can bring everyday people together to restore hope to this jewel city in a grassroots, hands-on fashion; the body politic should at the very least meet the people halfway and do its part. That is the true intersection of love and service," Smiley said.

SOBU Builds in partnership with Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu's Office will mobilize volunteers with the support of local community partners who are currently addressing community needs. The sections selected for the projects represent some of the worst hit areas of New Orleans. While millions has been spent on these neighborhoods, there continues to be a need for recovery in three key areas: housing, education and recreation. Volunteers will be assigned to one of six projects. "The State of the Black Union symposium will strengthen the spirit of New Orleans residents and the economy," said Lt. Governor Mitch Landrieu. "I applaud Tavis Smiley for bringing this important national event to Louisiana to focus attention on our city's rebuilding efforts", says Lt. Governor Mitch Landrieu.

As Americans approach the 2008 presidential election along with important state and local elections, this year's panel will examine the role that African Americans can and must play to create an America as good as its promise from education and health to the justice system and wealth-building.

A partial list of panelists for the symposium include: New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin; Norman Francis, president of Xavier University; Cornel West; Bishop Paul S. Morton; Newark, N.J. Mayor Cory Booker; the Rev. Al Sharpton; the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr. Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu; Angela Glover Blackwell, Michael Eric Dyson and Michael Steele.

The symposium supporters include Title sponsor Wells Fargo and National sponsors Allstate Insurance Company, ExxonMobil, AARP and Community Sponsor McDonald's.

"Wells Fargo is proud to again play a key role in staging the State of the Black Union," said Natalie Brown, Wells Fargo Home Mortgage African American segment program manager. "This year we are especially excited to roll up our sleeves and work on a community service project to benefit the New


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Orleans community. We view our support of this initiative as just one facet of our ongoing mission to help African American individuals, households and businesses succeed financially.”

"We are thrilled to be a community partner in this historical event, and help emphasize the importance of volunteerism and rebuilding our Black communities," says Tabeier Shine, co-founder of T.R.I.P.

SOBU BUILDS DAY OF SERVICE PROJECTS

Project 1 – Build a Home: Volunteers will take hammers and nails to help in the construction of a house.

Project 2 – Beautify a City Park: Volunteers will clean up, refurbish park benches, clean equipment and restore landscaping

Project 3 – Build a Playground: In an effort to give kids an opportunity to play; volunteers will assist in rebuilding playgrounds

Project 4 – Demolish a Home: Volunteers will clear debris from homes.

Project 5 – Beautify a School Yard & Donate Books: Volunteers will plant flowers and clean school yard areas of debris.

Project 6 – Build Shelves for Public Library and Donate Books: Teams will collect and sort books.

SOBU Builds lead partners include: Habitat for Humanity, Trinity Christian Community, Xavier University, Recovery School District, Hands On, and the New Orleans Public Library, *T.R.I.P. (Travel. Rebuild. Inspire. Progress.)* and sponsors Wells Fargo, Allstate Insurance Company, UnitedHealthcare's Generations of Wellnesssm initiative, SEIU 6434 (Los Angeles), and Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation.

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

To obtain media credentials, all personnel must register in advance with identification certifying that you are a working member of the news media on assignment. Business cards, press badges, or letters from editors from established news organizations are sufficient to establish eligibility. To register, **contact Vanesse Lloyd-Sgambati at (office) 215-877-2012 or (fax) 215-877-4846.**

About Tavis Smiley Presents

Tavis Smiley Presents is an event production company dedicated to bringing thought provoking discussions, engaging town hall meetings, and consumer expos to communities across the country. During the last nine years its programs have reached more than 350,000 conference attendees and attracted millions of television viewers nationwide. Tavis Smiley is the host of Tavis Smiley on PBS, a weeknight half-hour talk show and the host of The Tavis Smiley Show from PRI, a two-hour news and opinion program featuring provocative commentary and exclusive interviews. He's the author of 12 books including his bestselling memoir, *What I Know for Sure: My Story of Growing Up in America*. He founded the Tavis Smiley Foundation to provide leadership training skills to youth ages 13 to 18. For more information, visit: www.tavistalks.com.