

Second Thoughts

Costs and crowds weaken inauguration turnout expectations

By KASHMIR HILL
NYU Livewire

Enthusiastic Barack Obama supporters vowed to be in Washington on January 20 for his inauguration, to "be part of history."

Early media reports predicted unprecedented crowds — the D.C. mayor's office foresaw five million.

But the turnout now looks likely to be less than two million, with enthusiasms dampened by the expense and difficulty of traveling, the crowds, the cold weather and the scarcity of swearing-in ceremony tickets.

New York City would seem a likely source of inauguration out-of-towners, given the city's proximity to Washington, and its Democratic leanings.

Elated by the election, Bronx native Dacia Morris, 36, was prepared in mid-November to go, and sleep in her car or crash on a friend's couch.

"This is historic and I'm ready to do just about anything to be in D.C. when Obama is sworn in," she said then.

She's since reconsidered. "Thinking about getting to the inauguration has taken a backseat now to other things," she wrote in an e-mail. "The planning and the frustration that comes with not being able to figure out the logistics have left me resigned to staying at home."

Expectations of huge crowds and difficulties in finding transportation and lodging have deterred many potential attendees, said Curtis Gans, director of Washington-based American University's Center for the Study of the American Electorate.

"Emotional considerations are running into logistical and practical considerations," he said.

Despite early reports of area hotels being sold out, as of Jan. 7 there were still 627 hotel rooms available in the city, and over 12,000 within a 400-mile radius, according to the official tourism organization, Destination D.C.

Tour organizers across the country have discovered that inauguration enthusiasm has faded. GotoBus.com, an online bus tour company with one, two and eight-day inaugural packages from Boston to Washington, still has tickets for sale on every trip. Obama supporters in Florida had planned a "Yes We Can 2009 Cruise," with over 300 people to sail from Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., to



COLD SEATS: A policeman guards rows of empty seats as preparations continue for the inauguration of President-elect Barack Obama. JEWEL SAMAD/GETTY IMAGE

Baltimore, Md. But the cruise was cancelled, due to a lack of demand. Now the group will just send two buses, said Obama campaign volunteer Karen Phillips.

"The excitement seems to have died," said Neal Kellman, owner of SolidPlant, a tour and events company in Brooklyn, N.Y. His 56-person bus was only half full by Jan. 13, though the package had been discounted to \$175 from \$233. "This was supposed to be a big deal. Everyone said they were going to go... But now little small issues—It's cold. There will be a crowd.—seem to be making people decide against it."

Clinical psychologist Bonnie Jacobson says people are drawn to events like inaugurations to be part of a group, and to have their happiness and excitement reinforced by others.

But a group mentality can also sap excitement. Now recession is pressing Americans to cut back on spending, and to avoid a potentially expensive trip.

"When fears get triggered, it can

be really inhibiting," said Jacobson.

Even though NAACP Staten Island chapter president Edward Josey, 68, is facing a deficit of demand for his inaugural trip—with just 20 people slated to be on board his 56-person bus—he's still going.

"This is the first black president of the United States. I could very well watch it on TV," said Josey. "But I'll have the bragging rights that I was there, I've waited all my life for this, and I may never see it again."

A number of people backed out of Josey's trip over the last week.

"They said the weather would be bad and they would have a better view on television," said Josey. The forecasting service AccuWeather predicts Washington temperatures in the mid-30s that day.

The area around the Capitol will be restricted to 240,000 ticket-holders, and the bleacher areas along the parade route to 5,000.

Those without tickets can watch the ceremony on jumbotron screens set up on the National Mall, or can line up along Pennsylvania Avenue to see the processional parade to the

White House.

Many who changed their minds about attending cited the failure to get tickets from their congressional representatives as a major factor.

Wayde Grinstead, a New York City public school teacher, had planned to take his high school civics class, but encountered resistance from the school administration.

"The principal of our school doesn't want us going down to be on the fringes," said Grinstead, who attempted to get swearing-in ceremony tickets or a guaranteed watching spot. Unsuccessful, he'll be tuning into CNN with his class instead.

This seems to be a theme among would-be attendees. If they had front-row seats, they'd want to go. But fighting the imagined crowds, craning to catch a glimpse of the presidential motorcade going by, is less compelling. "Being part of history" seems less appealing than being warm and comfortable, and watching the action on TV.

Roads, Energy, States Win in U.S. Stimulus Plan

A breakdown of just where all the billions of dollars are headed

(Reuters)—Democratic leaders in the House proposed an \$825 billion economic stimulus package Thursday, with \$550 billion in spending to create jobs and \$275 billion in tax cuts.

The legislation is expected to be discussed by two House committees as early as this week with the aim of sending a final bill to the White House by mid-February. The Democrats' bill would create a website, www.recovery.gov, to track spending projects and a seven-member board to oversee the management of them.

Other highlights include:

Tax Cuts

- * Expand so-called net operation loss carryback period to five years from the current two years. The change would let banks, home builders and other companies accelerate the use of allowable deductions. The tax break would not be allowed for banks that received taxpayer money from the Treasury Department's Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP).

- * Speed up depreciation deductions for businesses investing in new plants and equipment.

- * Nearly double the amount small businesses can immediately write off on taxes for capital investments and new equipment.
- * Give businesses tax credit to hire veterans, youths.

Highways, Rail, Transportation

- * \$30 billion for highway construction.

- * \$19 billion for clean water, flood control, and environmental restoration investments.

- * \$10 billion for transit, rail to cut traffic congestion and gas consumption.

- * \$6 billion to buy buses, equipment for public transit.

- * \$3 billion for airport improvement projects to improve safety and reduce congestion.

- * \$1.1 billion to improve speed, capacity of intercity passenger rail service.

- * \$2 billion to modernize existing transit systems.

- * \$1 billion for grants for new commuter rail projects.

States, Education

- * \$79 billion in state fiscal relief to prevent cuts to key services.

- * \$39 billion to school districts, public colleges, universities via existing state and federal formulas.

- * \$26 billion to build new K-12 schools and for higher education construction.

- * \$15.6 billion to increase Pell grants for college students.

- * \$6 billion for higher education modernization.

Energy

- * \$31 billion to modernize federal, other public infrastructure with investments for long-term energy savings.

- * \$11 billion for research and development, pilot projects, and federal matching funds to modernize electricity grid.

- * \$8 billion for loans for renewable energy power generation and transmission projects.

- * \$6.9 billion for state, local governments to improve energy efficiency.

- * \$6.7 billion for renovations, repairs to federal buildings, especially for energy efficiency improvements.

- * \$2.4 billion for carbon capture and sequestration technology demonstration projects.

- * \$2 billion for advanced vehicle battery loan guarantees and grants.

- * \$500 million for energy-efficient manufacturing demonstration projects.

Health Care

- * \$87 billion to states, increasing through the end of FY 2010 the share of Medicaid costs the Federal government reimburses all states by 4.8 percent, with extra relief tied to rates of unemployment.

- * \$30.3 billion to extend health insurance coverage to the unemployed beyond 18 months provided under current law.

- * \$8.6 billion to provide full federal funding through 2010 for state Medicaid coverage of unemployed.

- * \$4.1 billion for preventative care and to evaluate the most effective healthcare treatments.

- * \$3.75 billion for Pentagon to build hospitals and ambulatory surgical centers.

- * \$3 billion to fight chronic and infectious diseases.

- * \$950 million to repair, modernize veterans hospitals.

- * \$900 million for biomedical research, pandemic flu preparation, cyber security at Health and Human Services Dept.

Broadband, Technology

- * \$20 billion for health information technology to prevent medical mistakes, provide better patient care.

- * \$6 billion to expand broadband Internet access for businesses in rural areas.

- * \$1 billion for school technology, computer labs.

- * \$400 million for Social Security Administration to replace its computer center.

- * \$276 million for State Department to upgrade technology to meet stricter security needs.

- * \$245 million for Farm Service Agency to upgrade technology to handle workload increases.

HOUSING

- * \$6.2 billion to help low-income families weatherize homes, cut energy costs.

- * \$5 billion for public housing repair, modernization.

- * \$4.2 billion to help communities buy, rehabilitate foreclosed properties for affordable housing.

- * \$1.5 billion to help local communities build, rehabilitate low-income housing using green technologies.

U.S. Inmates Sicker Than Average

Study says prisoners may not have adequate access to medical care

CHICAGO (Reuters)—Inmates in U.S. prisons and jails have rates of serious illness that far exceed those of the general population and many lack access to healthcare, researchers said Thursday.

They found that 800,000 inmates — about 40 percent of the U.S. prison population — have a chronic medical problem such as diabetes, asthma or heart or kidney problems.

And more than 20 percent of sick inmates in state prisons and 13.9 percent in federal prisons had not seen a doctor or a nurse since their incarceration began.

"A substantial percentage of inmates have serious medical needs. Yet many of them don't get even minimal care medical care," said Dr. Andrew Wilper of the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle, whose study appears in the American Journal of Public Health.

Wilper did the research while at the Cambridge Health Alliance and Harvard Medical School in Massachusetts. He and colleagues analyzed data from a 2002 survey of inmates in local jails and a 2004 survey of prison inmates.

They found a far higher incidence of chronic disease among inmates. Compared to other Americans of the same age, state prison inmates were 31 percent more likely to have asthma, 55 percent more likely to have diabetes, and 90 percent more likely to have suffered a heart attack.

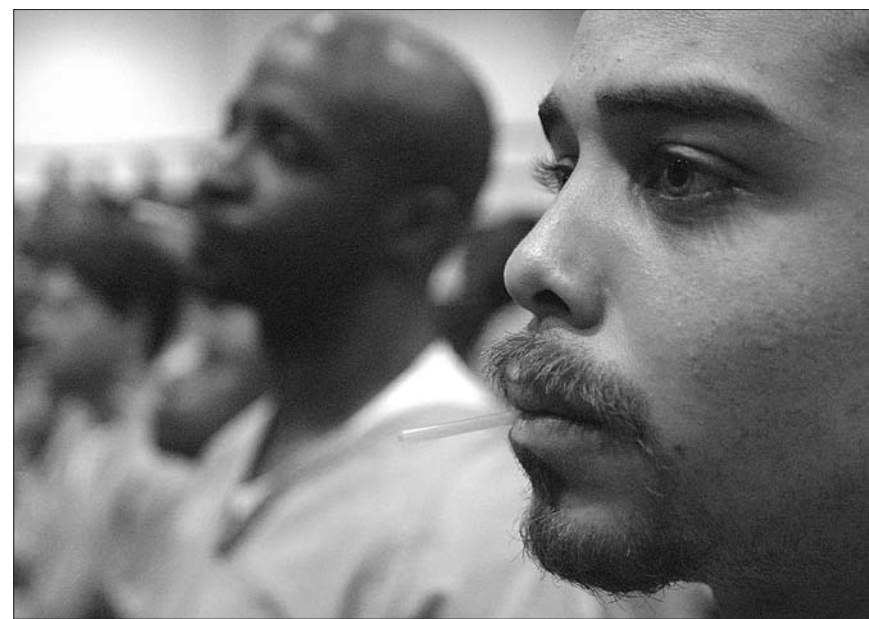
Access to care was worst in local jails and best in federal prisons. One-quarter of jail inmates who had suffered severe injuries had received no medical attention, versus 12 percent in state prisons and 8 percent in federal prisons.

The researchers also looked at mental illness. While about a quarter of inmates had a history of chronic mental illness like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression or anxiety, two-thirds of them were off treatment at the time of their arrest.

Only after their imprisonment did most of these inmates receive treatment.

A study this week in the Journal of the American Medical Association found inmates with drug problems are not getting adequate treatment.

The study by researchers at the



SICK IN JAIL: Cook County Jail detainees take an AIDS test in August at a jail in Chicago, Illinois. TIM BOYLE/GETTY IMAGES

National Institute on Drug Abuse, part of the National Institutes of Health, found about half of all prisoners — including some guilty of non-drug offenses — are dependent on drugs. Yet less than 20 percent of inmates suffering from drug

abuse or dependence get formal treatment.

They said the criminal justice system was in a position to encourage drug abusers to enter and remain in treatment, disrupting the cycle of drug use and crime.

Despite N.Y. Crash, Air Travel in U.S. Getting Safer

WASHINGTON (Reuters)—Despite the crash Thursday of a US Airways Group jetliner in New York's Hudson River, airline travel in the United States is safe and has been getting safer, aviation officials and experts said.

The accident was the second serious one involving a major airline in the past month but also the second in which no one was killed. More than 150 passengers and crew escaped the US Airways A320 that plunged into the river after takeoff from nearby LaGuardia airport, but it floated long enough to allow

passengers to escape.

* In December, 112 people got out of a Continental Airlines plane that ran off a runway and caught fire in Denver.

* The last fatal U.S. crash was in August 2006 when a Comair jet crashed and burned in a Kentucky pasture, killing all 50 people aboard. Investigators said the pilots used an unlighted runway.

* Virtually all aviation fatalities involve small private planes, statistics show.

* Aviation experts say that luck has something to do with increased

survival rates but that crew training, aircraft design, cockpit advances and safety precautions in combination can prevent deaths.

* Jim Hall, the former chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), said aviation authorities and airlines have learned painful but important lessons from past crashes about technology, mechanical problems, engines and fuel-fed fires, weather, crew behavior and training.

* U.S. airlines fly more than 600 million people each year. While many safety incidents are minor

and do not make headlines, investigators and safety advocates have grown more concerned in recent years about the potential for runway collisions due to increased congestion.

* U.S. safety investigators expressed concern last month about some airlines discontinuing a safety program that encouraged pilots, mechanics and dispatchers to voluntarily report safety incidents. The Federal Aviation Administration came under fire last year for lax safety inspection procedures at several airlines.