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Pepco's Post-Storm Performance Prompts Outrage



Pepco, the main utility company in the Washington, D.C. metro area, has been criticized for its response to power outages after major snow storms last year and this year.

By Zenitha Prince
AFRO Washington Bureau Chief

The last of the 210,000 Pepco customers that lost their electricity after the Jan. 26 snow storm were brought back to light on the afternoon of Jan. 31. That lapse in service has prompted an outcry from area officials and residents, who expressed their outrage in letters and phone calls to the company, in online forums and in the pages of area newspapers.

In a tersely written Jan. 29 letter addressed to

Joseph Rigby, chairman of Pepco Holdings, Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley expressed "frustration" and "anger" at the utility's lag in restoring power outages, its seemingly "slow response in requesting assistance from other jurisdictions," and its breakdown in customer communications.

"Despite earnest promises, numerous press releases, and even a six point plan, families in our State woke up, for the third morning in a row, to a cold, dark house, with Pepco advising them that service

Howard Makes Bold Changes Goal is to promote excellence

By Talibah Chikwendu
AFRO Executive Editor

This week Howard

University's president and Board of Trustees announced major changes to the academic structure of the school. The Academic Renewal Plan – the culmination of two years of meetings, university community input and the hard work by the Presidential Commission on Academic Renewal (PCAR) – was presented to the board by Howard's President Sidney A. Ribeau on Jan. 29 and approved.

"Universities must periodically review and assess themselves to respond to developments in higher education and the changing needs of our nation and the world," Ribeau said in a statement. "At Howard, we are doing just that. We must maintain the highest standards of academic and administrative excellence."

The plan consolidates or eliminates many of Howard's degree programs and works to reorganize the university's resources in a way that supports its strategic goals.

While this process was initiated by the board of trustees and President Ribeau, Alvin Thornton, Ph.D., senior advisor to the president on academic affairs and chair of the PCAR committee, was clear that this effort and the resulting recommendations involved all parts of the university community.

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CBC Chair Shares Insight for Session

By Andrea L. "Aunni" Young
Special to the AFRO

The 112th Congress has convened with a new chairman for the Congressional Black Caucus, Rep. Emanuel Cleaver II. Coming to the House of Representatives for his third term from Missouri's Fifth District, he serves on the Financial Services Committee, Homeland Security Committee and the Speaker's Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming.

The Congressional Black Caucus was formed in 1971 to help improve the ability of Black elected officials to support their constituencies.

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Congressman Emanuel Cleaver, seen in this March 4, 2005, file photo, is the new chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus.

Court Initiative Helps Strengthen Paternal Bonds, Financial Support

By Valencia Mohammed
Special to the AFRO

It was a big celebration for handful of fathers who completed one year of rigorous scrutiny by a dozen agencies working together under one program to help them get back on their feet. Unlike traditional court monitoring agencies, this program centered on fathers and their children. Some willingly sought help, others were forced by the courts to participate yet, ultimately, all seemed thankful someone intervened in their lives.

Beaming with a sense of accomplishment, Anthony Best, 36, sat proudly waiting for the festivities to begin on Jan. 28. Best spent time in Rivers Correctional Facility for a drug distribution charge. He signed up to participate in the program before his release via teleconference. "There's no doubt about it; this program has helped me become a better dad," Best said. Best found jobs with several businesses until he landed one in the District government with the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs for over a year. He has been working there under contract due to the hiring freeze.

"The program gave me the contacts and support that I needed to address my concerns and achieve each goal that I set. It gave me the tools to deal with my son. Now it's up to me to set all the tools into action," said Best.

Theresa A. Johnson, 53, Best's aunt, came by to cheer her nephew while on lunch break. "We can definitely tell a difference in Anthony. Now he spends more time with his son. Thanks to this program and the fact that he did what he had to do to change his ways, Anthony's going to be a great father," said Johnson.

The Fathering Court is an innovative program that helps support and connects fathers to their families. The initiative combines needs-assessment, skill development opportunities, case management, peer support, completion of a mandatory curriculum and putting non-custodial parents in contact with community resources with an emphasis on employment to give those returning from prison the ability to meet the needs of their children. Other services include housing assistance and referrals, substance abuse treatment and counseling, mediation services, and legal assistance.

Kevin Ross, 34, now has a job at Giant Food Stores. He also embraced the changes he decided to make in his life.

"Now I believe in learning how to live to provide for my daughter in the right way. I will never allow anybody to rent

space in my head and lead me into a life of crime that will take me from my daughter ever again," said Ross.

Judge Zoe Bush, presiding judge of the District's Family Court, smiled as she listened to the many accomplishments

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Fathering Court graduates celebrated with their family and friends at the closing ceremony on Jan. 28.

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