

THE CONGRESSIONAL BLACK CAUCUS AGENDA FOR THE 109th CONGRESS

“CLOSING DISPARITIES AND CREATING OPPORTUNITY”

- ***CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT AND OPPORTUNITY GAPS IN EDUCATION***
- ***ASSURING QUALITY HEALTH CARE FOR EVERY AMERICAN***
- ***FOCUSING ON EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC SECURITY, BUILDING WEALTH AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT***
- ***ENSURING JUSTICE FOR ALL***
- ***GUARANTEEING RETIREMENT SECURITY FOR ALL AMERICANS***
- ***INCREASING EQUITY IN FOREIGN POLICY***

INTRODUCTION

Since the formation of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), the core mission of the CBC has been to close (and, ultimately, to eliminate) disparities that exist between African Americans and White Americans in every aspect of life. These continuing and troubling disparities make it more difficult, and often make it impossible, for African Americans to reach their full potential. In pursuing the core mission of the CBC, the CBC has been true to its motto that “the CBC has no permanent friends and no permanent enemies, just permanent interests.”

The CBC acknowledges the unfortunate fact that disparities between African Americans and White Americans continue to exist in 2005 in every aspect of our lives and that the historical mission of the CBC has not yet been fully accomplished. Therefore, the members of the CBC have adopted this Agenda in the 109th Congress that recommits us to the historic mission of the CBC – working to close and eliminate disparities and toward the goal of full equality. Consistent with our motto, we will continue to work with all who are willing to work with us to help advance our Agenda and achieve this goal.

The following are among the many substantive areas in which disparities continue to persist, and some of the positions the CBC supports to close and eliminate the disparities in these areas:

“CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT AND OPPORTUNITY GAPS IN EDUCATION ...”

Providing a high quality education to all public school students is the most critical path to achieving our objectives in all areas of our Agenda. To do so, the CBC supports devoting more attention and, where necessary, more resources to:

1. Supporting early childhood nutrition, Head Start and movement toward universal pre-school;
2. Providing student nutrition, identifying and providing education and assistance appropriate to the needs of each individual student to fulfill the promise of *No Child Left Behind*, dropout prevention, after-school programs, school modernization and infrastructure and equipment enhancement;
3. Increasing the availability of Pell Grants, scholarships, loan assistance and other specialized programs to enable and provide incentives to more African American students to obtain college, graduate or professional degrees or otherwise receive training and retraining to meet changing job needs; and
4. Preserving and improving Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

The following are some of the dramatic disparities that the CBC believes would be reduced by the above priorities:

- ✓ In 2003, 39% of African American 4th grade students could read at or above a basic reading level compared to 74% of White 4th grade students, and 39% of African American 8th grade students performed at or above a basic math level compared to 79% of White 8th grade students;
- ✓ High school completion rates – 83.7% for African Americans, and 91.8% for Whites;
- ✓ Bachelor Degree recipients – 16.4% for African Americans, and 31.7% for Whites; and
- ✓ Digital Divide – 41.3% of African Americans are capable of accessing the Internet, compared to 61.5% of Whites.

“ASSURING QUALITY HEALTH CARE FOR EVERY AMERICAN...”

The CBC supports:

1. Emphasizing universal access, affordability and prevention;
2. Providing meaningful coverage for prescription medications to every American; and
3. Increasing African American representation across all health care professions.

Among the dramatic disparities the CBC believes could be reduced by doing so include:

- ✓ In December 2004, the American Journal of Public Health reported that 886,000 more African Americans died between 1991 and 2000 than would have died had equal health care been available;
- ✓ While African Americans comprised approximately 12% of the U.S. population in 2000, they represented 19.6% of the uninsured;
- ✓ African American men experience twice the average death rate from prostate cancer;
- ✓ In 2002, the African American AIDS diagnosis rate was 11 times the White diagnosis rate (23 times more for women and 9 times more for men);
- ✓ African Americans are two times more likely to have diabetes than Whites, four times more likely to see their diabetes progress to end-stage renal disease and four times more likely to have a stroke; and
- ✓ African Americans are only 2.9% of doctors, 9.2% of nurses, 1.5% of dentists and 0.4% of health care administrators, yet African Americans comprise 12% of the population.

“FOCUSING ON EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC SECURITY –BUILDING WEALTH AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT...”

The CBC supports:

1. Eradicating employment discrimination and ensuring the employment of a diverse work force by employers in the private sector and in government (including staffs of Committees and Members of Congress);
2. Protecting the rights and working conditions of all employees;
3. Providing support to enable people to work such as child care, transportation, health care, job retraining and a living wage;
4. Promoting the advancement of African Americans into management, executive and director positions;
5. Providing equal access to capital for individuals and businesses and the elimination of redlining and predatory lending practices;
6. Expanding affordable rental and ownership of housing; and
7. Achieving aggressive minority business goals and participation in government and private contracting.

Among the dramatic disparities the CBC believes would be reduced by pursuing these policies are the following:

- ✓ Unemployment rates for African Americans are consistently almost double the rates for White Americans;
- ✓ The median weekly earnings of full-time African American workers is consistently over \$130 less than White workers who are similarly educated and situated;
- ✓ The poverty rate for African Americans is almost double the national poverty rate (24% vs. 12.5%) and more than triple (33% vs. 9.8%) for children under the age of 18;
- ✓ Home ownership for African Americans is 48% compared to 72% for White Americans and African Americans are more than two times more likely to be denied a mortgage and more than two times more likely to receive predatory loans; and
- ✓ Minority-owned businesses receive only 57 cents of each dollar they would be expected to receive based on the percentage of “ready, willing and able” businesses that are minority owned.

“ENSURING JUSTICE FOR ALL...”

The CBC supports:

1. Guaranteeing equal access to vote, making sure that every vote is counted, extension of the expiring provisions of the Voting Rights Act, and reinstatement of voting rights after criminal defendants have served their sentences;
2. Ending racial and ethnic profiling;
3. Advocating for Criminal and Juvenile Justice Reform that focuses greater emphasis on prevention and rehabilitation, reduces recidivism by successfully reintegrating former inmates into society and ends arbitrary mandatory minimum sentences;
4. Appointing fair and impartial Judges; and
5. Preserving Affirmative Action until all the effects of past and present discrimination have been eliminated.

Among the dramatic disparities the CBC believes would be reduced by pursuing the above policies are the following:

- ✓ Practices of the kind documented in Florida in 2000 and in Ohio in 2004, the latter in a 100+ page Investigative Report issued by members of the House Judiciary Committee in January 2005; and
- ✓ While African-American men represent approximately 6% of the total population, they represent 44% of all male inmates in State and Federal prisons and jails (an estimated 12% of black males) and African-American females are five times more likely than White females to be incarcerated.

“RETIREMENT SECURITY FOR ALL AMERICANS...”

The CBC supports:

1. Preserving Social Security as a safety net for older Americans and guaranteeing that Social Security benefits continue to be paid; and
2. Making it possible for people of all income levels to accumulate assets and save for retirement as a means of supplementing their Social Security benefits.

Among the realities the CBC believes the above policies would help address are the following:

- ✓ Social Security benefits are the only source of retirement income for 40% of older African Americans and without these benefits the poverty rate for African American seniors would more than double; and
- ✓ 28% of African Americans receive income from assets upon retirement compared to 62% of White Americans and 32% of African American retirees receive income from private pension plans compared to 45% of White American retirees.

“INCREASING EQUITY IN FOREIGN POLICY...”

The CBC supports:

1. Reaching the Millennium Goals for developing countries;
2. Eradicating poverty, hunger and armed conflicts in countries around the world, especially in Africa and the Caribbean;
3. Reducing the heavy burden that debt has on many countries; and
4. Reengaging with the United Nations, regional organizations and countries throughout the world to help promote civil society, global health, fair trade and peace and to help combat terrorism and increase security at home.

Among the realities the CBC believes the above policies would help address are the following:

- ✓ Nearly 1.3 billion people around the world live in poverty and do not have safe drinking water;
- ✓ More than one-third of the world’s children are malnourished;
- ✓ Within the last ten years, approximately two million children have been killed in armed conflicts, many after being forced to be child soldiers;
- ✓ Many poor countries spend 30%-40% of their annual budgets on repaying their foreign-held debt (often more than they spend on health and education combined); and
- ✓ Horrific conditions can lead individuals to become more disaffected and susceptible to recruitment by terrorist organizations.

OTHER PRIORITY AREAS

There are many areas in addition to the above in which disparities continue to exist and on which the CBC Action Agenda will also focus. Some of these areas include building stronger African American families, improving the welfare of children, increasing African American political representation, reducing inequities and improving opportunities for African Americans to advance in the military, documenting and preserving African American history by assuring that financing and construction of the African American Museum moves forward and eliminating waste, fraud, abuse and disparities in every area of government.

CONCLUSION

The mission and objective of the CBC and our Agenda for the 109th Congress continues to be improving the condition of African American people. However, the CBC has never sought to limit the benefits of its endeavors to African Americans. Indeed, the members of the CBC firmly believe that the priorities outlined in this Agenda will benefit all Americans and will make our country better for all people. We invite all Americans to join us in the quest to remove disparities and barriers that increase the burden or make it impossible for individuals to achieve their full potential. African Americans will be better for it and America will be better for it, too.