

OUR VIEW

Blackened Out

Las Vegas is the convention capital of the nation. It's a well-earned honorific, testimony not only to the city's magnetism but also its professionalism. Nobody would want to hold business meetings here if work couldn't/wouldn't get done. On the flip side, many companies and groups meet here because precisely because there's so much to do once work is finished and it's play time—the shopping, the dining, the entertainment; Vegas is a vacationer's/leisure traveler's/conventioner's paradise.

More and more those conventioners are African-American. Black groups are choosing Vegas as their destination of choice. Wind the clock back a decade: Black sports agents, Black public relationships professionals, Black skiers, Black engineers, Black fraternities and sororities, 100 Black Men of America and the list goes on and on. On Sunday, the National Association of Black Journalists, the nation's largest group of minority journalists, wrapped up a 5-day convention at Bally's Hotel and Casino. The NABJ Convention, it's 32nd, drew a who's who of Black media movers and shakers for a week's worth of workshops, networking events, career advancement, student projects, awards ceremonies and parties. Democratic presidential candidates Sen. Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., and Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., also addressed members. Conventioners remarked that the convention was one of NABJ's most successful to date. Which makes sense: poll members of most organizations that meet annually or biennially and they'll probably say their Vegas convention was one of the most well attended.

Black groups meeting in Vegas is a good thing. We need more of them to consider our fair city. We need the trend to continue because it's imperative that tourism officials and gaming operators respect the power of the Black dollar and that they actively court the African-American leisure and business travel market. In 2005, Blacks spent \$4.6 billion on travel, transportation and lodging, a 27 percent increase from 2004. This according to "The Buying Power of Black America," a book published in 2005 that detailed Black consumerism. No matter which way you look at it \$4 billion is a lot of money. So is one tenth of that, \$400 million. So is one tenth of \$400 million—\$40 million. Ditto one tenth of that last number, which is \$4 million. Even \$400,000 is a pretty penny. Not to mention \$40,000. Know anybody that couldn't use \$4,000? The point of this exercise, you ask?

To point out that there's plenty of money to be spent with Black people in the host cities. A nasty habit has developed among many of the Black groups that have met here in recent years: little, if any, attention is given to making an impact on Black culture in this valley. West Las Vegas and parts of North Las Vegas where there are significant African-American populations are virtually ignored. Few events are held in tougher neighborhoods whose residents, particularly the youth, could benefit from seeing professional Blacks. Outreach to Black businesses is half-hearted. When dollars do trickle in to Black media outlets, they do just that—trickle. The few groups who've invested time, money and resources into our town's Black culture are far outnumbered by those who meet here for a few days, enrich the coffers of Strip properties and leave.

It's been said ad nauseum that Black America doesn't practice enough financial reciprocity. Money leaves our community as fast as it comes in, whereas other races recycle dollars four, five and six times before investing outside their communities. Why is that? Is it really that difficult to make a few extra calls to the local Black media outlets, to the local Black civic and social service organizations, to local Black business leaders and to ask them how your organization can be of assistance when it comes to town? Are we not confident enough in our people's competence? You'd think the NABJ would spend money advertising in Black media. That it would donate money or resources to KCEP. That it would host a town hall on the lack of local media diversity. That it would use local Black businesses for goods and services. That it wouldn't just come here and leave.

NABJ wasn't the first to do this. Let's hope it is the last Black group to engage in an economic blackout.



Dems want college for all

By U.S. Rep. Kendrick Meek
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The New Direction Congress under the Democratic Leadership is passing legislation that reflects the priorities of the African-American community.

Every day, we in Congress are restoring accountability to government in Washington, D.C. We are helping improve the lives of all Americans, not just the privileged few.

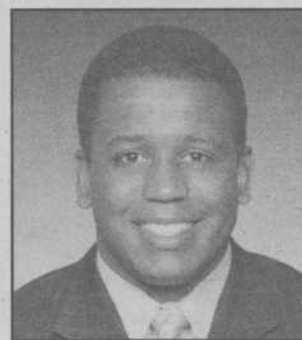
Strengthening our military and defending our country is our objective. Restoring accountability and achieving fiscal responsibility is our mandate.

Achieving energy independence and working toward attaining global warming solutions is our charge. Expanding economic opportunities by raising the minimum wage and protecting the middle class from tax increases is our priority.

Helping families and caring for our children is our mission.

These are the principles that Democrats are championing in Congress everyday.

The College Cost Reduction Act of 2007, which recently passed the House of



KENDRICK MEEK

Representatives, is one of those priorities.

This bill amounts to the single largest investment in college aid since the GI Bill of 1944 and will boost scholarships and reduce loan costs at no new taxpayer expense.

Who benefits from this legislation? Our community does.

African-American students comprise about 12 percent of all undergraduate students. While the median household income for all Americans was \$46,242 in 2005, the median household income for African-Americans was \$30,858.

The College Cost Reduction Act increases the maximum Pell Grant scholarship—the federal scholarship for low- and moderate-income students—by \$500 over the next four years.

About 47 percent of all African-American students receive Pell Grant scholarships each year.

It cuts the interest rates on need-based federal student loans in half from 6.8 percent to 3.4 percent over five years. Once fully implemented, this cut would save the typical borrower \$4,400 over the life of the loan. About 38 percent of African-American students take out need-based student loans each year.

The bill also provides \$170 million in grants for Historically Black Colleges and Universities over the next five years. As a graduate of Florida A&M University, I know firsthand the integral role HBCUs play in

educating future leaders of our community.

Fourteen percent of African-Americans students are enrolled in HBCUs and the 99 institutions that currently receive federal funds would benefit greatly from this funding increase.

Furthermore, this legislation will create a new designation of Predominantly Black Institutions, which are defined as schools that enroll students in financial need and have at least 40 percent African-American student enrollment.

These schools would be eligible to receive \$30 million in grant aid over five years for programs in the
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