

NAACP: More companies pushing for diversity

Special to Sentinel-Voice

(NNPA) — After 12 years of tracking the diversity efforts of some of the nation's largest companies in five key industries, the NAACP reports measured progress toward the goal of addressing economic concerns of the African-American consumer.

The 2008 edition of the NAACP Consumer Choice Guide, part of the NAACP Economic Reciprocity Initiative (ERI), is now available. The latest guide provides African-American consumers with empowerment tools that enable them to make informed choices when purchasing products and services from the surveyed companies.

African-Americans infuse an estimated \$700 billion into the American economy annually. "More than 40

companies participated in this year's survey because they recognize the importance and necessity of implementing diversity strategies," said NAACP Interim President & CEO Dennis Courtland Hayes. "Our community wields a substantial block of economic power. African-Americans want to experience a return on their consumer investment and challenge those who are taking their dollars for granted."

In 1996, the NAACP launched the ERI as a sustained consumer movement to measure corporate America's financial relationship with the African-American community. Since then, the ERI has expanded its scope and has continued to annually highlight diversity efforts made in lodging, telecommunications, financial services, general merchan-

dising and automotive industries.

"Economic empowerment is a civil rights issue too," said NAACP National Board of Directors Chairman Julian Bond. "African-American consumers want fairness in the marketplace just as they do in all aspects of their lives. As we educate consumers on the value of their dollar, they will make more prudent spending decisions, ultimately holding businesses accountable for their practices, good or bad."

Participating industries and companies are rated in employment, marketing/communications, charitable giving, supplier diversity and one industry-specific area. Information contained in the report is based on 2007 data provided by the participating companies. Survey questions are graded, weighted and as-

signed point values which are translated into a letter grade.

Lodging: This year's grade for the lodging industry is a C for its diversity-related activity. Their score is virtually unchanged from the previous year and 100 percent of the corporations participated in the ERI survey this year. The industry overall tends to be most responsive in the area of charitable giving; the greatest challenge is in the area of property ownership. Loews earned a B-; Marriott, Hyatt, Intercontinental and Omni received a C. Wyndham Worldwide earned a C-, while Starwood recorded a C+. Hilton and Carlson received a D+ and Choice a D.

Telecommunications: This year's overall grade for the telecommunications industry is B-. Despite mergers and acquisitions they continued to make strides in their diversity efforts. AT&T led the firms with a B, followed by Alltel and Verizon each with a B- in the latest round of grading. Cox Communications and Comcast each received a C+, while Sprint earned a C. A D+ went to Charter Communications and a D to Qwest Communi-

cations. Cablevision and T-Mobile each received an F for not responding.

Financial services: The financial services industry received a B this year. The industry saw modest gains in the areas of employment, marketing/communications, and supplier diversity. Wachovia Corporation, Bank of America and SunTrust led the pack by earning a B while Wells Fargo Company received a B-. A C+ went to Key Corporation, U.S. Bancorp, Fifth Third Bank, PNC Financial, Regions Financial Corp. and Citigroup Inc. BB&T received a C. Citizens Financial Group earned a C-.

General merchandising: The nation's major retailers earned a C overall in this year's report, making the gains in community reinvestment. After four years of non-participation in the survey by Target, the Minnesota-based company has agreed to participate in the 2009 ERI survey.

In response to the fifth consecutive year of non-participation in the survey by Dillard's, the NAACP will launch an online petition that will compel Dillard's to dem-

onstrate their commitment to diversity and appreciation for the African-American dollars spent in their stores.

This year, Wal-Mart held the top rank in the category with a C+ followed by Macy's Incorporated, which received a C. A D+ was earned by Kohl's Department Stores. Nordstrom Inc. received a D. J.C. Penny Company Inc., Sears Roebuck and Company and Dillard's each earned an F for their lack of participation.

Automotive: The automotive sector received a C. This industry showed marked improvement in supplier diversity. Top grade in this industry was a B- given to Chrysler LLC, Ford and Honda. General Motors got a C+ followed by Toyota's C. C minuses went to Mitsubishi, Nissan and Hyundai. Volkswagen earned a D.

All the industries were most responsive in the charitable giving category.

Complete details of the 2008 Consumer Choice Guide and NAACP Economic Reciprocity Initiative Report, including individual company scores, can be found at: www.naacp.org.

McCain

(Continued from Page 1)

U. S. media struggled to balance coverage by focusing on McCain's string of economic town hall meetings — none of which were held in Black communities, where joblessness, the sub-prime mortgage crisis and overall economic decline has hit the hardest. Meanwhile, upon Obama's return home, he went straight to the gathering of Black, Hispanic, Asian and American-Indian journalists at Chicago's Unity Convention. McCain declined the invitation. Black voters, who normally support Republican candidates by less than 10 percent anyway, have significantly lessened that percentage with the prospects of Obama's becoming the nation's first Black president as well as with his message of hope and change.

But, it's not like McCain hasn't tried to reach the Black community:

He did speak at the annual NAACP conference in mid-July. There, he received only polite responses as he pushed for charter school vouchers, which the NAACP has long opposed, "based on the premise that these programs use public funds to support private and/or parochial education," according to a policy statement on NAACP.org. "Moreover, voucher programs may hasten the abandonment of public schools while leaving behind the majority of low-income students of color," it states.

"That's why the comments from McCain were

met with deafening silence," says Mark Q. Sawyer, political science professor at UCLA and director of the university's Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity and Politics. He described the McCain speech to the NAACP as "really bizarre."

Sawyer observed, "Probably at least a quarter of the people sitting in the room were members of a teachers union... When he starts basically attacking public school teachers, he's basically attacking the Black middle class who were the people who were sitting there in the audience at the NAACP meeting," he said. "They are so much more likely to be somebody who's a member of a teachers union than they are to be someone who's a poor parent looking for a voucher because they perceive their kid to be stuck in a city school."

Now, some perceive that Obama has beaten McCain on his own turf.

Obama, viewed as a one-term senator from Chicago with no military experience, traveled abroad after being nudged to do so by McCain, a decorated Vietnam War veteran, a former prisoner of war, and a law maker for 26 years. McCain had also toured the Middle East, Europe, Mexico and other nations earlier in the campaigns in order to bolster his diplomatic resume.

"It's been an absolute disaster for the McCain campaign," Sawyer describes. "So, McCain comes out and

dares him to go on this trip and basically sort of dreams it up himself as well as the kind of attention that might get focused on it... He accepts the dare and turns it into a wonderful kind of public relations coo. Then McCain starts screaming fowl, calling it some kind of media bias."

Obama, looking presidential at every stop, won applause back home — but not just because of his presidential candidacy.

"Frankly, I wish every member of the United States Senate would go to Afghanistan," said economist and social commentator Julianne Malveaux, also president of Bennett College in North Carolina. "And to understand what our situation is, why we're losing lives, what we should be doing differently. If they see it for themselves and talk to some of the troops there, they might make different kinds of decisions. I think he's doing absolutely the right thing."

Both McCain and Obama were scheduled to attend the National Urban League conference in Orlando this week, where McCain is obviously hoping to make some points.

Alexander says he has a better idea: "Far more important than going to the conventions, let's go to the places where Americans live. Let's go to the barrios, let's go to the ghettos, let's go to those schools, let's go to those emergency rooms and let's see some of that. And then let's see what some of your positions are."

RE-ELECT

Morse
ARBERRY, JR.

NEVADA STATE ASSEMBLY CLARK COUNTY DISTRICT 7

Progress - Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow!

Paid Political Advertisement by Morse Arberry, Jr.