

Cease and desist challenges to Rangel's chairmanship

Written by William Reed

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Is race related to rancor to remove Charles Rangel from his seat at the head of the House Ways and Means Committee? Black Americans leaders have reasons to think so.

Charles Bernard Rangel is an African-American icon deserving respect and retention of his office. His office as Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee represents a watershed achievement for Blacks. Rangel has rose in rank and clout in the Congress, but at the same time, represented Blacks' issues. Rangel was the first African American on the Ways and Means Committee and has represented Blacks' issues on the Committee since 1983.

Before and after becoming Chairman in 2007, Rangel has recorded an astute body of work. In recognition of those works, the baying of partisans and mainstream media for his ousting should cease until the US House Ethics Committee concludes investigations on the matters.

Black leaders are leery of machinations to remove Rangel. The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) recently sent House Speaker Pelosi "a Letter of Support for Rangel" arguing "no decision should be made in regards to Rangel's chairmanship until the House ethics committee inquiry is complete". Established Black leadership is lining up behind Rangel and the CBC. National Newspaper Publishers Association head Danny Bakewell and Harlem Republican businessman, Dr. Eugene Webb, also contacted Speaker Pelosi that Rangel retain his position until the House Ethics Committee says otherwise. Chairman Rangel has been subjected to repeated attacks and allegations that he committed errors in complex financial disclosure and tax filings.

The House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct is conducting a review of any possible errors and will present findings when completed. Presuming him guilty before investigation is complete violates a core American principle of "presumption of innocence". The sensationalists on cable networks can't help but distract "The Chairman" from important work he is doing to fix the economy, put Americans back to work and improve health care access.

The political drama being played out to strip Rangel of his chairmanship should be viewed in its historical context. Rangel is not the first Black Chair of a powerful Congressional Committee to be removed from his position by peers. Rangel's treatment is remnant of procedures put in play 50 years ago when a racially-motivated Congress ousted his Harlem District predecessor, Adam Clayton Powell, from his chairmanship of the House Education and Labor Committee. History has set the mark in this matter. Both of Harlem's congressmen have used political acumen to break down barriers and bridge divides on behalf of Blacks.

Like Powell, Rangel too has remained representative of his roots. Both of Harlem's Black Representatives have used their Congressional clout to move urban Americans' issues to the forefront of Washington policy-making. Rangel's advocating for, and funding of, Empowerment Zone programs provides \$3.5 billion for urban and rural development. Empowerment Zone programs from Rangel are driving a Harlem economic renaissance with business development, jobs, educational and health programs, and social services. Rangel has secured increases in funding for AIDS research and treatment in Africa and the Caribbean; and money to establish a Howard University program that prepares minorities to compete for careers in American Foreign Service.

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Blacks have historically been shut out of divvying the federal government's multi-trillion-dollar budget. Blacks want Charlie Rangel to continue as "chairman of the nation's money", where he is making decisions to impact the nation's budget, economic development, Social Security and Medicare. In comparison to those grouching against him continuing his chairmanship, Blacks believe Rangel can be counted on to keep our interests on the table and remains an African American role model: A decorated Korean War veteran; Rangel is a high-school drop out who rose to become a lawyer, and represent the neighborhood of his youth. Chairman Rangel's political savvy and knowledge of the issues facing his Committee is important to retain at this time. Never again should what happened to the first Black to chair a powerful House Committee be repeated. It's not time to usurp the congressional ethics process. Call the Speaker at (202) 225-0100 and tell her that.

(William Reed – www.BlackPressInternational.com)