

Clyburn takes 'wait and see' posture after CBC meeting with President

Written by Hazel Trice Edney, NNPA Editor-in-Chief
Thursday, 18 March 2010 14:53

WASHINGTON (NNPA) – It was a pivotal moment for the Congressional Black Caucus - and the Black community - on Thursday, March 11. The CBC was face to face with President Barack Obama at the White House to talk about what is currently the foremost problematic socioeconomic issue among African Americans – joblessness.

But, when the meeting was over and the 41-member Caucus was back in their Capitol Hill offices, had America's first Black president really listened? The jury is still out according to the Black Congressman who holds the highest office on the Hill.

"We'll have to wait and see. I don't know. I know that there were some significant suggestions," said U. S. Rep. Jim Clyburn (D-SC), who holds the office of House majority whip. But, to make sure that the Caucus – in its second full meeting with the President got the message - Clyburn says he will follow up in a strong way.

"I will be sending a memorandum to his senior staffers who were in the meeting to let them know what I thought I heard and what I thought some of the suggestions were and hopefully lay a foundation for us to evaluate in a few weeks or months whether or not they're listening."

The CBC has been clear about what they want since Obama has been in office. Representing the overwhelming majority of the 12 percent of America's Black population, CBC members have written letters, had phone conferences and committee meetings with the President and his staff. Still the Black male unemployment rate is more than 18 percent while the general Black unemployment rate is 15.8 percent. This is double the White unemployment rate which is several percentage points below the national average of 9.7 percent.

According to Clyburn, the President wasn't trying to hear all of that. He just wanted to know the solutions, Clyburn recounted.

"He didn't really want to hear how bad it is and how bad off people are and how much unemployment is out there because, he said - and rightfully so – 'I know all of that. So, what are your suggestions as to how we can address all these issues' And that's what made it a great meeting," Clyburn said.

Clyburn said what Black America cannot forget is that it was President George Bush who created the crisis.

"You know that George Bush did all these tax cuts," Clyburn explained. "And so all of the income that the government was getting from wealthy people in this country, they're now not getting it. Because they're not paying the taxes, all the taxes are now dumped on middle income people in America."

Among the suggestions that the CBC made to President Obama:

- Create jobs through weatherization programs that would create jobs for landscapers, plumbers, electricians, carpenters, bricklayers and other skilled workers.
- Make sure governors are putting stimulus grant money where it should be and that it's not just sitting in state coffers.
- Allow retrofitting of homes to save energy and for people to get low interest loans through

Clyburn takes 'wait and see' posture after CBC meeting with President

Written by Hazel Trice Edney, NNPA Editor-in-Chief

Thursday, 18 March 2010 14:53

co-ops in order to pay back their monthly bills.

- Create a big summer jobs program for youth.
- Establish new tax credits.

CBC Chair Barbara Lee (D-CA) agreed with Clyburn that the meeting with Obama was successful. She was far more optimistic than her colleague.

“As chair of the Caucus, I do believe that this administration has been receptive, responsive and has listened. ... I think it was a very productive meeting and very specific,” she said.

However, she stressed that the CBC is doing its job by being the voice of Black and other disadvantaged people even at the Obama White House.

“We’re that voice. We’re the voice of conscience; not only for the African American community, but all communities,” she said. “We’ve been working most of our lives to advance an agenda that speaks really to the soul of America.”