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Council Report On Black Males Heard At Senate Hearing

Issuing a wake-up call, the Council of the Great City Schools recently released an eye-opening report indicating that young black males in America are in a state of crisis.

"The results are not anything we should be proud of as a nation," said Council Executive Director Michael Casserly of the new report in recent testimony before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Children and Families.

"On almost every indicator of well-being we looked at, our black male young people were coming up on the short end, despite the fact that many city school systems were showing progress."

The report, *A Call for Change: The Social and Educational Factors Contributing to the*

Council Report continued on page 4

A CALL FOR CHANGE:
THE SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING
TO THE OUTCOMES OF BLACK MALES IN URBAN SCHOOLS



Research Conducted by
The Council of the Great City Schools
October 2010



CBS News journalist Byron Pitts, left, moderates the Council's town hall meeting on Black Male Achievement featuring, left to right, Schott Foundation President John Jackson, Buffalo Schools Superintendent James Williams, Executive Director of Concerned Black Men George Garrow, Palm Beach Schools Black Male Task Force leader Gloria Crutchfield, Kansas City (Mo.) school board president Airick West and Tampa student Tevin Sutton.

Challenges Facing Black Males Take Center Stage at Town Hall Meeting

TAMPA--When Tampa student Tevin Sutton began his first day of high school, he walked to school with about 20 of his friends from the neighborhood. Four years later, only three or four of the senior's friends are still making that walk with him.

"The rest of them have dropped out, are in GED programs, and some are even in jail," said Sutton, a 12th-grade honors student at Middleton High School.

The experiences of Sutton and his friends took center stage at a riveting 90-minute town hall meeting in conjunction with the Council of the Great City Schools' 54th Annual Fall Conference here.

The town hall on Black Male Achievement was moderated by Byron Pitts, CBS News national chief and *60 Minutes* correspondent, who said the issue not only matters to him as a journalist but on a personal level as well.

Pitts was born and raised in Baltimore to a single mother and didn't learn to read until the age of 12.

"I am a witness to the power of education," said the award-winning journalist.

Town Hall continued on page 6

Change at the Top



Cathleen Black

Leadership at the helm of at least nine big-city school systems has undergone change or will be changing.

School districts in New York City, Chicago, Las Vegas, Washington, Atlanta, Pittsburgh, Newark, Louisville and Little Rock are experiencing transition at the top post.

Change continued on page 3

Philadelphia Superintendent Named Nation's Top Urban Educator

TAMPA—Arlene Ackerman was selected as the superintendent of The School District of Philadelphia in 2008, and under her leadership the school system launched a five-year strategic plan, *Imagine 2014*, focusing on providing significant resources to struggling schools. As a result, half of the district's students for the first time scored at the proficient or advanced level on Pennsylvania's standardized test.

For her efforts, Ackerman was recently presented with the Richard R. Green Award at the Council of the Great City Schools' 54th Annual Fall Conference here.

Sponsored by the Council, ARAMARK Education and Cambium Learning Group, the award is presented annually to the nation's top urban education leader in memory of Green, who led the Minneapolis and New York City public school systems.

Upon accepting the award, Ackerman noted that she is two generations away from grandparents who were sharecroppers and never attended school past the eighth grade. "I am a product of the public school system, and I believe in public schools," she proclaimed.



Philadelphia Schools Superintendent Arlene Ackerman, center, holds her \$10,000 oversized check and is congratulated by ARAMARK's Dennis Maple, Cambium's Carolyn Getridge, Atlanta Schools Superintendent Beverly Hall and Council Executive Michael Casserly.

She said that the progress being made in Philadelphia has demonstrated that it doesn't take a long time to make change happen if everyone is on the same page.

"If we focus on children, we can get this work done for them," said Ackerman.

As the recipient of the award, Ackerman receives a \$10,000 college scholarship, which she can present to a 2011 graduate of her choice in the Philadelphia school system or from her high school alma mater.



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In the nation's largest public school system, New York City will have a new chancellor in Cathleen Black, a publishing executive, appointed by New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg. But for her to be seated as chancellor, the state had to issue a waiver since she is not an educator.

Black, chairwoman of Hearst Magazines, will succeed Joel Klein, who resigned in early November to take a post at News Corporation. Klein was appointed in 2002 by Mayor Bloomberg after the mayor took control of the school system.

In Chicago, Terry Mazany, president and chief executive officer of the Chicago Community Trust, has been named interim CEO of the nation's third largest school system. He replaces Ron Huberman, who resigned in late November after less than two years at the helm. His announcement came in advance of Chicago Mayor Richard Daley's planned departure in May. The Chicago school system is also under mayoral control.



Dwight Jones

The country's fifth largest public school system, Clark County School District in Las Vegas, will have a new superintendent taking the reins soon. In mid-October, the school board formally approved a four-year contract for Colorado Commissioner of Education Dwight Jones to lead the school system.

He will succeed Walt Ruffles, who notified the school board last March of his intention not to renew his contract. He served as superintendent since 2006.

Another school system under mayoral control also lost its school chief. Michelle Rhee, chancellor of the District of Columbia school system, resigned in mid-October after Washington, D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty lost his bid for reelection.

The then-presumptive mayor-elect Vincent Gray named Rhee's deputy, Kaya Henderson, as interim chancellor of public schools in the nation's capital. Rhee had

led D.C. schools for more than three years after the mayor took control.

Award-Winning Leader

In Atlanta, longtime Superintendent Beverly Hall announced Nov. 20 that she would step down from the helm in June. She was the nation's superintendent of the year in 2009 and is a recipient of the country's top prize in urban school leadership, the Council of the Great City Schools' Richard Green Award.

"I will be taking on new educational challenges when my contract expires in June 2011," she said in a statement. She took the reins of Atlanta Public Schools in 1999, and has been nationally recognized for her leadership in advancing student achievement.

In an announcement that reportedly came as a surprise, Pittsburgh Public Schools Superintendent Mark Roosevelt in early October told the school board that he would resign in December after five years at the helm. He noted plans to become president of Antioch College in Ohio.

On Dec. 13, the Pittsburgh school board appointed Deputy Superintendent Linda Lane as the first African-American woman to be named permanent superintendent.

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie in early September decided not to renew Newark Superintendent Clifford Janey's three-year contract. Janey took the reins of the state-controlled school system in 2008, appointed by former New Jersey Gov. Jon Corzine.

In Louisville, Ky., the school board in late November voted 5-2 not to renew Jefferson County Public Schools Superintendent Sheldon Berman's contract. Berman reportedly plans to finish his contract, which expires at the end of June. He took the helm in 2007.

And in early December, Little Rock School District Superintendent Linda Watson announced her resignation, reportedly stepping down in mid-January. She has led Arkansas' largest school system for the past three-and-a-half years.

Urban Superintendents Staying at Helm Longer

The average tenure of current superintendents leading the nation's largest urban public school districts has increased to nearly four years, or 3.64 years, in 2010 from little more than two years, or 2.33 years, in 1999, according to a new survey by the Council of the Great City Schools.

The increase shows a 56 percent jump in superintendent tenure since 1999 that has gradually risen every year, the report -- *Urban School Superintendents: Characteristics, Tenure and Salary* -- points out.

"Urban school superintendents are staying in their districts for longer periods of time, which is reflected in the average tenure of immediate past superintendents of 5.1 years in 2010," stressed Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. "Superintendent stability contributes to academic success in an urban school system."

The new report is the Council's seventh survey in a series of *Urban Indicator* publications. Highlights of the 11-page report include the demographics of urban school superintendents, showing approximately 47 percent white, 41 percent black and 11 percent Hispanic, as well as 74 percent men and 27 percent women in 2010. Data are also given on previous work experience, accountability, salaries, benefits and bonuses.

Council Offers Scholarships

The Council of the Great City Schools last summer honored four students from school districts in Dallas, Miami, Tampa and Albuquerque, respectively, as Exxon-Mobil Bernard Harris Math and Science Scholars.

Now the Council is kicking off its second year of the program, making schol-

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Council Report continued from page 1

Outcomes of Black Males in Urban Schools, presents stark data on the differences between black and white academic and social achievement from the cradle to adulthood, describing “comprehensive challenges” facing African-American males nationwide and in the major cities.

Since the report’s Nov. 9 release at Washington’s National Press Club, it has received nationwide attention, garnering coverage from major news outlets such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *USA TODAY*, CBS and NBC News, as well as National Public Radio.

The study points out that there has been no concerted national effort to improve the education, social and employment outcomes of African-American males, who are not receiving appropriate attention from federal, state and local governments or community organizations.

“This is a national catastrophe, and it deserves coordinated national attention,” stresses the report, calling for a White House initiative.

In his Nov. 18 testimony on Capitol Hill, Casserly asked the Senate subcommittee chaired by Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) to have the report entered into the record.

Study Findings

The study focuses on six areas of the lives of African-American males. Highlights of the report’s findings show:

- In readiness to learn, black children were twice as likely to live in a household where no parent had full-time or year-round employment in 2008. And in 2007, one out of every three black children lived in poverty, compared with one out of every 10 white children.

- In black male achievement at the national level, first-time analysis of the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) reveals that on the 2009 fourth-grade reading assessment only 12 percent of black male students nationally and 11 percent of those living in large central cities

performed at or above proficient levels, compared with 38 percent of white males nationwide. In eighth grade, only 9 percent of black males across the country and 8 percent living in large cities performed at or above the proficient level in reading, compared with 33 percent of white males nationwide. Math results were similar in both grades.

Moreover, the average African-American fourth- and eighth-grade male who is not poor does no better in reading and math on NAEP than white males who are poor; and black males without disabilities do no better than white males with disabilities.

- In black male achievement in selected big-city school districts, 50 percent of fourth- and eighth-grade black males in most urban districts and nationwide scored below Basic levels.

- In college and career preparedness, black males were nearly twice as likely to drop out of high school as white males. In 2008, 9 percent of black males dropped out of high school compared with 5 percent of white males.

In addition, black male students nationally scored an average 104 points lower than white males on the SAT college-entrance examination in reading. And black students generally were about one-third as likely to meet ACT college readiness benchmarks as white students.

- In school experience, black students were less likely to participate in academic clubs, more likely to be suspended from school, and more likely to be retained in grade than their white peers.

- In postsecondary experience, the 2010 unemployment rate among black males ages 20 and over (17.3 percent) was twice as high as the unemployment rate among



Council Executive Michael Casserly testifies before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Children and Families about the Council’s report on black males.
Photo Credit: U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

white males of the same age (8.6 percent). In 2008, black males ages 18 and over accounted for 5 percent of the college population, while black males accounted for 36 percent of the nation’s prison population.

Although the report presents dismal data, it also profiles black males who are succeeding in urban public schools and are on the path to success in their chosen careers.

Plan of Action

In a plan of action at the conclusion of the report, the Council calls for a White House conference on the issues to help lay out a comprehensive plan of action that leaders at all levels can pursue. The organization also aims to marshal the help of school district, state, national and university leaders, as well as civic and faith-based leaders and governmental officials to address black-male issues.

Casserly told the Senate subcommittee on children and families, “Congress may not be able to solve all the complicated issues surrounding this situation, but it is hard to believe that additional focus on this issue would not pay enormous dividends....

“The great civil rights battles that so many on this panel fought were not fought so our kids could have access to mediocrity; they were fought over access to excellence and the resources to pay for it.” he stressed, noting that America squanders so much of its human talent.

The report can be read at: <http://www.cgcs.org/publications/achievement.aspx>

Actor and Journalists Address Big-City School Leaders

TAMPA—Hill Harper is an actor, a best-selling author of three books and a graduate of Brown and Harvard universities as well as a graduate of a public high school in Sacramento, Calif.

Harper knows he would not be where he is today without the education he received, but sometimes wonders how he managed to attend two Ivy League institutions.

“No one at the high school I went to attended an Ivy League college,” he said. He noted that the school had three counselors for 3,500 students and while there were many committed individuals at the school who wanted him to succeed, they didn’t have the tools.

“That’s why I’m so committed to young people,” Harper told more than 800 big-city school superintendents, board members, administrators and deans of colleges of education assembled in Tampa for the Council of the Great City Schools’ 54th Annual Fall Conference.

The actor said he interacts with thousands of young people across the country, and as a result decided to write a motivational book for youth. However, his book was declined by several publishers with one telling him that it would not make financial sense to publish a book for a population that doesn’t read.

“I guarantee you if I write a book they are interested in they will read it,” Harper told the publisher. Eventually, he found a publisher and his first book, *Letters to a Young Brother*, went to the top of the *New York Times* best-seller list.

He followed it with *Letters to a Young Sister* because “I want young women to look in the mirror and say they are exceptional.”

Harper noted that because young people tend to model adults behavior, “we as adults have to take a look in the mirror at ourselves.”

He urged urban educators to have courage and take the risks that need to be taken to improve the nation’s educational system.

Harper recalled meeting a principal in Compton, Calif., who knocked on every door in the neighborhood and pushed par-



Hill Harper

ents to be active in her school.

“She has seen results that are amazing in this small little bubble in Compton,” said Harper, just because she had the heart to knock on people’s doors.

He then read aloud a letter from a 16-year-old male named Brian who was in jail and wrote to Harper about how much he loved his book. “Many boys don’t have role models, but you are my role model,” Brian wrote.

The author said that he is tired of receiving letters from the Brians of the world and that society has failed this young man.

“It’s letters like this and all the young people I meet that give me the passion and courage to battle on the front lines,” said Harper. “Let’s start doing whatever it takes by any means necessary to change our system. The Brians of our cities deserve better.”

Breakthroughs in Politics

Conferees also heard from Gwen Ifill, the senior correspondent with *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*.

Ifill, who moderated the nation’s 2008 vice presidential debate, became interested in politics when Shirley Chisholm became the first woman and African American to run for president in 1972.

And she was inspired four years later when Barbara Jordan became the first woman and the first African American to give the keynote speech at the Democratic national convention.

“Seeing people who looked like me

step up taught me the power of change,” said Ifill.

Years later, she watched another commanding presence on the stage of the Democratic national convention in 2004 when Barack Obama gave the keynote speech.

That moment eventually led to her writing her best-selling book, *The Breakthrough: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama*.

According to Ifill, the book is about breakthroughs and people breaking through city halls, statehouses and Congress.



Gwen Ifill

“They are smart, motivated and engaged and have realized that going along to get along is not the formula for success, and goals that seemed out of reach were worth reaching for anyway,” said Ifill.

The moderator of *Washington Week* on PBS urged conferees to speak up about the issues they are passionate about. “That’s what I did when I defended the women of Rutgers,” said Ifill, referring to the incident when radio host Don Imus insulted the Rutgers University women’s basketball team.

During a question-and-answer session, Ifill was asked for her opinion about the 24-hour news cycle being driven by cable TV.

She said there has to be room for other options such as *The NewsHour*.

“College students will tell me they only watch Jon Stewart [host of *The Daily Show* on Comedy Central],” said Ifill. “I then ask them do you know who Jon Stewart watches? He watches me.”

Actor, Journalists, continued on page 7

Town Hall *continued from page 1*

"I'm mindful of what can happen when good people give of themselves to tell a young black boy that despite where you are right now, you can make it."

In addition to Sutton, the panel also featured John Jackson, president of the Schott Foundation; James Williams, superintendent of Buffalo Public Schools; George Garrow, the national executive director of Concerned Black Men; Gloria Crutchfield, the Palm Beach Schools Black Male Task Force leader; and Airick West, president of the Kansas City (Mo.) School Board.

How bad is the problem facing young black males? Pitts asked the panelists.

Kansas City's West said that the unemployment rate for black men in his community is double the rate of everyone else and college is not seen as an option for many black youths.

"I live in a neighborhood where every single week we are losing at least one of our black males [to violence]," said West.

According to Jackson, only 47 percent of black males graduating from high school a year presents a national problem. "You can't separate a 28 percent graduation rate in New York City for black males with the fact that 50 percent of black males in New York City are unemployed," he says.

He noted that there is a link between education and the economy, and unemployed black males do not pay into the nation's tax system, social security or health system.

"Our economy can't grow under those constraints," Jackson stressed.

Pitts asked the panelists if they could provide a sense of where things went wrong.

"Our public education system was not geared to educate all children," said Williams. "Blacks were not in the equation."

He believes that all of society's ills were placed at the doorstep of public education, which was ill equipped to handle all of children's social, emotional and academic needs.

"It's a historical problem and we are just feeling the result of many years of neglect," Superintendent Williams emphasized.

Jackson said that after the passage of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Edu-



Left to right, Moderator Byron Pitts takes a question from the audience as Schott Foundation President John Jackson, Buffalo Schools Superintendent James Williams and Concerned Black Men Executive Director George Garrow look on.

cation Act, the achievement gap between blacks and whites started to close.

"Then in the early '80s, there was a shift in how we approached civil rights and the gap opened and it has been opened ever since," said Jackson.

Garrow, who is a lawyer, cited how the '80s crack epidemic in urban areas led to mandatory minimum sentences and incarceration rates skyrocketed for black males.

"Is too much made of politics and not enough made of parental and community responsibility?" Pitts asked the panelists.

West believes that parenting was never designed to be an isolated practice, but a communal one where everyone took part in caring for young people.

To prove his point, he asked audience members to stand up and identify the place in their community that had the highest needs. He then told them to sit down if they did not live in that community. Only a few people were left standing.

"We don't have a failure to parent that is as nearly as strong as our failure to be a community," declared West.

According to Crutchfield, one cannot undereducate anyone and expect to have great results. "If you put students into less than standard curriculum experiences, you are going to get less than stellar students and young people who are not going to graduate."

Sutton, who is an honor student as well as captain of his football team, was asked to explain why he is so successful in school.

He recalled that in middle school he had a teacher who encouraged him to do

well and also a mother who supported him academically.

"What can educators do to solve the problem?" Pitts asked.

Jackson listed three things: guarantee every child access to early education, develop a recovery system for students who are behind and ensure students have a rigorous college preparatory curriculum.

"Every child doesn't have to go to college," said Jackson, "but every child, when they get to 12th grade, should have the opportunity to make that choice."

Williams believes that school districts should require mandatory preschool and kindergarten, a longer school day and develop rigorous courses for all students.

Garrow told big-city educators that they must develop specific interventions for young black males.

Crutchfield said the nation must respect the teaching profession. "We must prepare teachers the way they need to be prepared and pay them what they deserve to be paid."



Student Tevin Sutton is a scholar-athlete.

West advocates that citizens personally invest in the lives of students by becoming mentors and tutors and school districts target resources geographically to the most underserved areas and invest in early childhood education.

And Sutton believes that schools should create more dropout prevention programs.

At the end of the town hall, Pitts invited Andrés Alonso, the chief executive officer of Baltimore City Public Schools, to share what is working in his district. Alonso noted that in 2007, 1,400 black males dropped out of the school system compared to 500 in 2010.

Town Hall *continued on page 7*

Four Superintendents Extend Their Tenures



Carol Comeau

Carol Comeau began her career in Alaska's Anchorage School District in 1974 as a noon duty attendant and teacher aide and has held several positions in the district since then, culminating with being named superintendent in 2000.

The school board recently praised her strong leadership by extending her contract through June 2013. In a news statement, the board noted that over the past year she has implemented a new student-information system, administered an array of stimulus-funded projects and developed a new value-based budgeting process.

Town Hall *continued from page 6*

He credits the district's success to going door-to-door identifying dropouts, the board closing schools that functioned as dropout factories, and bringing churches and community organizations to the table.

Alonso said that while he has intensely focused on the issue, the entire community must participate in order for the effort to be successful.

"If the entire community doesn't embrace a challenge, there is too much change in leadership in the superintendency for it to be sustainable," said Alonso.

"If half of our kids are not graduating, what does that say about us?"

The town hall meeting can be viewed in its entirety at: <http://vimeo.com/17343909>.



Andrés Alonso shares progress.

Comeau, a former chair of the Council of the Great City Schools, is also one of the longest-serving urban school superintendents in the nation.



Melody Johnson

Also receiving a contract extension was Melody Johnson, the superintendent of Texas' Fort Worth Independent School District since 2006. The school board extended Johnson's contract until 2013.

During Johnson's tenure, the school system opened its first single-gender school, the achievement gap has narrowed and the district's largest bond package was approved.



Carole Smith

In an effort to prepare students for college or career, Oregon's Portland Public Schools developed a framework to track student achievement in grades K-12.

The set of student achievement measures was developed under the leadership of Portland Superintendent Carole Smith, and is one of the reasons the school board recently decided to extend her contract through June 2013.

Smith has served as the superintendent since 2007.



Jean-Claude Brizard

And in Rochester, N.Y., the school board recently re-appointed Superintendent Jean-Claude Brizard, entering into a new agreement with him that runs through 2014. He began leading the school district in 2008.

Brizard is credited with improvements in student performance and more students graduating high school in four years.

"I am very pleased to be able to continue the reform work that is underway..." said Brizard.

Actor, Journalists, *continued from page 5*



John Quiñones

The Power of Journalism

Also addressing the conference was John Quiñones, co-anchor of the ABC News show *Primetime Live*.

He recalled a story he did in Colombia, South America, about homeless children who lived in the sewer system. The night after the story aired millions in donations came in and the children were pulled out of the sewer.

"I'm able to shine the lights of journalism on the darkest corners of the world," said Quiñones

The Emmy-award winner, who spoke no English until he went to school, recalls that in junior high he was put on a vocational track.

But Quiñones was determined to "beat the odds" and transferred to a better school, where he was encouraged to pursue a career in journalism. He also participated in the Upward Bound program, which changed his life.

"They said to me you can go to college," said Quiñones, who holds a bachelor's and master's degree.

In addition to *Primetime Live*, Quiñones hosts the hidden camera series, *What Would You Do?* and played a videotape from an episode about a woman who came to the aid of a man lying on a street pretending to be homeless.

After the episode aired, money was collected to help the woman.

"Linda Hamilton was partially paralyzed and homeless, but she did it because her heart told her it was the right thing to do," said Quiñones. "So the next time you see something amiss, step in."

Pictorial of 54th Annual Fall Conference



Journalist Gwen Ifill, far right, poses with the Council's leadership, left to right, Past Chair Carol Johnson, Chair-elect Beverly Hall, and Chair Dilafruz Williams.



Caddo Parish (Shreveport, La.) Schools Superintendent Gerald Dawkins shares his views at a session.



Hillsborough County (Tampa) Schools Superintendent MaryEllen Elia welcomes conferees to the 54th Annual Fall Conference.



Albuquerque Schools Superintendent Winston Brooks and Cleveland Schools Superintendent Eugene Sanders present information at a session on implementing the new common core standards.



Then-District of Columbia Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee participates in a session on urban teacher contracts.

Photos by Clarence Tabb Jr.



Oakland Schools Superintendent Anthony Smith makes a point at a conference session as Oakland board member Jody London looks on.



Miami Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalho attends a conference session.



Memphis school board member Stephanie Gatewood participates in a session.



Sacramento Schools Superintendent Jonathan Raymond facilitates a conference session.

Newark Schools, State University Win Urban Impact Award

TAMPA—The Council of the Great City Colleges of Education, an affiliate group of deans working with big-city school leaders, presented the second annual Dr. Shirley S. Schwartz Urban Education Impact Award to Montclair State University and Newark Public Schools for their Partnership for Instructional Excellence and Quality program, designed to support, develop and maintain educators at every stage of their development.

The award honors an outstanding partnership between a university and an urban school district and is named in honor of the Council's director of special projects who died in March 2009. A student from Newark Public Schools, who attends or will be attending Montclair State University, will receive a \$2,000 two-year scholarship.

Council Scholarships, continued from page 3

arships available to African American and Hispanic students pursuing college degrees and careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Named for the first African American to walk in space, former NASA astronaut Bernard Harris, a physician and businessman, launched the math and science scholarships to help satisfy the need for more STEM college graduates in the nation, especially among minority students.

Like the inaugural year, four \$5,000 scholarships for two males and two females each will be awarded to two African American and two Hispanic graduating seniors attending schools in the 65 school districts represented by the Council.

The 2011 scholarship application is available on the Council's web site at <http://www.cgcs.org/Awards/ExxonMobil2011.pdf>

Deficit Dialogue

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

The recent elections, the Tea Party movement, and the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility all converge on controlling the federal deficit. Yet, much of the action so far during the lame-duck session of the 111th Congress would add to the national debt. The high level negotiations between Congressional leaders and the White House over the Bush-era tax rates and the estate tax, the Obama tax cuts of 2009, the extended unemployment insurance benefits, and the FY11 appropriations all boost the national debt.



The irony of having a political debate about lowering the deficit while having members vote to do the opposite is more than even the most cynical Washington-watchers can bear. The proposal to reduce the deficit by \$700 billion over 10 years by not renewing the current top-tier tax rates and other big-ticket tax breaks is not likely to survive the political need to not raise taxes on anyone -- even the most affluent. Reports of a tentative agreement between the White House and selected members of Congress would cost nearly \$900 billion primarily over the next two years, including nearly \$130 billion for the expiring top tax breaks and the estate tax; \$112 billion for a 2 percent payroll tax cut for everyone, \$56 billion for extended unemployment insurance; \$44 billion in tax credits for the poor, children, and higher education coursework; \$112 billion for business investments; and \$380 billion to extend the middle class and lower income tax breaks and adjust the alternative minimum tax. Believe it or not, the pending agreement exceeds the cost of the 2009 Stimulus legislation or the 2008 bank bailout--and none of it is paid for. If one thought that the public's concern about the deficit was Congress's paramount focus, then the public should think again, for there are higher political priorities now at play.

Outside the Capitol beltway, such stark differences between rhetoric and reality appear simply nonsensical. But,

many examples of such behavior can be found even in the education arena. There is widespread concern that the most critical education programs are inadequately funded, but new programs are being created in a way that will compete with the limited resources that do exist. In addition, there has been an emphasis on research-based or evidence-based programs over the last 10 years, yet marginally-effective approaches and unproven strategies continue to find their way into the national education agenda. And, with the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) being roundly criticized as punitive, even harsher actions have been imposed under the Stimulus "reform" programs. Expecting Washington to be consistent is often a fool's errand.

In any case, there appear to be higher priorities for both the political right and left than deficit reduction, despite all the noise about the nation's debt. The Council of the Great City Schools does not usually take positions on such mega-tax policies now under congressional consideration. But, the spasm of new tax and other expenditures that the proposed tax deal represents will do nothing but create an atmosphere where members of Congress will later claim that they can't increase education investments because all the money is gone. And one need look no further than the proposed education freezes in the Continuing Resolution (H.R. 3082) now pending in Congress for evidence to support that claim.

It is notable that the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility has emphasized the need for America to invest in economic growth and competitiveness, including education, infrastructure, and research. Yet, the Commission's main charge to the White House and Congress is to "put up or shut up" on the national deficit and debt. In the short run, it doesn't look like we will see either one.

Ballot Measures Pass in Three Urban Districts

Three urban school districts received a vote of confidence from citizens at the ballot box.

Voters in Fresno, Calif., passed the \$280-million Measure Q school bond that

will provide funds to upgrade and improve all district schools

And St. Louis voters passed a bond issue that will provide \$155 million for school building upgrades.

Also receiving good news was Seattle Public Schools, when voters approved a three-year \$48.2-million operations levy to provide funds for district programs, such as full-day kindergarten.

First Lady Inspires Anti-Obesity Programs In Urban Schools

Students at Maple Avenue School in Newark, N.J., grow their own vegetables, and healthy nutrition and exercise have been introduced into the science and math curriculum. As a result, the school was the site of a recent visit by First Lady Michelle Obama for the launch of her *Let's Move!* campaign in a partnership with the City of Newark and its school system.

The *Let's Move!* anti-obesity campaign was launched nationwide last February to improve children's health by empowering parents, providing healthy food in schools, improving access to healthy foods and increasing physical activity.

During her visit, the first lady talked with students about their activities.

Also receiving a recent visit from Obama was Miami's Riverside Elementary School. The first lady launched the *Let's Move!* salad bar initiative, which will place salad bars in 6,000 schools across the nation. Riverside Elementary received the first salad bar of the campaign.



First Lady Michelle Obama talks with students at Miami's Riverside Elementary during her visit to the school to launch the *Let's Move!* initiative. Photo Credit: Miami-Dade County Public Schools

And inspired by the *Let's Move!* campaign, Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla., is working with nationally renowned chefs in a pilot program to make cafeteria food healthier and taste better.

The chefs are working with food service managers at 15 schools to design appealing menu choices, training manuals and nutrition education programs.

The new food selections, program and training courses will be offered this January.

K.C. Superintendent Named One of Top Public Officials of 2010



John Covington

When John Covington became superintendent of the Kansas City Missouri School District in 2009, he revamped the school system from the ground up. In doing so, *Governing Magazine* recently named him one of its

eight 2010 Public Officials of the Year.

In his first year as superintendent, Covington closed almost half of the district's 61 schools and cut the workforce by a third.

All curricula were rewritten and 7th and 8th grades were moved to the high schools. Also, a standards-based approach is now used at elementary schools, which eliminates letter grades and grade levels and groups children by learning abilities.

"[We have to] move with all deliberate speed and continue to make those decisions that we know are going to be in the best interest of children," said Covington. "Why wait?"

Council Districts Receive Grants For Magnet Schools

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools will open a new magnet school next year that will provide students training and real-world experience in the entertainment industry and music business.

The school is one of six new magnet schools the district will open, as a result of a \$4-million Magnet School grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The grants, which were awarded to 36 school districts in 15 states, will provide funding

Magnet Schools, continued on page 12



Barry Manilow Supports Las Vegas School District

Legendary singer and songwriter Barry Manilow presents tens of thousands of dollars of musical instruments to 15 Clark County School District middle and high schools at a recent event in the Las Vegas-based school system. "The Las Vegas community has been so kind to me; it is a pleasure to be bringing instruments to these kids," he said. "With public school music programs so severely depleted, it's more important than ever to do what we can to keep the music alive." (Photo by Denise Truscello)



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Former Council Official Dies



Milton Bins

Milton Bins, deputy executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools from 1985 to 1992, died Oct. 10 at his home in Leesburg, Fla., at age 75.

Mr. Bins joined the Council in 1974, serving as a senior associate for programs and policy before assuming the deputy executive director post. When he departed the Council in 1992, he became an education consultant until he retired in 2000.

“Milton Bins provided critical leadership at the Council in the 1970s and 1980s when the organization was undergoing substantial change,” says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. “All who knew him valued his input and commitment, and will miss his passion and good humor.”

Mining Accident in Chile Reminded St. Paul Superintendent of Home

The story of 33 Chilean miners who were trapped underground for 69 days captured the attention of people around the world, including students in the Spanish International Baccalaureate program at Highland Park Senior High School in St. Paul, Minn.

The students wrote letters of encouragement to the miners and their families and presented the letters to St. Paul Schools Superintendent Valeria Silva, who sent the

letters to Chile’s ambassador to the United States to deliver to the families.

The Chilean miners held a special interest to Silva, who grew up in a mining community in Chile. She arrived in the United States 25 years ago and started her career with the district as a teacher, rising to the position of superintendent last January.



St. Paul Superintendent Valeria Silva, center, accepts the letters students wrote to the Chilean miners and their families.

Magnet Schools, *continued from page 11*

to districts for up to three years.

Big-city school districts also receiving grants were: Los Angeles Unified School District (\$3.6 million); San Diego Unified School District (\$2.6 million); Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville, Fla., (\$4 million); Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa, Fla., (\$3.9 million); Broward County Public Schools (\$3.1 million); Wichita Public Schools (\$1 million); Houston Independent School District (\$3.7 million); and New York City (\$10.9 million).