

OPINION

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Wyden Lets Down Black Businesses

Senator must take a leadership role

BY JAMES L. POSEY



A few weeks ago at the invite of a prominent Portland black business, I attended a meeting to discuss issues facing black businesses with Sen. Ron Wyden.

I have been to a number of Senator Wyden's meetings over the last 20 years. In every meeting I hoped to make the point that the black community needed special help in order to turn around decades of debilitating economic conditions. I always thought Senator

Senator Wyden knows that the black community has little capacity to maintain and sustain wealth. He already knows our black businesses are decimated. And I believe he understands that unless black communities can somehow generate commerce sufficient to employ many of their own people, blacks will continue on the path to a permanent underclass.

I am particularly concerned about his patronizing approach to black community leaders and his willingness to ignore the obvious. For example, he came

to formulate a plan to deal comprehensively with the problem of black contractor and worker exclusion on federal contracts in Oregon. (See my open letter to him in the May 31, 2006 Portland Observer) But it seems that Senator Wyden prefers to measure success by a few token contracts awarded primarily to black and Asian "front" companies in 2009.

At this meeting he continued to resist taking a com-

prehensive approach, but instead tried to convince those present that he would look at individual issues and concerns and report back to the group. Senator Wyden clearly knows that this approach is unlikely to bring about any real results. He knows that issues like access to capital, bonding, low bidding methods, size of contracts, internal staff resistance, and outright discrimination among other barriers, are all interrelated

and must be addressed collectively.

It appears as if Senator Wyden is depending on black leaders to accept his half hearted approach, and just be glad he agreed to meet with them. There is a sense that Senator Wyden will work on behalf of one or two businesses in attendance for political expedience, but no sense that he will become accountable for initiating structural changes benefiting the community of black businesses.

The black community can

only hope that more of us will stand up to this politically convenient charade. The black community must demand that Senator Wyden withhold Oregon Department of Transportation funding until there is a responsible, comprehensive plan to assure that black businesses will receive an equitable number of federal contracts.

James L. Posey is a Portland business owner and former president of the Oregon chapter of the National Association of Minority Contractors.

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Wyden, known in some circles as a progressive, was also a decent person with a strong moral conscious. To me, he was the black community's best hope in the congressional delegation to seriously address conditions that put blacks at the bottom of every economic scale.

In this latest meeting, it was as if a light came on and I recognized how naïve I have been all these years. I finally realized that Senator Wyden has no intention of seriously addressing these issues that clearly cripple the black community.

to the meeting to tout a waiver process his office took some credit for which would allow the Oregon Department of Transportation to set specific goals for African Americans on federal highway projects. These are federal projects on which black contractors got zero contracts and dollars for the last 10 years.

This has been a festering problem. Senator Wyden has known about for as many years but has never taken any effective, definitive action to resolve. Repeatedly he has been asked to take a leadership role in convening other local lead-



Why Obama is Right on Health Care

Setting the record straight

BY MARC H. MORIAL



Before a joint session of Congress, President Obama made his most detailed and impassioned case to date in support of legislation to fix our broken health care system and at long last make health insurance affordable and accessible to every American.

In summary, the president's plan will provide more security and stability to those who have health insurance. It will provide insurance to those who don't. And it will lower the cost of health care for families, businesses and our government.

If you have health insurance, the president's plan will prevent insurance companies from denying you coverage due to a pre-existing condition. It will also put a cap on out of pocket expenses so people don't go broke when they get sick. It will ensure that all Americans have access to free preventive services like mammograms, flu shots and diabetes tests to

improve health and save money. And it protects Medicare and closes the so-called prescription drug "donut hole" which has resulted in an average of \$4,080 in out of pocket costs for beneficiaries who reach a coverage limit and who lack another source of insurance.

If you are one of the tens of millions of Americans who

America stands alone among industrialized nations in not affording its citizens comprehensive health insurance.

don't have health insurance, half of whom are people of color, the president's plan creates a new insurance marketplace - the Exchange - that allows people without health insurance and small businesses to compare plans and buy insurance at competitive prices. It provides new tax credits to help individuals buy insurance and to help small

businesses cover their employees. It offers new low-cost coverage through a national "high-risk" pool to protect people with pre-existing conditions from financial ruin until the new Exchange is created. And it offers a public health insurance option to provide the uninsured who can't afford coverage with a real choice.

The president also sought

to dispel a number of myths, lies and distortions that have fueled so much misinformation and confusion about his plan. The National Urban League shares his outrage at the deliberate attempts to defeat reform through the spreading of outright falsehoods. That is why on the morning of the president's speech, I joined members of

the Congressional Black Caucus and NAACP president, Ben Jealous in a Capitol Hill press conference to help set the record straight.

We made it clear, as the president did later in the evening, that the plan would not create so-called "death panels" with the power to kill off senior citizens; coverage will not be extended to illegal immigrants; and no federal dollars will be used to fund abortions.

Finally the public option, which we strongly support, is not a "government takeover" as some have irresponsibly claimed. It would be an essential option to hold down costs. It simply increases competition. That is the very essence of capitalism.

America stands alone among industrialized nations in not affording its citizens comprehensive health insurance. We have been fighting this battle for over a century. Now is the time to get the job done.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

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Working for the Common Good

Let's get unified

BY BISHOP H. L. HODGE



It is easy to blow smoke regarding the state of affairs for the so-called leadership of people of color in the greater Portland area.

A cursory glance and half-hearted attendance will reveal a litany of "jaw flappers; who attempt to besmirch or deny the efforts of organizations such as the NAACP as opposed to joining in. The truth is that there are an inordinate number of persons who verbalize a desire to make a difference in the non-existent "Black Community."

I have found that the Black Community has no unified voice; however, many are like frogs in a pond, each croaking their own solo. I contend that it is time to stop seeking to be king and work together for the common good by developing a unified kingdom mentality.

One of the goals of Portland NAACP branch is to establish a voice for "people of color."

To address this concern, the Portland NAACP will call for a Summit to speak to the real issues affecting the Portland community.

It is time to unify as a people

and to stop pretense. When this occurs, we will take note of the leadership in attendance and inform the community of the outcome. We must take a stand on issues, such as racial profiling, quality of education in our schools, housing discrimination, health care availability, and unemployment.

We must overcome the "Ostrich Syndrome" and get our heads out of the sand or whatever place they are buried.

Information about the summit will be provided in a timely manner for all leaders and community representatives to attend.

Bishop H. L. Hodge is president of the Portland NAACP.

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