

New Congressional Black Caucus Created to Champion HBCUs

By Jazelle Hunt
NNPA Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON – A little help may be on the way for historically Black colleges and universities struggling against falling financial support and an increasingly skeptical public.

The Bipartisan Congressional HBCU Caucus was launched in May, with Congressional members Representatives Alma Adams (D-N.C.) and Bradley Byrne (R-Ala.) at the helm. Its 45 members and counting are charged with safeguarding the interests of historically Black colleges and universities, supporting students and graduates; creating a national dialogue; and educating other members of Congress on the value of these institutions.

“This bipartisan HBCU Caucus is bringing together champions for HBCUs, so that we can make an even big-

“We talk about access and affordability. You don’t have access if you don’t have the check to go with it

ger impact to ensure their needs are heard in every aspect of policy making and across party lines,” said Rep. Adams, creator and co-chair of the caucus, alumna of North Carolina A&T State University, and former administrator at her alma mater and Bennett College, both in Greensboro, N.C.

“[HBCUs] do what no other schools do for students like me, a poor Black girl

from Newark, New Jersey who came to North Carolina – wasn’t fully prepared – but yet North Carolina took me in, got me prepared, and I was able to do what I’m doing right now.”

The caucus comes at a time when HBCUs are facing a barrage of challenges. In 2011, Congress put more funding toward need-based Pell grants, but lowered the cap to 12 semesters (or six school years) instead of the previous 18. Non-traditional students, such as parents, veterans, and people beyond their early 20s, as well as low-income students who work part-time, often have complicated circumstances that make it difficult to go straight through four years of school full time. For such students, it can take several years to earn a degree.

“Many of our young people really do have to work...to pay for education. So a large majority of students we serve at

our HBCUs in particular are on financial aid – several types of financial aid,” said Rep. Adams at a launch event for the Caucus. “We talk about access and affordability. You don’t have access if you don’t have the check to go with it.”

The same year, federal parent PLUS loan requirements were changed in an effort to keep financially burdened families from taking on more debt. The changes went into effect almost immediately, and thousands of previously approved parents were abrupt-



Representative Alma Adams (D-N.C.), shown here, partnered with Bradley Byrne (R-Ala.) to launch the Bipartisan Congressional HBCU Caucus.

ly denied for a renewal. As a result thousands of students – largely Black, low-income, and first-generation – were forced to pause or delay their college educations. According to data from the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, enrollment at HBCUs fell 3.4 percent for fall 2012. The number of students with PLUS loans fell 46 percent, and HBCUs saw a 36 percent decrease in the awarded dollar amounts.

That meant fewer students able to continue college, and less revenue for the schools.

The Obama administration has corrected this oversight, but the damage has been done.

“Our parents spend much more money on educating their children than

White families do. That’s just a fact, if you look at percentage of income,” said caucus member Rep. James E. Clyburn (D-SC) at the same event. “We’re talking about good students who need an opportunity, who need to go into an environment that’s nurturing. So we are going to have to fight for these HBCUs.”

There is also less aid available for institutions. According to a 2014 report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, state schools now rely on students fees and tuition for 48 percent of their revenues, compared to 24 percent in 1988.

Of the nation’s 105 HBCUs, nearly half are state schools. Meanwhile, Texas, North Carolina, South Carolina, West Virginia, Virginia, Arkansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Florida, and Delaware were all caught withholding state funds specifically from their HBCUs.

The Department of Education shells out roughly \$300 million for Black schools each year. But this funding, like all federal money, can change without warning from year to year.

Howard University, for example, is a private school, but has historically had its own line in the budget that serves as a critical source of funding.

In 2012, this funding was cut by more than \$12 million, and has remained at that amount each year since.

The Obama administration has attempted to work around the financial squeeze by awarding of grants and contracts to HBCUs through the White House Initiative on HBCUs, but some reports state that the amount of these awards is also on the decline.

Celebrate DIVERSITY

NW Natural is a proud supporter of diverse cultures, as they play a vital role in the unique and multicultural landscape of the communities we serve.

At NW Natural we support an environment for our employees that create opportunities, encourage respect and trust and values diversity. Such an environment contributes to the success of the organization and is essential to the service we provide to our customers.

Visit nwnatural.com to learn about current employment opportunities. NW Natural is an Equal Employment Opportunity employer and maintains a Drug-Free workplace.

