

Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The CBC Celebrates History with 49 Members in the 115th Congress

By **Freddie Allen** (Managing Editor/NNPA Newswire)

During the Ceremonial Swearing-In event a few blocks from The White House, the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Inc., honored Rep. Cedric L. Richmond (D-La.), the new chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and members of the CBC that will serve during the 115th Congress.

A. Shuanise Washington, the president and CEO of the CBCF, said that 115th Congress will have the largest CBC in history with 49 members.

“While the CBC grows in numbers, there remains a lack of diversity and inclusion when it comes to senior staff placement in senate and congressional offices,” said Washington. “The CBCF is committed to doing its part to change the landscape of Capitol Hill and we’re doing so with one of our newest initiatives: Emerge 535.”

Launched in 2013, the Emerge 535 program will enable the CBCF to

expand opportunities for young people of color by providing 535 scholarships and fellowships to work on Capitol Hill.

During her comments at the CBC ceremony, House Minority leader Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) blasted Republican lawmakers for blocking President Barack Obama’s last Supreme Court justice nominee and efforts to pass an updated Voting Rights Act (VRA).

Pelosi also noted the irony in the fact that some of the same Republicans, who attended the opening of the National Museum of African American History and Culture and the fiftieth anniversary of “Bloody Sunday” in Selma, Ala., refused to work with Democrats on Capitol Hill to restore the protections of the VRA.

“It’s not about Democrats, it’s not about Republicans, it’s about America,” said Pelosi. “The greatness of America is affected by how [Republicans] have rejected the ability of our president to appoint a [Supreme Court] justice,

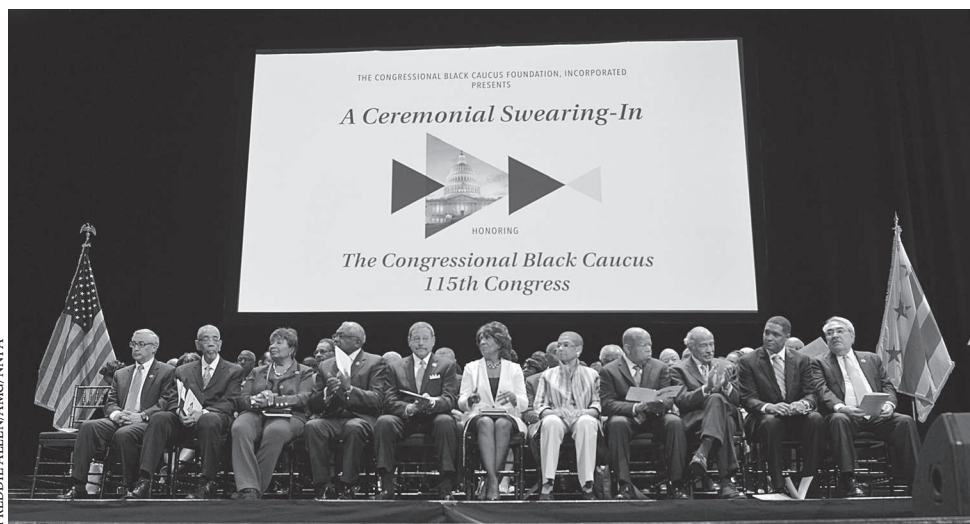
how they have rejected our calls for correcting the injustice of the Supreme Court decision [in *Shelby v. Holder*]. It’s all about justice.”

Pelosi called the CBC the “conscience of the Congress and indeed of the country,” and she added that it was exciting to see that some of the newest members of the CBC were representing districts who had never elected a Black lawmaker to serve in the U.S. Congress.

The newest members of the CBC are: Senator Kamala Harris, who is California’s first African American senator; Rep. Val Demings (D-Fla.); Rep. Lisa Blunt-Rochester (D-Del.), the first African American woman to serve in Congress from Delaware; Rep. Anthony Brown (D-Md.); Rep. Dwight Evans (D-Pa.) and Rep. Donald McEachin (D-Va.).

After the ceremonial oath of office was performed, outgoing Chairman G.K. Butterfield (D-N.C.) said that 2016 is now in our rearview mirror.

“We find ourselves fac-



Members of the Congressional Black Caucus participate in the Ceremonial Swearing-In event for the 115th Congress at The Warner Theatre in Washington, D.C.

ing a difficult, political and legislative environment, unlike any that we have ever seen before, but I promise you that the CBC will rise to the occasion and we will meet these new challenges,” said Butterfield. “The consequences are too enormous for us to be indecisive and to allow conservative forces and forces of the alt-right to defend our nation. We will be strategic and we will be unified in our work.”

While many of the CBC members are “baby boomers,” Butterfield

said that there is no question that Richmond, who is a part of Generation X, is well-suited and well-prepared to lead the CBC in confronting these new challenges.

During his remarks at the ceremonial swearing-in event, Richmond said that CBC members represent 78 million Americans, 24 percent of the population and 17 million Blacks representing 41 percent of the African American population in this country.

“There are many Americans, especially Black Americans, who can’t

understand how we got here today, coming off eight years of hope, pride and inspiration,” said Richmond. “They are fearful of the current state of division, hate and pettiness.”

Richmond continued: “Many of our young people are frustrated with the fact that they seem to be fighting the same causes that Dr. King and Reverend Jackson and John Lewis and many others galvanized the country behind during the Civil Rights Movement; and that’s jobs justice and common humanity.”

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