

THE Skanner

Challenging People to Shape
a Better Future Now

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The Skanner
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MLK
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January 15
2018

NEW LOCATION!

Opinion

Prohibitions and Bans: Serious, Unintended Consequences

Rapidly shifting U.S. demographics are fueling the urgency of civil rights leaders, social scientists, policy makers, and public health professionals to focus their attention on policies designed to close the gap in racial and ethnic health disparities and ensure justice and equity in communities of color. In the interest of social justice, the good intent of policies developed and endorsed by dedicated public servants requires, however, a thorough and thoughtful consideration of the impact of unintended consequences of those policies in communities of color across the nation.

While many Black Americans have made significant advances in professional and educational achievement, heightened political and social status, far too many are still burdened with poverty, few employment and educational opportunities and poor health. Compounding this situation is the tense relationship between police and the Black community because of use of excessive force, profiling, over incarceration, and selective prosecution. It has also been well documented that Black people are sicker, experience bias and discrimination in the healthcare system and die sooner than other groups in American society. It stands to reason why con-



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Rev. Al Sharpton
National
Action
Network

scientious policymakers and public health professionals are zealous in their efforts to do whatever it takes to improve the safety, quality of life and health in Black communities — even if it means making selected harmful products unavailable by imposing bans and prohibitions.

“Black people are sicker, experience bias and discrimination in the healthcare system and die sooner than other groups

Prohibitions and bans are official public proclamations and legislative orders forbidding, limiting, restricting and making illegal a behavior or forbidding, limiting, restricting and making illegal the use, manufacture or selling of a product. In 1920, Congress ratified the 18th Amendment to the Constitution prohibiting the manufacture, transportation and sale of liquor.

The good intentions of those who aggressively supported the prohibition on alcohol were to reduce access to alcohol as a way of reducing

drunkenness, the crime and accidents caused by drunkenness and to reduce the death, illness and disease associated with the use and abuse of alcohol.

The national prohibition of alcohol (1920-1933) was extremely difficult to enforce. While the consumption of

alcohol dropped at the beginning of Prohibition, it subsequently increased. Banning alcohol did not stop its use. Unregulated, illegally produced alcohol was more dangerous to drink, crime increased and became “organized,” courts and prisons were stretched to the breaking point. When the production and sale of alcohol went underground, black markets developed controlled by the Mafia and gangs in communities. By 1933, public sentiment had turned against prohibition and Congress repealed the prohibition by con-

stitutional amendment. The unintended consequences of alcohol prohibition were real and far outweighed the good intent of the prohibition and led to the failure of this noble experiment.

The lessons learned from the failed policy of alcohol prohibition are important for us today when a ban on menthol cigarettes has been proposed to reduce smoking among African Americans. Since over 80 percent of African Americans who choose to smoke, smoke menthol cigarettes, prohibitions, restrictions and bans would affect Black communities more than other communities in America.

When police have to spend time enforcing prohibitions and bans, they have less time to focus on solving violent crime and ensuring public safety. Tensions between police and the Black community have focused national attention on the pervasive inequities in the U.S. criminal justice system. In 2014, the National Research Council issued a comprehensive report on America’s overgrown criminal justice system. The rate of imprisonment in the United States has more than quadrupled during the last forty years.

Read the rest of this commentary at
TheSkanner.com

HBCU Leaders, Advocates Must Engage Dems and Republicans

As the president and CEO of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCFF), I’m spending a good amount of time working to build strategic, government alliances that extend beyond our traditional Democratic support. If you’re wondering why, all you need to do is look at a map of where America’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are located.

The fact of the matter is that a majority of TMCFF’s 47 member-schools are clustered in southern and midwestern states completely controlled by Republicans. By that, I mean states where the governor, both U.S. senators, both chambers of the legislature and most of the U.S. House members are Republican.

The next largest group of our member-schools occupies states that are under at least a majority of GOP control. Only a small number of our member-schools — three to be exact — are in states and the District of Columbia that are completely controlled by Democrats.

If those statistics don’t jump out at you, maybe these facts will. Many of our institutions of higher learning are in desperate need of not just operating dollars, but serious capital infusions to the tune



Johnny C. Taylor
Pres. & CEO
Thurgood
Marshall
College Fund

of hundreds of millions of dollars.

Earlier this year, Grambling State University President Rick Gallot announced that his school will need to aban-

“The people who currently hold the purse strings—both nationally and on a state level—are in most cases Republicans

don the campus library—an unprecedented decision for a university seeking to expand its national imprint in research and training for its students. Gallot’s announcement came almost exactly one year after Louisiana’s state auditor reported nearly \$111 million in deferred maintenance at another Louisiana public HBCU campus, Southern University in Baton Rouge.

The people who currently hold the purse strings—both nationally and on a state level—are, in most cases, Republicans. Yet, some will still suggest that we not even talk to those elected leaders, because

of their party affiliation.

When the media released photos of our meeting at the White House with President Trump, some derided it as just a “photo op.” Tell that to the administrators who were wondering how they’d fill the gap in funding should their already strained budgets face sudden, drastic cuts.

We’re simply not able to pick and choose whom we engage with. We saw firsthand a couple months ago how pos-

itive strategic engagement paid off when I worked with our member-school presidents and chancellors to ensure that their federal budget dollars would not be cut in President Trump’s first budget proposal.

Working with the White House, through open communication and lots of effort, HBCU leaders and I were able to deliver flat funding for HBCUs in the upcoming fiscal year budget. Flat funding is a big win, considering President Trump proposed a 13.9 percent funding decrease in federal education dollars.

But that’s not the end of it.

With so many capital needs, we must ensure Washington doesn’t cut the vital capital financing program that provides about \$20 million a year to support more than \$280 million in capital financing for our schools.

The need to work across the aisle extends beyond just elected officials. In January, TMCFF announced a \$25.6 million gift from the Charles Koch Foundation and Koch Industries. This generous gift was a direct result of proactive outreach I initiated with Mr. Koch, a man often associated with support of conservative and libertarian causes. What I found by having a dialogue with him is that we share a deep concern about the impact of over-incarceration and lack of educational opportunities that disproportionately impact fragile communities. Together in January, we launched a new, HBCU-based research institution, known as the Center for Advancing Opportunity, that is studying barriers to opportunity in those communities.

In reaching across the aisle, we should never forsake our historic alliances. But for the sake of the young people our HBCUs seek to educate, we must also realize the need to grow new and different alliances.