

The Congressional Black Caucus – A powerful majority of one

Written by Marc H. Morial, NNPA Columnist
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Last month, a small but influential group of African Americans was invited to the White House to discuss its priorities with President Barack Obama.

The meeting was significant for several reasons. First, it was the first time in history that members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) met with a President who was a former member of their caucus, and second, it signaled the renewed strength of an organization that has served as the "Conscience of the Congress" for nearly 40 years.

Since its founding in 1969, when it was comprised of the 13 African American members of Congress, the CBC has fought a largely uphill battle to ensure that the promise of liberty and justice for all is extended to African Americans and others who have historically been left out and left behind.

Today, under the chairmanship of Congresswoman Barbara Lee of California, its 42 members include four Committee Chairmen, 15 Sub-Committee Chairmen and the third most powerful person in the House of Representatives, Majority Whip James Clyburn.

While its numbers have steadily increased over time, the CBC still represents just 9.5 percent of the 435 members of the House; and only one African American, Roland Burris of Illinois, serves in the 100-member Senate.

However, the CBC's strength has always been measured more in the rightness of its cause than in the size of its membership. In the words of Henry David Thoreau, "Any man more right than his neighbors constitutes a majority of one."

When others have turned their backs on issues like hate crimes, police brutality, judicial injustice, homelessness, hunger and poverty, the CBC has always stood up and spoken out as a majority of one.

And it continues to do so today. From the effort to secure voting rights for the citizens of Washington, DC, to the fight to right the wrongs of Hurricane Katrina, to the great debate over the stimulus bill, no group in Congress has fought or worked harder to expand opportunity and equality for all Americans than the Congressional Black Caucus.

There are some who argue that with Barack Obama as President and Eric Holder as Attorney General, the need for groups like the CBC and the National Urban League is diminished. Nothing could be further from the truth.

We must remember that Barack Obama is President of the United States of America – not Black America.

As CBC member Corrine Brown of Florida has said, "It doesn't matter who is President...if you're not in the room, your interests will be left on the table."

That's why the CBC's meeting at the White House was so important and it is why the National Urban League will continue to stand with the CBC as a voice of the people and a sounding

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board for the President.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of CBC founding member Shirley Chisholm's election as the nation's first Black congresswoman.

She once said, "I am, was and always will be a catalyst for change." Let that be the rallying cry for the CBC and all of us as we re-double our efforts to build a stronger, more prosperous and more equitable America.