

Black Caucus convenes in DC

Written by William Reed

Wednesday, 09 September 2009 17:09

Each year the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Inc. (CBCF) presents the Annual Legislative Conference (ALC), a four-day event held each September in Washington, D.C. The ALC is the premier political gathering of African Americans. Over 15,000 African American: elected officials, business, union and industry leaders, and media are expected to attend ALC'09 and its policy forums, general sessions, Exhibit Hall, job fair, book signings and networking.

As America becomes more "race-neutral" is time short for the CBCF and ALCs? The headliners of ALC'09 will be the 42 members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). The CBC is comprised of all African-Americans in the 111th Congress. The CBC was started in 1971 with 13 founding members to "positively influence the course of events pertinent to African Americans". By the 1980s the CBC gave an annual report on the State of Black America and by the 1990s the ALC became a multi-million operation. Black executives Henry Brown of Budweiser; LeBaron Taylor of Sony; and Ingrid Saunders Jones of Coca-Cola gave the ALCs early life with \$100,000 annual donations.

The CBCF is the CBC's operations and fund-raising arm. The Foundation was established in 1976 "to help improve the socioeconomic circumstances of African Americans". The CBCF conducts research on issues affecting African Americans, publishes reports on key legislation, and sponsors issue forums, seminars and scholarships. Florida Congressman Kendrick Meek is current chairman of the CBCF. Fundraising events and corporate partners and Exhibit Hall patrons support CBCF programs. The CBCF funds its activities by hosting the ALC each September and regularly draws \$250,000 sponsorships from a range of corporations. The 2009 conference's theme is "Reinvest. . . Rebuild. . . Renew."

The CBCF, seeking to distinguished itself in conducting research on financial issues affecting African Americans, will host a forum to address "Economic Recovery and Opportunity" at a National Town Hall Meeting. . CBCF President and CEO Elsie L. Scott says "The town hall meeting brings together a diverse group of African Americans to collectively discuss common issues and concerns". ALC'09 programs include more than 70 workshops, seminars and information forums on topics that capture and portray the concerns of African Americans. Participants in the 39th annual conference are scheduled to discuss the challenges facing underserved populations, including health care, economic success and failures, global and domestic security as well as highlight successes and provide critical information that will help to build strong communities, organizations and individual families.

Scott says other ALC '09 highlights September 23-26 will include: Opportunities for All - Pathways Out of Poverty Summit. An in-depth forum defining what poverty looks like in 2009, and ways to create pathways out; - Celebration of Leadership for the Visual and Performing Arts. CBC Spouses will honor Tyler Perry, author, producer and screenwriter and visual artist Sam Gilliam at the National Museum of Women; - Emerging Leader Series will present multiple sessions connecting the nation's powerbrokers with emerging professionals.

Topics include higher education funding, entrepreneurialism in urban communities, mental health and wellness, a networking luncheon and premier of BPX 1.0 - The Black Party Xperience - a soulful fusion of music, art and culture; - Annual Prayer Breakfast. Bishop

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Richard Franklin Norris, presiding bishop of First Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church of Philadelphia, will deliver an inspirational message and Grammy Award Winner Yolanda Adams and the Pine Forge Academy Choir will lead audience in musical praise.

The CBCF has planned ALC'09 programs relevant to Blacks' empowerment. But, will "Age of Obama" elected officials and corporate ALC'09 attendees rally and regularly engage the original vision of CBC's founding members – to "promote the public welfare through legislation designed to meet the needs of millions of neglected citizens"? When the last party is over, and as forums and committees inspired by ALC'09 are convened, will race-specific issues be the focal point of the legislative work and political activities of the CBC? As CBC Members gain rank and seniority in Congress, how much of their attention and actions will be focused on disparities African Americans experience in work opportunities, wages, wealth, health, education and justice.?

(William Reed – www.BlackPressInternational.com)