

'Where's the money?': NNPA Chairman Bakewell takes Capitol Hill by storm

Written by Hazel Trice Edney and Pharoah Martin , NNPA Editor-in-Chief and National Correspondent
Friday, 16 October 2009 17:20

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - It was a closed-door face to face conversation between U. S. senators and the top leadership of the nation's premier Black institutions and new NNPA Chairman Danny Bakewell was on the front line for all of them.

"We've had landmark legislation in terms of the stimulus bill. Yet, when you talk to Black businesses, when you talk to newspaper publishers, where is the money? Where is the money," Bakewell demanded rhetorically as the audience inside the Mansfield Room of the U. S. Capitol broke into applause.

He continued: "General Motors got almost a hundred billion plus dollars of stimulus money. They have a billion plus dollars advertising budget. The Black Press probably cannot find \$2 million dollars in advertising throughout the entire country of the United States...Where is the acknowledgement of our community? Where is the acknowledgement of Black businesses?"

The meeting, organized by Gary Flowers, executive director and CEO of the Black Leadership Forum, was closed to press; therefore responses and other details of the meeting cannot be published, due to agreements. However, after the meeting, both the senators present and Flowers promised there would be follow up meetings with an aim to turn dialog into legislation.

The fiery NNPA Foundation Chair Dorothy Leavell was also in the room, but deferred to Bakewell. Fair public policy will be the key to gaining and economic equity, he told the senators.

"I'm hearing that there's going to be another stimulus bill. If you don't make provisions for small businesses, then who will? We give General Motors 25 percent of their market share; yet we get less than point 5 percent of their advertising. Does that make any sense? Where is the equity in America? And you are the stewards of that. We don't want to come here for talk. We don't want to come here for dialog. We want to come here to make sure that our business is taken care of. That is the new voice you are going to be hearing from NNPA. The Black Press of America is going to make the voices of all the people in this room heard and we are going to be on you and challenging you to make our voices heard."

That was just the beginning of a three-day D.C. whirlwind for newly-elected NNPA chairman Bakewell who, with other NNPA publishers attended the Congressional Black Caucus Annual Legislative Weekend September 23-26. It included the press for fair legislation, business meetings to drum up advertising dollars, and a glitzy Friday night bash to introduce the new leadership of the Black Press of America.

There were also light moments with members of Congress.

During a Black Entertainment and Media Entrepreneurs panel discussion Bakewell was cut short during his panel speech by his own congresswoman. It was for good reason. Rep. Diane Watson (D-Ca.) wanted to honor Bakewell with a special award but, she had to leave early to vote on a legislative proceeding.

"I'm sorry Danny to interrupt you but the congresswoman has to go vote," said moderator Julia Wilson. Bakewell was scheduled to be honored after the panel but that would have to take place

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right away as the congresswoman was hit by an urgent page to return to Capitol Hill.

"Come on Danny," Watson instructed. "As all of you know, my job comes first. That's why I'm here."

She continued.

"I wanted to take the time to honor a beacon, not only in our community but across this country. He is the one that always stays true to who he is, and that is a true African American. He has improved our paper. And I refer to it as our paper because, for as long as I could remember, we've had a weekly Los Angeles Sentinel newspaper," she said of the 76-year-old paper that circulates 125,000, according to its website.