



# Daily Update

Blacks In Government 30<sup>th</sup> Annual National Training Conference  
Volume 3 – August 13, 2008

## “Rising Above the Storm: Navigating New Challenges with High Professional Competency and Dedication to Public Service”

### ***BIG National President’s Reception***

*Reported by Ms. Miriam Dugger*

Jubilance filled the air of the halls of the Ernest Morial Convention Center, the sounds of jazz streaming from the brass horns of local musicians Marlin Jordan and the James Andrew Quartet heard in the background and the smell of cuisine that could only be found in the **BIG EASY**.



Conference attendees had an opportunity to have a photo signing with the National President.

The President’s Reception was also devoted to publicly recognizing the many sponsors to the National Training Conference. Awards were presented and representatives for each company or organization saluted the attendees and hailed their commitment to BIG. This year’s title

### ***“BIG CALL FOR ACTION” ARE YOU GOING TO SHOW UP & SHOW OUT?***

*Reported by Ms. Laverne Saulny*

With standing room only at the Hilton Riverside Hotel, BIG hosted a Katrina Town hall meeting with **moderator Gary Flowers**, and 10 powerful panelists. These individuals sparked some emotional discussions about the storm, the aftermath, and the way forward. **Panelist: Ms. Melanie Campbell, Dr. Calvin Mackie, Ms. Ellen Lee, Ms. Kay Wilkins, Mr. Mark Smith,**

sponsors are Heaven 1580 Radio, Financial Assurance and Pathfinders. Platinum Gold, Silver and Bronze sponsors were also recognized. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was recognized as the oldest Corporate Member. President Young recognized the great work that Dr. Doris Sartor, National Executive Vice President, Mr. Richard Shields, National 3<sup>rd</sup> Vice President, and Mr. James Wilson. Due to their effort, BIG’s Corporate Sponsorship has increased tremendously.

The theme of the reception was “*The Taste of New Orleans Masquerade*”. In keeping with the flavor of New Orleans and its Mardi Gras heritage, attendees wore decorated masks while enjoying a taste of the scrumptious food items which quickly enlightened everyone why people from throughout the world travel to New Orleans just for the food. The night’s finale was a “second line” dance through the convention hall with their big band sound. President Darlene Young led the dance, adorning her masquerade mask and waving her white handkerchief. The procession also included a display by the Mardi Gras Indians.

### **Councilwoman Cynthia Willard-Lewis, Mr. August Martin and Mr. Grady Paulard.**

**Main topic of discussion:** What does the future hold for the city of New Orleans?

Dr. Mackie shared with the BIG membership that Hurricane Katrina was the costliest and one of the five deadliest hurricanes in the history of the United States. The most severe loss of life and property damage occurred in New Orleans and the surrounding parishes, which flooded as the levee system catastrophically failed hours after the storm moved inland. At least **1,836**

people lost their lives in Hurricane Katrina and in the subsequent floods, making it the deadliest U.S. hurricane since the 1928 Okeechobee Hurricane. He also stated that the catastrophic failure of the flood protection in New Orleans prompted immediate review of the Army Corp of Engineers, which has, by congressional mandate, sole responsibility for design and construction of the flood protection and levee systems.

It was also stated by Dr. Mackie that the criticism of the government's response to Hurricane Katrina primarily consisted of condemnations of mismanagement and lack of leadership in the relief efforts in response to the storm and its aftermath. The percentage of black victims among storm-related deaths (**49%**) was below their proportion in the area's population.

Panelist N.O. City Councilwoman Willard-Lewis stated that Katrina's storm surge led to **53** levee breaches in the federally built levee system protecting metro New Orleans. Failures occurred in New Orleans and largely in her district and the surrounding communities. The Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MR-GO) breached its levees in approximately 20 places, flooding much of eastern New Orleans. Councilwoman Willard-Lewis wanted to remind the BIG members that **80%** of New Orleans flooded an area equal in size to seven Manhattan Islands. **204,000** homes and **67,000** businesses were destroyed and **800,000**-plus citizens were forced to live outside of their homes - the greatest Diaspora since the Dust Bowl of the 30's. Nearly **40,000** former New Orleans households still reside outside of Louisiana three years after the storm. **81, 688** FEMA trailers were originally occupied. Three years after Katrina, almost **45,000** are receiving housing assistance from the Disaster Housing Assistance Program managed by HUD. Those who lived in travel trailers, studies have shown

### ***National Health Initiatives Program***

*Reported by Ms. Melinda Shelton*

Claudette Ellis is the picture of health. She's vibrant, energetic, and has a well-defined figure that she attributes to exercise and a healthy diet.

many have been exposed to unsafe levels of formaldehyde toxicity.

**The real question is what's next for New Orleans?** Three years after Hurricane Katrina and the levee failures, greater New Orleans has recovered **87** percent of its population and **86** percent of its jobs. Today, the city of New Orleans is dealing with **65,000** residential addresses that are blighted or empty lots, and concentrated in areas largely flooded by Hurricane Katrina. Housing costs in greater New Orleans are unaffordable for many service sector employees, who are essential to the city's and the region's recovery.

### **President Young challenged the BIG members to the following:**

- Sign-up with the American Red Cross as volunteers. The American Red Cross served **1.2 million** families after Katrina.
- Be a part of public policy to protect culture, community and economic development across the U.S. by: enhancing the nation's emergency preparedness, boosting disaster response, rebuilding crumbling infrastructure and creating a comprehensive disaster plan.
- For every BIG member to encourage your member of Congress to come to the New Orleans region. As of this date, only **57** out of **100** United States Senators and only **142** House of Representatives out of **435** have visited the city of New Orleans and the region.

**Mr. Richard Shields your committee staff, thank you for an outstanding town hall meeting.**

Clad in a snappy chapeau, Dr. Ellis marched, sang, lectured, cajoled, and celebrated the audience at Wednesday morning's health forum. Then she shared some jaw-dropping news:

“Look at me. LOOK at me! I’ve had two heart attacks and five heart surgeries. FIVE! But in the last three years, no more surgeries. I made up my mind, no more. So here I am, 55 years old and I wear a size eight. And I feel good! I FEEL GOOD! So can you,” she cheered to the audience.

Wednesday’s daylong forum was part of the BIG 2008 National Health Awareness Program. The morning session featured speakers who addressed the myriad health problems African Americans face, healthcare inequities, and preventive measures the audience can and must use in their own lives.

Dr. Ellis moved between the lectern and the audience, a bundle of energy she admits is difficult to contain. She was there not as a scientist, she said, but as a woman, a person with heart disease, someone who found out the hard way what happens when you don’t take care of yourself.

She bounced between topics, carrying her audience on a rollercoaster ride to knowledge and self-awareness. Her major points included:

“Be authentic to yourself. You need to be honest.”  
“Let’s face it: we’re dying. We’re dying A LOT. We’re gonna die, everybody is gonna die and we can’t do anything about that. But we have the freedom of CHOICE, and we can choose how we live, which will help determine how we die.”  
“Know what my slogan is? No health. No wealth. No health. You DESERVE good health, and you need to choose wellness. Choose health.”

Other speakers in the morning forum included Drs. Ricardo Parker, Marian Johnson-Thompson, Beverly Lyn-Cook, Athena Starlard-Davenport, George Hammons, and Ludmilla Wikkeling-Scott. The scientists covered topics that touched on health disparities in the African American community; the leading causes of death; the high rate of HIV/AIDS in the African American community; how nutrition, good and bad, affects a person’s health and vulnerability to disease; ways to eat healthily; and disease-preventive strategies.

Dr. Parker and the other scientists offered dismal statistics about disease in the African American community:

- The leading causes of death are heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes, and Alzheimer’s disease.
- African Americans are two times more likely to die from heart disease than whites/non-Hispanics.
- The most prevalent and deadly forms of cancer in African Americans include lung, prostate, breast, colorectal, and pancreatic cancer.
- Obesity has reached epidemic proportions among adults and children.
- One in four children is obese, and this generation of children will have a shorter life expectancy than their parents.
- African Americans account for 50% of the American population that has tested positive for HIV/AIDS—but Blacks comprise only slightly more than one-third of the total U.S. population.

As food for thought, Dr. Parker presented eye-opening statistics about what the average American consumes every year: 7 lbs. of chips; 22 lbs. of candy; 23 gallons of ice cream; 60 lbs. of cookies and cakes; 365 sodas; 90 lbs. of fat; and 134 lbs. of refined sugar. The average child consumes three-fourths of a pound of these everyday.

Several of the presenters agreed with Dr. Parker’s comment that “there is no such thing as race in biology.” Dr. Lyn-Cook added these caveats: “99% genetically, we’re all the same. But culturally, socioeconomically, physiologically, and genetically we are NOT the same.”

Why are the health statistics for African Americans so radically different than whites/non-Hispanics? A lower socioeconomic status, unequal receipt of treatment, later stage cancer detection, more aggressive cancer tumor growth, and biological/genetic differences all contribute, according to Dr. Starlard-Davenport.

The news wasn’t all bad, the forum panelists told the audience.

- ✓ Most people can choose to improve their health by improving their lifestyles and eliminating the stressors—and bad eating—in their lives.
- ✓ Consistent screening for cholesterol levels, diabetes, blood pressure, prostate cancer, and other life-threatening conditions should be done often.
- ✓ Mammograms and self-exams help detect breast cancer.
- ✓ HIV/AIDS testing should be done once a year, even for those in long-term/monogamous relationships/marriages. Such testing can be done as part of a typical screening panel during a routine checkup, which is covered by insurance; local HIV/AIDS programs usually offer free testing.
- ✓ Practice a diet HIGH in fruits and vegetables and very low in meats and dairy products.
- ✓ Avoid fast foods, unhealthy snacking, and unhealthy food preparations, such as frying.
- ✓ Limit alcohol consumption; a glass of red wine is the exception and has positive health effects.
- ✓ Exercise. Move. Get off the sofa. Buy a Wii, which offers interactive play—and exercise routines.

### ***HOME TOWN JOURNAL***

The Home Town Journal is a personal synopsis of the activities and events of the conference attendee’s experience at the 2008 Blacks in Government National Training Conference. Anyone interested in creating their own personal Home Town Journal, should report to Room 289.

#### **Youth Empowerment**

Thursday, August 14, 2008

8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Hilton Grand Salons Ballrooms Level 1

#### **Legislative Luncheon**

Thursday, August 14, 2008

12:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m. Grand Ballroom A Level 1

#### **New Life Member and Gold Plus Member Reception**

Thursday, August 14, 2008

5:30 p.m.-7:00 p.m. Grand Ballroom A/B

#### **BIG National Youth Summit**

Thursday, August 14, 2008

7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m., Hilton Jefferson Ballroom, Level 3

Daily Update articles should be submitted no later than 6:00 p.m. each day. Please have your article typed and ready for download. Articles should be submitted to the Press Room, Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, Room 289.

The National Communications and Public Relations Committee



Please return Master Eric O’Neal package of pictures, the front cover has a picture of him with an 8ft. trophy and the title, “7 – Time U.S.K.A. World Karate Champion; 2 – Gold Medalist; International Karate Hall of Farmer” on the front. Please contact Master Eric “Lionman” O’Neal at 504-258-7773 – cell phone.

Visit the Exhibitors and the BIG Store located in the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center on Level 1