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“CBC Not Positioned to Optimize Black America’s Well-Being”

Today’s 61-membered Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) is not positioned well to optimize Black America’s well-being. It is true that 14 of the members are lawyers, and that they should be able to navigate well US laws.¹ However, we should be cognizant that President Calvin Coolidge’s famous statement from nearly 100 years ago remains accurate today: “After all, the chief business of the American people is business.”²

Consequently, we should realize that the US Congress, with its “power of the purse” (i.e., taxing and spending powers as fashioners of fiscal policy) and its related participation in lobbying efforts, is deeply and broadly involved in the nation’s economic activity. In other words, it may be safe to say that, especially in today’s context, economic considerations supersede legal considerations in US Congressional operations. At bottom, the creation of new, and revisions to old, laws mainly concerns distributing and

redistributing rights and privileges that have economic import.

If the nation is largely involved in business, then those providing governance for the nation should be skilled in business. This is doubly true for Black Americans who suffer greatly from weak economic and business positions (e.g., wealth, income, employment inequality). Therefore, it is critical that CBC members reflect a very strong aptitude for navigating business and economic issues.

How does the CBC stack up on this front? Our review of CBC members’ brief biographies revealed that just six of the 61 Congresspersons indicated that they are/were “business owners” or “entrepreneurs.”³ These six Congresspersons constitute about 10 percent of total CBC membership, which may appear to be significant “business” representation.⁴ However, if the work to be performed in Washington, DC mainly

¹ **BlackEconomics.org** was unable to determine the various fields of law (constitutional, criminal, corporate, etc.) in which these Congresspersons have expertise.

² See Ellen Terrell (2019), “When a quote is not (exactly) a quote: The Business of America is Business Edition” (January 17); https://blogs.loc.gov/inside_adams/2019/01/when-a-quote-is-not-exactly-a-quote-the-business-of-america-is-business-edition/ (Retrieved 072721).

³ The brief biographies were obtained from the following Internet website:

<https://www.congress.gov/members?q=%7B%22congress%22%3A117%7D> (Retrieved 072621).

⁴ The 10 percent can be compared with the percentage of Black business owners (employer and nonemployer firms) as a percentage of the labor force (16.1 percent in 2018). Importantly, we have no information on the extent of business success enjoyed by these Black congresspersons. For comparison, White business owners represent 20.4 percent of the White labor force. Statistics on business ownership are from the US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census: www.census.gov (Retrieved 072821).

concerns business, then it is advisable to engage a higher percentage of businesspersons/entrepreneurs as congresspersons.

But the situation is bleaker. Not only is America's chief business business, but America's chief business is "big" business—i.e., corporations. It is common knowledge that large corporations rule the American roost. Therefore, to address economic and business issues in the US Congress, a Congressperson should be intimately familiar with the inner workings of large corporations. Unfortunately, of the six Congresspersons who indicate that they have business ownership experience, we were only able to determine that one Congressperson owned/operated a corporation.⁵

When Black Americans witness limited progress/success on the economic front from our representatives in the US Congress, we should realize that the latter are generally ill-equipped to wrest from the system the benefits that we so richly deserve.⁶ Given their lack of business and economic training and experience, existing CBC members appear to be unable to craft and champion strategies that produce the most favorable short- and long-term well-being for Black America.

It seems reasonable to take all of this into account when electing future Black Congresspersons.

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Labor force statistics are from the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics: www.bls.gov (Retrieved 072721).

⁵ Although **BlackEconomics.org** contacted each of the six Congresspersons' office (Joyce Beatty, Troy Carter, Eddie Bernice Johnson, Al Lawson, Barbara Lee, and David Scott) three times, only two Congresspersons (Al Lawson and David Scott)

provided details of their business operations. Scott operated a corporation, while Lawson operated a sole proprietorship.

⁶ The lack of economic and/or business training and experience may be ameliorated somewhat when Congresspersons include economic and/or business experts as staff members.