



Members of Congress Support the National Color of Wealth Policy Summit's Goal of Closing America's Racial Wealth Gap

Key House Leadership, Administration Officials Partner With Experts of Color to Discuss Practical Ways to Close the Gap and Reinvigorate the U.S. Economy

WASHINGTON – As the nation struggles to get out of recession, members of Congress showed their support for closing the gap in wealth between whites and people of color at a national policy summit organized on March 23 and 24, 2009 by the Insight Center for Community Economic Development. Experts of color in attendance used research and community practice to show that investing in the economic development of communities of color will lay a foundation for national economic revival.

Looking at the numbers showing that the racial gap has grown over the last five years, “We have to figure out a way to fight back,” said Rep. Xavier Becerra (D-Calif.), vice-chair of the House Democratic Caucus and a member of the Ways and Means Committee, during a standing-room only work session at the Library of Congress. “If we don’t, we will set ourselves back 30 years.”

Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.) agreed and expressed his optimism for success: “We have the opportunity to build, build, build,” Ellison said. “We have nowhere to go but up on the wealth chart.”

Becerra and Ellison were speaking this week to more than 100 prominent African American, Latino, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Native American scholars, policy experts and advocates who gathered in Washington to discuss how to close the racial gap in economic security and mobility that exists in the United States.

Other noted speakers at the event included Dr. Jason Furman, deputy director of the White House National Economic Council; House Majority Leader Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-MD); Rep. Melvin Watt (D-NC); Rep. Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD); Rep. Chaka Fattah (D-PA); Congressional Black Caucus Chair Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA); and Congressional Asian and Pacific American Caucus chair Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA).

All expressed their commitment to addressing on Capitol Hill the United States’ persistent racial wealth gap: In 2007, for every dollar of net worth owned by the median white family, the median African-American family had only a dime, and Latino families had only 12 cents. Substantial research, including by many scholars in attendance, shows that government policies and not individual actions account for the gap.

Such a gap only exacerbates what is “the most serious economic crisis this country has faced since the Great Depression,” said Furman, whose keynote speech to the group laid out the Obama Administration’s agenda for addressing economic inequality.

The goals of the two-day 2009 Color of Wealth Policy Summit were to educate Congress and the Administration about the magnitude of the problem, why it is important for the overall U.S. economy to close the gap, and to provide practical, achievable recommendations on attaining that goal for the next generation.

“It was an honor to have respected congressional leaders and members of the administration join us in our efforts to unleash the potential of all America’s people to generate economic growth,” said Meizhu Lui, director of the Insight Center’s Closing the Racial Wealth Gap Initiative. “Our leaders showed us they understand that in order to fulfill the promise of the American dream, our nation must commit to helping families of color build assets and increase community economic capacity.”

The Color of Wealth Summit was the latest in series of annual meetings organized by the Insight Center and the Ford Foundation’s Asset Building Program, bringing together some of the leading minds on wealth-building from communities of color and their allies.

This year’s summit also featured:

- A roundtable discussion that included John A. Powell, executive director of the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University, on how political shifts will affect economic security for communities of color.
- A discussion of how employment issues impact wealth creation, moderated by Linda Chavez Thompson, Executive Vice President Emeritus of the AFL-CIO.
- A panel on homeownership, home lending and financial services with Jacqueline Pata, executive director of the National Congress of American Indians and James Carr, chief operating officer of the National Community Reinvestment Coalition.
- A session on best innovative practices that build on community strengths moderated by Puanani Burgess, noted Hawaiian leader in community economic development.
- A panel chaired by Arizona State University associate professor Barbara Robles on small and micro businesses and their ability to generate wealth.

“Asset building is the key to improving the lives of individuals, families and communities of color across the country,” said Lisa Hasegawa, executive director of the National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development. “This policy summit offered not just analysis but practical proposals about ways that government can play a key role in closing the racial wealth divide.”

The Insight Center’s “Experts of Color Clearinghouse,” a continually growing database featuring more than 100 experts, Summit materials including reports and fact sheets can be found at: www.insightexpertsofcolor.org

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The Insight Center for Community Economic Development is a national research, consulting and legal organization dedicated to building economic health in disenfranchised communities. Its mission is to develop and promote innovative solutions that help people and communities become, and remain, economically secure. It is leading a national effort to close the racial wealth gap in the United States for the next generation. For more information on the Center, go to www.insightccd.org.