

NAACP LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR THE 115TH CONGRESS (2017 – 2018)

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

ISSUE	House Bill	Senate Bill	NAACP
Law Enforcement Trust and Integrity			Issue Alert available
End Racial and Religious Profiling	Conyers, Jr. H.R. 1498	Cardin S. 411	Action Alert available
Eliminate racially disparate prosecution			Issue Alert available
Require video surveillance of all law enforcement activities	Green, Al (TX) H.R. 124		Action Alert available
Establish effective and independent civilian review boards to examine police activity			Issue Brief available
Abolish Mandatory Minimum Sentences / Sentencing Reform			Action Alert available
Eliminate Crack Cocaine Sentencing Disparities			Issue Alert available
Reform our Nation's Immigration Laws			
Enactment of Safe, Sane & Sensible Laws to Curb Gun Violence			Issue Alert available
Death Penalty Abolition			Issue Alert available
Promote Prisoners' Rights, Education, Training and Reward Good Behavior			
Encourage youth to stay away from gang activity			Issue Alert available
Reduce over-criminalization at the federal level			Issue Alert available

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

ISSUE	House Action	Senate Action	NAACP
Support, Preserve and Protect Equal Opportunity Programs			Issue Brief available
Eliminate potential discrimination in "Faith Based" initiatives			Issue Brief available
Study Proposals for Reparations for African Americans	Conyers H.R. 40		Action Alert available
Federal budget that invests in public education, health care, job training and the protection of civil rights			
Establish paid sick leave	DeLauro H.R. 947	Gillibrand S. 337	Action Alert Available
Establish a national cap on interest rates and fees at 36% to eliminate high-cost loans, such as debt perpetuating "pay day" loans			Issue Alert available
Protect Social Security			Issue Brief available
Increase availability of safe, decent, affordable low-income housing			Issue Alert available
Enact a comprehensive program to combat homelessness			
Increase resources to fight housing discrimination			Issue Alert available
Employment Non-Discrimination Act			Issue Alert available
Enable Workers to Unionize			Issue Alert available
Equal pay for equal work			Issue Alert available
Job Creation			
Enact a fair minimum wage for all workers			Issue Alert available
Protect union / collective bargaining rights of public employees			Issue Brief Available
Ban the use of credit checks by potential employers			Issue Alert available

(Placement on list does not represent priority)

More...

NAACP Legislative Priorities for the 115th Congress (2017 – 2018) CONTINUED

EDUCATION

ISSUE	House Action	Senate Action	NAACP
Reduce Financial Disparities Between Schools			Issue Alert available
Full federal funding for public education programs			Issue Update Available
Public School Construction, Repair and Renovation			Issue Alert available
Oppose Discriminatory “High Stakes” Educational Testing			Issue Brief available
Oppose publically funded private school vouchers			
Maintain the federal role in ensuring a decent public education available to all			Issue Alert available
Allow students convicted of minor drug offenses to receive federal financial aid			Issue Alert available
Increase funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities			Issue Brief Available
Expanding Pell grant availability and funding			Issue Alert available

HEALTH

ISSUE	House Action	Senate Action	NAACP
Full funding for AIDS Prevention, Treatment & Education			Issue Alert available
Full Implementation of Health Care Reform			Issue Brief Available
End Childhood Obesity			Issue Alert available
Protect Medicare and Medicaid benefits			

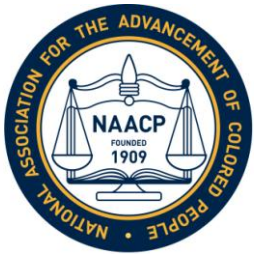
VOTING RIGHTS

ISSUE	House Action	Senate Action	NAACP
Expand access to the polls for all eligible voters			Issue Alert available
End Deceptive Practices in Elections			Issue Alert available
Oppose Photo Identification requirements for voting			Issue Brief Available
Campaign Finance Reform	Sarbanes H.R. 20		Action Alert available
Re-enfranchisement of Ex-Felony Offenders			Issue Alert available
Repair and Strengthen the Voting Rights Act of 1965			Issue Alert available
Congressional Voting Rights / Statehood for the District of Columbia			Issue Alert available

INTERNATIONAL

ISSUE	House Action	Senate Action	NAACP
Eliminate U.S. trade and travel embargos against Cuba			Issue Alert available
Peace in Sudan			Issue Brief available
Enhance aid, trade and development programs throughout Africa and the Caribbean			
Establish a Department of Peace			
Increase stability in and humanitarian assistance to Haiti			

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NAACP LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR THE 115TH CONGRESS (2017 – 2018)

THE NAACP FEDERAL POLICY AGENDA

In February, 2012, the NAACP Board of Directors adopted a strategic plan to map out the path of the organization for the 21st century. The plan is centered around 5 primary “Game Changers”—the core areas where we intend to have an impact in the years ahead. The Game Changers have been created under consultation with the National Board of Directors, unit leaders, and staff through a year-long collaborative process, and they address the major areas of inequality facing African Americans that are the focus of the NAACP’s work. The five “game changers” are:

- **Economic Sustainability:** A chance to live the American Dream for all. Every person will have equal opportunity to achieve economic success, sustainability, and financial security.
- **Education:** A free, high-quality, public education for all. Every child will receive a free, high quality, equitably-funded, public pre-K and K-12 education followed by diverse opportunities for accessible, affordable vocational or university education.
- **Health:** Health equality for all Americans including a healthy life and high-quality health care. Everyone will have equal access to affordable, high-quality health care, and racially disparate health outcomes will end.
- **Public Safety and Criminal Justice:** Equitable dispensation of justice for all. Disproportionate incarceration, racially motivated policing strategies, and racially biased, discriminatory, and mandatory minimum sentencing will end. Incarceration will be greatly reduced and communities will be safer. The death penalty will be abolished at the state and federal level, as well as in the military.
- **Voting Rights and Political Representation:** Protect and enhance voting rights and fair representation. Every American will have free, open, equal, and protected access to the vote and fair representation at all levels of the political process. By protecting democracy, enhancing equity, and increasing democratic participation and civic engagement, African Americans will be proportionally elected to political office.

In accordance with our mandate to promote these “game changers” the NAACP Washington Bureau has identified several legislative proposals that are important to our membership and that we will be pursuing vigorously over the next two years. These issues are outlined below. For further information on any or all of the issues listed below, please feel free to contact the Washington Bureau at (202) 463-2940, or look for our “Action Alerts” on the web at www.naacp.org.

The Washington Bureau is committed to ensuring that our members are kept up to date on issues that are important to them. We will, therefore, be faxing out **Action Alerts** on matters that are expected to come before the House or the Senate in the near future, or on issues that may arise over the course of the Congress that would have an impact on the basic rights of American citizens. Action Alerts outline the problem, give a legislative update and inform out membership how they can contact their representatives.

****Placement on list does not represent priority****

CRIMINAL JUSTICE ISSUES

Law enforcement trust and integrity:

Police misconduct, the lack of law enforcement accountability to the communities they serve, and the fact that there are no national, uniform, use-of-force standards for law enforcement officers or agencies, are problems that affect every sector of our country and imperils the continued security of our nation. The fact that actions which may not be accepted or practiced in one community are regularly used in another can lead to a mistrust of law enforcement by the people they are hired to protect and serve.

Furthermore, there is a strong perception among Americans of all races that people of color are treated much more aggressively and with much more force than their Caucasian counterparts by law enforcement agents at all levels. We are subject to stories of police misconduct on an almost daily basis: acts of blatant, unwarranted brutality, and the increase in national media attention which they are receiving, have led to a mistrust by members of every community. Something must be done to raise the level of accountability, or the situation will only continue to deteriorate.

The *Law Enforcement Trust and Integrity Act* provides incentives for local police organizations to adopt performance-based standards to ensure that incidents of misconduct will be minimized through appropriate management, training and oversight protocols and that if such incidents do occur, that they will be properly investigated. By doing this, not only would we be building trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve, we would also be providing police officers with the tools necessary to work with their communities and to enhance their professional growth and education.

Eliminate racial and religious profiling:

The *End Racial and religious Profiling Act* comprehensively addresses the insidious practice of biased treatment by law enforcement because of who you are, which God you believe in, or who you are perceived to be, by law enforcement. Specifically, the *End Racial and Religious Profiling Act* addresses bias policing on five levels: first, it clearly defines the discriminatory practice of profiling by law enforcement at all levels; second, it creates a federal prohibition against profiling; thirdly, it mandates data collection so we can fully assess the true extent of the problem; fourth, it provides funding for the retraining of law enforcement officials on how to discontinue and prevent the use of profiling; and fifth, it holds law enforcement agencies that continue to use profiling accountable.

Numerous studies over the past few years have provided us with evidence to support what we have known for decades: law enforcement agents at all levels have consistently used race, ethnicity, religion, and national origin when choosing which individuals should be stopped and searched. At the most basic level, it is difficult for our faith in the American judicial system not to be challenged when we cannot even drive down an interstate without being stopped merely because of the color of our skin. We need this legislation to stop this insidious practice and to help begin to restore the confidence of communities of color throughout the United States in federal, state and local law enforcement.

Eliminate racially disparate prosecution:

While people may argue about the reasons behind it, few would disagree that extensive racial and ethnic disparities exist today in the American criminal justice system. These disparities are particularly true for African American men and boys, who are grossly overrepresented at every stage of the judicial process, from initial contacts with police to punishments. African Americans routinely receiving more jail time and harsher punishments; 42% of Americans currently on death row are African American. Nearly a million African Americans today are incarcerated in prisons and in jails, and unless there is a change, a black male born today has a one-in-three chance of going to prison in his lifetime. In fact, despite the fact that numerous studies show that African Americans and Caucasians use cocaine at roughly the same rate, statistics confirm that over 80% of those currently in prison for crack cocaine possession are African American.

To address these disparities, the bipartisan *Justice Integrity Act* aims to address the issue of unwarranted racial disparities in the American criminal justice system was introduced. This important legislation would establish 10 pilot programs to create local advisory groups charged with collecting and analyzing racial and ethnic data on charging, plea negotiations, sentencing recommendations and other factors involved in creating these disparities.

Require Video Surveillance of all law enforcement activities:

The availability of video evidence of police interactions with civilians through body cameras, cameras mounted on dashboards of police vehicles, and cameras mounted to guns and tasers can lead to significant improvements in police accountability and trust among a community. Video cameras and the evidence they produce help law enforcement agencies and community groups alike gather and preserve the best possible evidence and serve as another layer of transparency.

Establish effective and independent civilian review boards to examine police activity:

We must restore and give power to local communities over the agencies which are meant to “protect and serve.” The NAACP therefore strongly supports the establishment of civilian accountability review boards for every local, state, and even federal law enforcement agency.

While the exact composition of these Boards should be determined by the needs and the make-up of the community being served, in order to be effective they must all have the following characteristics:

- The review board must be ***independent*** in that it will have the power to conduct hearings, subpoena witnesses and report findings and recommendations to the public and it shall be housed away from police headquarters to maintain credibility;
- It needs to be ***relevant*** in that it will have the power to independently investigate incidents and issue findings on complaints; it will be able to spot problem policies and provide a forum for developing reforms; an effective review board must have complete access to police witnesses and documents through legal mandate and subpoena power; the Board will publish, on a periodic basis, statistical reports which detail trends in allegations, to help identify officers or who of practices which are subjects of unusually numerous complaints; and Board findings will be considered in determining appropriate disciplinary action. The Civilian Board will also have the capacity to compel prosecutors offices to bring charges against police officers to a panel or Grand Jury to try the case;
- Finally, an effective Civilian Review Board will be ***reflective*** of the racial and ethnic make-up of the community in that the Board and staff will be broadly representative of the community it serves.

The Review Board must consistently be adequately funded to fulfill the obligations laid out above; it should not be a lower budget priority than police internal affairs systems.

Abolish mandatory minimum prison sentences / Sentencing reform:

From the days of slavery, through years of lynchings and Jim Crow laws, and even today our criminal justice system has always been deeply affected by racial bias. As a result of the mandatory minimum sentencing laws under which we currently live, young African American men and women being sent to prison in unnecessarily disproportionate, and unacceptably high rates and for too long. Mandatory minimum sentences, such as the various *Three Strikes and Your Out* laws, especially when applied as vigorously as they are in California, are not only ineffective in stopping crime, but they are also a powerful drain on our resources in a manner which discriminates against entire communities.

The rush to enact mandatory minimum sentences in the 1990’s is, perhaps, a text-book example of a lack of forethought. Legislators failed to take into account the costs on our budgets, on specific communities or on families when enacting mandatory minimum sentences. California’s “*three strikes*” law has cost the state an additional billions of dollars, and has had an untold impact on the lives and

communities that are ruined when a nonviolent offender is given a sentence of 25-years-to-life. This is money that could rather have been spent on education, job creation, health care, interdiction and alternatives to incarceration programs. Mandatory minimum sentences do not work as intended. Rather, they work to further destroy our communities and exacerbate the racial divide that alienates so many of our young people today. The NAACP remains very opposed to mandatory minimum sentences.

Furthermore, the United States has seen a 500% increase in the number of inmates in federal custody over the last 30 years, in large part due to the increasing number and length of certain federal mandatory sentences, and as the prison population has increased so has the racial disparity among prisoners. More than 60% of the people in prison are now racial and ethnic minorities. For African American males in their thirties, 1 in every 10 is in prison or jail on any given day. Two-thirds of all persons in prison for drug offenses are people of color, and approximately half of all Americans incarcerated today are for non-violent offenses. The results of these policies include the ruination of lives, the decimation of communities, and a deep distrust of the criminal justice system.

To address this unacceptable, unnecessary, and harmful problem the NAACP supports the *Smarter Sentencing Act*, which has bipartisan support in the US House and the US Senate. This crucial legislation would:

- Expand the existing federal “safety valve”: The current “safety valve” has been effective in allowing federal judges to appropriately sentence certain non-violent drug offenders below existing mandatory minimums. This safety valve, however, only applies to a narrow subset of cases. *The Smarter Sentencing Act* would broaden criteria for eligibility, yet still applying it only to certain non-violent drug offenses;
- Promote sentencing consistent with the bipartisan Fair Sentencing Act: The bipartisan Fair Sentencing Act of 2010 – which was signed into law in Aug. 2010 – reduced a decades-long 100:1 sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine offenses. Unfortunately, because of the timing of their sentences, some individuals are still serving far-too-lengthy sentences that Congress has already determined are unjust and racially disparate. *The Smarter Sentencing Act* allows certain inmates sentenced under the pre-Fair Sentencing Act sentencing regime to petition for sentence reductions consistent with the Fair Sentencing Act and current law.; and
- Increase individualized review for certain drug sentences: *The Smarter Sentencing Act* lowers certain drug mandatory minimums, allowing judges to determine, based on individual circumstances, when the harshest penalties should apply.

Eliminate sentencing disparity in crack cocaine cases:

Federal crack cocaine defendants over the last ten years have been disproportionately black: more than 88% have been African American, while 7% have been Hispanic and only 4% Caucasian. Many observers blame this disparity on the 1-to-100 ratio of the quantities of crack cocaine versus powder cocaine that trigger Federal mandatory minimum sentences. The NAACP has worked with the Congressional Black Caucus, the US Sentencing Commission and other like-minded organizations to try to bring federal mandatory minimums for crack cocaine in line with those for powder cocaine.

On Tuesday, August 3, 2010, President Obama signed the *Fair Sentencing Act* into law.

This important legislation will reduce the mandatory minimum sentence for a federal conviction of crack cocaine possession from 100 times that of people convicted of carrying the drug in powdered form to 18 times the sentence. The NAACP supported this legislation as an important first step toward completely eliminating this racially discriminatory sentencing disparity.

The NAACP appreciates all of the hard work that has gone into this legislation, as well as the fact that it is the first time Congress has moved to reduce any mandatory minimum sentence. The NAACP also recognizes and appreciates that everyone involved in the negotiations seems to agree that the current 100:1 sentencing disparity has had a hugely unfair and racially discriminatory impact on racial and ethnic

minority Americans. The NAACP will continue, however, to push for complete elimination of the disparities between crack and powder cocaine sentencing.

Reform our nation's immigration laws:

Americans deserve an immigration system that protects all workers and guarantees the safety of our nation without compromising our fundamental civil rights, human rights and civil liberties. Our nation's immigration policies must be consistent with deeply held NAACP humanitarian and civil rights values and with the need to treat all individuals regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender or religion with respect and dignity. The overhaul of our nation's immigration law is long overdue, as the current system is a blueprint for exploitation of workers both foreign-born and native, is feeding a multi-million criminal enterprise.

The NAACP strongly believes that immigration "reform" cannot focus solely on enforcement but must address current and historic discrimination problems in our immigration system. The U.S. Government immigration reform efforts must be coupled with policies to promote meaningful job training programs, job creation programs and small business development, as well as federal education assistance so that all Americans regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion or national origin will have an opportunity to advance in living wage positions. The federal government must find a way to reward companies that do not decide to place profits above American-based employees and move their operations overseas, thereby removing jobs and other business opportunities from the United States.

There are a large number of immigrants of African descent from Haiti, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, Asia, Central and South America and the Caribbean Islands, the NAACP affirms that any immigration reform must take into consideration the need for just treatment for all people throughout the African Diaspora. The NAACP calls on the United States Congress to increase the minimum wage by instituting a fair "livable wage" which ensures that all American workers, be offered jobs which include livable wages, healthcare benefits, and safe working conditions, legally compliant working hours as well as other benefits and protections afforded hard working American citizens. The NAACP rejects the principle that immigrants are taking jobs that Americans, specifically African American and other unemployed workers, do not want and calls on the federal government (U.S. President, Congress, U.S. Department of Labor) to identify the job categories that are currently unemployable as well as the geographical locales that are either currently experiencing or are likely susceptible to economic dislocation and high worker displacement and provide over five-years a \$3,000 annual tax credit (annually adjusted for inflation) to all American citizens employed in a job category or geographical locale identified by the federal government as an unemployable job category or geographical locale. The NAACP supports comprehensive, fair, and non-discriminatory legislative proposals that allow people to earn the right of citizenship through hard work, after the commitment of several years, and meeting several monetary, security and related requirements.

The NAACP strongly opposes any efforts to criminalize undocumented status of immigrants. The NAACP strongly opposes efforts to penalize individuals or institutions for providing non-compensatory humanitarian assistance to their fellow human beings, regardless of the citizenship status of the person in need of help. The NAACP supports safe, procedurally sound and humane methods to adequately manage the migration of undocumented immigrants into the U.S. The NAACP supports that U.S. immigration policies shall be consistently applied to all immigrants regardless of national origin. The NAACP believes that immigration reform policies should emphasize family unification by not subtracting the visas given to immediate relatives of U.S. citizens from visas available to all family immigrants thereby reducing the family backlogs in which people wait for far too many years to reunite with their closest family members. The NAACP is opposed to proposals to allow the Department of Homeland Security to detain individuals indefinitely.

Enactment of safe, sane and sensible laws to curb gun violence:

The crisis of gun violence in America, specifically in African American communities across our country, demands that we continue our struggle. From mass shootings to street shootings, more than 13,000 Americans were killed by guns in the U.S. in 2015 to date, and 2016 is being predicted to be worse. Today, gun-related homicides are a common cause of death in the United States, killing about as many people as car crashes under normal circumstances. An average of 30 people are killed by gun violence every day, and nearly half of the victims are African American men, despite their comprising just 6% of the U.S. population. In addition to the outrageous number of deaths, countless more have their lives changed forever: survivors crippled, children left as orphans, and families and whole communities terrorized and scarred.

Given these figures, as well as the disproportionate damage gun violence is having on communities of color, the NAACP has advocated for a number of sane, sensible gun laws which will do a lot to eliminate the damage caused by gun violence. Specifically, we are calling for a permanent, nation-wide ban on the sale, transfer, importation, and manufacturing of all high-powered military style semi automatic assault rifles and pistols (assault weapons) and the ammunition clips; a federal law requiring universal background checks for all gun purchases; that the federal government do more to require states and federal agencies to submit information about disqualified individuals, including mentally ill and other dangerous people for inclusion in the National Instant Criminal Background Check System; and that known or suspected terrorists be prohibited from buying guns.

The NAACP is also opposed to proposals which have the potential to increase gun violence or may unnecessarily, disproportionately criminalize African American youth or other youth of color. Specifically, we have asked for an increase in federal resources for more comprehensive security measures and technology in areas surrounding schools and for counselors in schools to help stop all types of violence, rather than some proposals which have called for police officers or armed security personnel to be placed in schools across the country or to arm teachers or administrators. There exists a body of literature that argues that police in schools, sometimes referred to as Resource Officers, has the result of criminalizing non-violent student behavior such as class skipping and other acts of defiance and pipelining kids into the juvenile justice system rather than in-school counseling and discipline. Rather than criminalizing children or adding more guns into the school environment, our nation should focus on providing resources so that more counselors and mental health professionals can be hired and placed in public schools to help assist, monitor and prevent these types of tragedies.

The NAACP also remains opposed to enhanced sentencing provisions which might include more mandatory minimum sentences or the expanded use of the death penalty. We know all too well that mandatory minimum sentences, and the death penalty, are too often applied disproportionately and that racial and ethnic minorities, specifically African Americans, are too often disparately incarcerated much more often.

Lastly, the NAACP has consistently opposed various pieces of legislation which will result in the proliferation of guns and gun violence. Specifically, we have opposed and continue to work against legislation which would restrict states' ability to control who may and may not carry a concealed weapon within their borders, undermine the ability of police to verify the validity of gun permits, and allow gun traffickers to more easily bring illegal guns into their respective states.

Death penalty abolition:

From the days of slavery, through years of lynchings and Jim Crow laws, and even today capital punishment has always been deeply affected by race. Although African Americans make up only 13% of the overall population, 42% of the people currently on death row are black, and 35% of those who have been executed in the United States are African American. A recent study by the Death Penalty Information Center, in fact, found that in Philadelphia the odds of receiving the death sentence are

nearly four times higher if the defendant is African American. The NAACP supports an abolition of the death penalty.

Promote Prisoners' rights, education, training, and good behavior:

There are currently more than 2 million men and women in America's federal and state prisons today. Of those, recent studies show that more than 50% are either functionally illiterate or have marginal reading, writing and math skills. Furthermore, it is estimated that 95% of unskilled jobs in this country require a high school diploma or some work experience. But 40% of released prisoners lack a high school diploma or GED -- more than twice the rate of the general population over 18. In prisons today, only about 1/3 of inmates receive vocational training or work experience designed to improve their ability to obtain legitimate employment once released. Even fewer ex-offenders receive job counseling and placement services after release.

When inmates are better prepared to re-enter communities, they are less likely to commit crimes after they are released. That is why the NAACP supports the Recidivism Reduction and Public Safety Act; this crucial legislation encourages participation in recidivism reduction programs and productive activities, like prison jobs; allows earned time credits for low-risk prisoners of up to 10 days for every 30 days that the prisoner is successfully completing a recidivism reduction program or productive activity; allows medium risk prisoners to earn a 5 day for 30 day time credit while successfully completing recidivism reduction programs and productive activities; and would allow certain low risk offenders who demonstrate exemplary behavior to spend the final portion of their earned credit time on community supervision.

Encouraging youth to stay away from gang activity:

While the perpetrators of these crimes must be punished, it is becoming clear that we must take a proactive approach and try to steer at-risk youth away from gangs and towards being successful, productive members of our communities before a crime is committed. The "Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support and Education Act" (the "*Youth PROMISE Act*") would reduce crime before it happens by investing in research-based programs. The Youth PROMISE Act mobilizes community leaders and invests almost exclusively in prevention and intervention, as opposed to the standard approach, which is obviously not working, of waiting for a crime to occur and then putting the alleged criminals in jail.

Specifically, the *Youth PROMISE Act* allows communities facing the greatest youth gang and crime challenges to form a council to include representatives from law enforcement, court services, schools, social service organizations, health and mental health providers and community-based organizations, including faith-based organizations. These councils will then develop a comprehensive plan for implementing evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies that fit the needs of the particular community. These strategies will target young people who are at-risk of becoming involved, or who are already involved in, gangs or the criminal justice system and redirect them toward productive and law-abiding alternatives.

Reduce Over-Criminalization:

Since 1980, the federal imprisonment rate has grown by an astounding 518% and annual spending on the federal prison system rose 595%. During that same time, most states also recorded sharp increases in imprisonment and associated costs. During the past decade, however, several states have been able, through a reform of their criminal justice systems, been able to reduce their imprisonment rate by 4% and at the same to cut costs by more than \$4.6 billion, and improve public safety. The NAACP supports the *Safe, Accountable, Fair, and Effective (SAFE) Justice Act*, bipartisan legislation that puts lessons learned in the states to work at the federal level.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Support, preserve and protect equal opportunity programs:

Despite the fact that equal opportunity programs, such as affirmative action, have proven to be an effective tool that gives qualified individuals equal access to participate and contribute; access that has been historically denied, they have come under attack again in recent years.

The fact of the matter is that our nation still needs equal opportunity programs in education, employment and contracting. Approximately 18% of all college students are African American, Latino, or American Indian compared with 28% of the college age population. African American men and women comprise less than 2.5% of total employment in the top jobs in the private sector. Based on their number, minority-owned firms received only 57 cents for every federal dollar they would be expected to receive if they were not a minority-owned firm. Equal opportunity programs are making sure that we have competent, educated leaders from and for all communities in the United States. Equal opportunity programs are the epitome of the great American ideal of self-reliance; they give people the opportunity to help themselves.

We need to make our voices heard, and demand that every member of Congress, as well as the President, stand in support of equal opportunity programs including affirmative action.

Eliminate potential discrimination in “faith based” initiatives:

Because of our Nation’s sorry history of bigotry, for decades it has been illegal to discriminate in employment and make hiring decisions based on race or religion. The only exception is faith-based organizations, which are exempted from anti-discrimination provisions in programs using their own money; although until now they had to adhere to basic civil rights laws when using federal monies to support a program.

Under the existing rules, many faith-based organizations of all types get hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars, are still able to pursue their religious missions, and comply with existing anti-discrimination laws. Yet under new proposals from the Bush Administration, faith-based organizations, some of whom, unfortunately, may use religious discrimination as a shield for racial or gender discrimination, will be allowed to legally discriminate against tax-paying Americans in the course of spending federal dollars.

The NAACP recognizes, celebrates and supports the crucial role faith-based organizations have played throughout our nation’s history in addressing some of our country’s most serious ills. Yet led by our Religious Affairs Department, the NAACP remains in firm opposition to any initiative, including the “faith-based” approach that may result in legalized and federally funded discrimination.

Sadly, some lawmakers appear intent on lacing provisions into individual bills that would allow faith-based institutions to discriminate against people because of their religion when implementing programs funded by federal taxpayers’ dollars while eliminating anti-discrimination safeguards.

Study proposals for reparations for descendants of the trans-Atlantic slave trade:

For almost 20 years, Congressman John Conyers (MI) has introduced legislation (which has consistently been given the number H.R. 40) to establish a Commission to Study the Reparations Proposals for African Americans. This commission would be charged with reviewing the institution of slavery, the resulting economic and racial discrimination against African Americans, and the impact these forces have had on living African Americans. The bill would also acknowledge the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality and inhumanity of slavery in the United States.

Develop a federal budget that invests in public education, health care, job training and the protection of civil rights:

A nation's budget is, in its aggregate, a statement about the values and priorities of its people. Each year, the President submits his budget proposal for the following fiscal year to Congress in late February, which sets off the budget process which, ideally, culminates in a federal budget by the beginning of the fiscal year, which is October 1st (for more information on the budget process, see the NAACP Washington Bureau publication, "The path to a federal budget.")

The NAACP has historically supported budget proposals that invest in the American people, all the American people, by ensuring that the health, education, crime prevention, protection of civil rights needs and employment needs are met. Furthermore, we will continue to oppose changes to the budget which might result in a decrease in the "federal safety net," programs that serve and assist the most vulnerable among us, including Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid and long term unemployment benefits.

Paid Sick Leave

The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was signed into law in 1993 by President Bill Clinton, and it allows workers to take up to three months of unpaid leave to care for themselves, a newborn child, an ill parent, or another family member facing a serious illness without the fear of losing their job or their health insurance. Since enactment 13 years ago, the FMLA has been used by American workers more than 200 million times. The FAMILY Act builds upon the success of the of FMLA in that it provides American workers with up to three months of paid sick leave in the event of a serious illness, the birth or adoption of a new child, or if they need to care for a very sick family member.

The FAMILY Act is modeled after successful programs in several states, including California, New Jersey, Rhode Island and most recently New York. The *FAMILY Act* will allow employees to allocate part of their wages to take off up to 60 workdays, or 12 workweeks, in a year to address their own serious health issue or to care for a family member and will provide 66% of their highest annual earning over the last three years. Some of the covered health issues include pregnancy, childbirth, or adoption; caring for an ill family member; and for specific military caregiving and leave purposes. Under this legislation, both employees and employers would contribute a small amount every pay period to a self-sustaining fund. The eligibility rules of the *FAMILY Act* would allow younger, part-time, or low-wage workers to contribute and benefit, regardless of their employer's size or their length of time on the job.

Eliminate high-cost loans, such as debt perpetuating "pay day" loans:

Predatory lenders strip cash from the earnings of working people at astounding rates. Predatory loans, including high-cost lending such as payday loans, car title loans and refund anticipation loans cost American families nearly \$5 billion in fees per year. They trap people in debt and make it impossible for individuals or families to save money, build nest eggs, or sometimes even to simply survive. Nearly 12 million Americans are caught in a cycle of five or more high-cost payday loans per year.

"Payday loans" are perhaps the most common predatory loan. Payday lenders offer small, short-term loans while charging annual interest rates of up to 400%. One of the biggest problems with payday loans is that consumers who use payday lenders are often in desperate debt, and the high interest rate makes it so hard to pay back the loan that they quickly find themselves on the perpetual debt treadmill. When they cannot pay back the original loan, they extend it, often paying the fees and interest several times over. The end result is that many consumers end up paying far more in fees than what they originally borrowed. This is so common that 99% of all payday loans go to repeat borrowers; the typical payday borrower pays almost \$800 on a \$325 loan.

The sad truth is that many payday lenders locate themselves in low-and moderate income neighborhoods as well as communities with large concentrations of racial or ethnic minorities and areas

surrounding military bases. One study found that African American neighborhoods have three times as many payday lending stores per capita as white neighborhoods in North Carolina, even when the average income of the neighborhood is taken into account. Another study showed that in Texas, where 11% of the population is African American, 43% of the payday loans were taken out by blacks. In too many cases, payday lenders are the only financial institutions in a community of color.

The NAACP supports legislation which would establish a new Fee and Interest Rate (FAIR) calculation that includes all interest and fees and creates a cap of 36% for all consumer credit transactions, including all open-end and closed-end consumer credit transactions, including mortgages, car loans, credit cards, overdraft loans, car title loans, refund anticipation loans, and payday loans. That rate is similar to usury caps already enacted in many states and is the same as the cap already in place for military personnel and their families, and we must also ensure that this federal law does not preempt stricter state laws.

Protect Social Security:

Under the current system, Social Security will be unable to meet its financial obligations to beneficiaries by the year 2032. Therefore, over the last few years politicians and others have sought ways to “save” Social Security. While some proposals call for a reduction in benefits, others call for Social Security funds to be invested in the stock market, or “privatized.” Because African Americans and other ethnic minorities tend to be at the low end of the earning scale over their lifetimes, they are generally more dependent upon Social Security in their retirement years. For this reason, any changes in Social Security are of special importance to the NAACP. Specifically, the NAACP has pledged to oppose any proposal that would reduce monthly benefits or eliminate the guarantee of a minimum monthly benefit; or that would raise the retirement age, as African Americans tend to have shorter life expectancies and would thus be disproportionately hurt by any such increase.

Universal, decent & affordable housing:

For close to half of American families, owning an affordable home or even finding a safe and affordable rental unit is financially unattainable. In fact, the problem is getting worse. The number of American families with “worst case” housing needs continues to grow, while the inventory of affordable housing shrinks. Furthermore, statistics show that race and age play a significant role in the ability of a family to own a home. While 71% of Caucasian households own their own home, only 47% of African American and 46% of Hispanic American families own their residences.

Renting a home has also become harder in the last decade. Between 1996 and 1998, rents rose by 1.6% while the median income of renter households grew by only .3%. From 1995 to 1997, the income of the poorest 25% of renter households fell by 2.6%, while rental costs increased by 4.5%. At the same time, well over 100,000 units of housing for very low-income families was demolished without replacement. Lack of safe affordable housing has an enormous impact on American families and our communities. Families with high housing costs are forced to choose between paying for housing and putting food on the table. Children who live in substandard housing are more likely to suffer from debilitating conditions such as asthma and lead poisoning.

In 2008, the NAACP-supported National Housing Trust Fund (NHTF) was created at the federal level. The NHTF will provide funds to states and local municipalities across the nation for the production, construction, preservation and rehabilitation of badly needed homes that are affordable and secure for the lowest-income Americans. In his budget request for fiscal year 2010, President Obama requested that Congress fund the NHTF at \$1 billion as an initial capitalization.

Under the legislation that created the NHTF, 90% of the funds must be used for rental housing that extremely low income families can afford. Data from a 2008 survey shows that nationwide, for every 100 extremely low income renter households, there were only 37 homes available which they could afford, for less than 30% of their income.

The NHTF would also create American jobs: it is estimated that a \$1 billion investment in the NHTF will create 15,100 construction jobs and 3,800 jobs in on-going operations. Furthermore, when low-income Americans are not spending over 30% of their income on housing, they can afford to spend more on food, child care, transportation, and other basic human needs.

Enact a comprehensive program to combat homelessness:

About 3.5 million people in America are likely to experience homelessness in a given year. Of these, 39%, or 1.35 million are children. People of color – particularly African Americans – are a disproportionately large percentage of the homeless population. A 2002 study showed that the urban homeless population is estimated to be 50% African American, 35% white, 12% Hispanic American, 2% Native American and 1% Asian American. Approximately 40% of men who are homeless are American veterans. The composition of the average homeless family is a single parent household headed by an African-American female. Unfortunately, these numbers appear to be on the increase.

To try to address this problem the NAACP supports the comprehensive legislation which includes resolutions putting Congress on record as supporting housing as a basic human right, Universal Health Care and a Living Wage; a dramatic expansion of federal resources for affordable housing and homelessness programs; a dramatic expansion of health care and services for people experiencing homelessness; greater income and work supports for people experiencing homelessness; temporary worker protections; and civil rights protections for people experiencing homelessness.

Provide additional funds for testers to uncover housing discrimination in America:

Currently, despite the enactment of the Fair Housing Law more than 40 years ago, experts estimate that as many as 4 million fair housing violations occur each year. Yet less than 8% of these violations are actually reported to federal, state or local housing authorities and only a handful of those are investigated and result in charges. The result is, sadly, that housing discrimination is alive and well and allowed to flourish in America today.

The NAACP therefore supports increases in funding for both the Fair Housing Initiatives Program (“FHIP”) and the Fair Housing Assistance Program (“FHAP”), through which the federal government provides assistance to states and local governments to investigate and enforce Fair Housing complaints within their jurisdictions.

Employment non-discrimination:

It is currently legal in 27 states to discriminate in hiring decisions based on an individual’s perceived sexual orientation. The *Employment Non Discrimination Act* expands federal protections against employment discrimination to include sexual orientation. It also allows every American the right to be free from discrimination because of personal characteristics unrelated to successful job performance.

Enable workers to join a union:

For almost a century, unions have helped American workers increase their standards of living for themselves and their families on many fronts. Currently, union workers earn 26% more in median weekly wages than non-union workers; unionized women earn 31% more than their non-union counterparts, and black union workers earn 29% more than non-union African Americans. Furthermore, 75% of union workers have health benefits, compared to 49% of non-union workers. 69% of union workers have short-term disability coverage, compared to 30% of their non-union counterparts. Finally, 82% of union workers get life insurance, compared with 51% of non-union workers.

The impact of unions – ensuring that all working Americans are treated well and share in the prosperity – cannot be overstated. Despite the continuing strength and advocacy power of unions, however, some employers continue to treat workers poorly, not paying them a fair wage or providing them with necessary benefits: the purchasing power of workers’ wages is 5% below where it stood 30 years ago.

CEO pay has continued to rise and is currently more than 1,000 times the earnings of the average worker. The richest 13,000 US families have nearly as much income as the poorest 200 million combined. And some employers continue to fight the legitimate organization of unions. 70% of American employers in manufacturing threaten to close the plant if workers choose a union. Furthermore, in the 1950's, when 30% of workers belonged to unions, only a few hundred workers suffered retaliation for trying to organize a union; in 1969, the number of workers suffering retaliation was just over 6,000 and by the 1990's more than 20,000 workers each year were victims of discrimination when they tried to organize a union.

To address this situation, the ***"Employee Free Choice Act"*** will make sure workers have a fair chance to exercise their democratic right to choose a union by making it easier for a union to act as a mediator for workers if the majority of workers have provided authorized signatures indicating that they want the union to act as their representative, and increasing penalties for violations against employees who are trying to organize a union.

Equal pay for equal work:

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, women who work full time still earn, on average, only 77 cents for every dollar men earn. The statistics are even worse for women of color. African-American women make only 62 cents, and Hispanic women only 54 cents, for every dollar earned by white, non-Hispanic men. These gaps translate into a loss of almost \$20,000 a year for African-American women and almost \$24,000 annually for Hispanic women.

The Equal Pay Act of 1963, mandates that employers pay equal wages to men and women who perform substantially the same work. While the Equal Pay Act has helped to narrow the wage gap between men and women in our workforce, significant disparities remain and must be addressed. To eliminate these continuing disparities, the NAACP supports the Paycheck Fairness Act. The *Paycheck Fairness Act* closes loopholes in the Equal Pay Act of 1963 that have diluted its effectiveness in combating unfair and unequal pay.

Enact comprehensive, aggressive job creation legislation that focuses on the needs of American communities as well:

Unemployment rates nation-wide are critically high: In August, 2011, the official national unemployment rate was reported at over 9%. Among African Americans, the rate is much higher, at 16.7%. For African American males the rate is 17.5%, and for black teens it's nearly 41%. 1.4 million African Americans have been out of work for more than 6 months. That is why the NAACP was so encouraged by President Obama's jobs proposal –announced September 9, 2011 – and his statement that "inaction is not an option". The NAACP applauds the President and Congress, which has now begun to focus on the need for an aggressive, national job creation program and address an issue that the NAACP has been calling a very real and crucial need for a long time.

The *American Jobs Act* will expand opportunities for the long-term unemployed to reenter the workforce, provide incentives for businesses to hire and make investments in revitalizing schools, infrastructure and neighborhoods. It also extends unemployment insurance to benefit the long-term unemployed and their families. The plan supports summer / year-round jobs for youth. The tax cuts portion will benefit over 100,000 African American small businesses and will help African American owned small businesses access capital.

The *American Jobs Act* is also proposing to invest \$15 billion in a national effort to put construction workers on the job rehabilitating and refurbishing hundreds of thousands of vacant and foreclosed homes and businesses. In addition, his plan would invest \$25 billion in school infrastructure to modernize at least 35,000 public schools, with the funds targeted at the lowest income districts. The bill would also invest \$35 billion to prevent layoffs of up to 280,000 public school teachers, while hiring tens of thousands more teachers and keeping first responders, such as cops and firefighters on the job.

Lastly, the *American Jobs Act* would target the long-term unemployed by proposing a tax credit of up to \$4,000 to employers for hiring workers who have been looking for a job for more than 6 months. The President's plan also specifically prohibits employers from discriminating against unemployed workers.

The NAACP plans on keeping job creation and anti-employment discrimination a priority for American lawmakers until people and our economy are back at work. As such, we will continue to review and assess all job creation plans and strongly promote and advocate for those which will offer the greatest amount of help to those most in need.

Support for a fair minimum wage:

The *Raise the Wage Act* will increase the federal minimum wage to \$12.00 by 2020 by first raising it to \$8.00 and then increasing it by \$1.00 per year until it reaches \$12.00 in 2020; the bill will gradually eliminate the sub-minimum wage for tipped workers; and it will index the minimum wage to median wages, so as wages grow for the workforce overall, they will also grow for the lowest-wage workers in this country.

At a time when wage stagnation and income inequality pose serious threats to our families and our economy, the *Raise the Wage Act* would begin to reverse that cycle and raise pay broadly across the bottom of the workforce. By raising the minimum wage to \$12 by 2020, it will restore the minimum wage to roughly half of the average wage—which is where the federal minimum wage stood 40-50 years ago when the nation enjoyed strong growth and low unemployment.

The *Raise the Wage Act* will deliver long-overdue raises to a large segment of the workforce: more than 1 in 4 workers. That workforce is composed not of teens, but almost entirely adults—nearly 90 percent. The average age of workers who would get a raise is 36, nearly half have some years of college education, and 20 percent hold associate's degrees or higher. More than 27 percent are working parents with children, and half currently have family incomes of less than \$40,000 per year.

These are the frontline workers who make America run. Yet they are struggling as our economy enjoys strong growth but remains tilted towards low-paying jobs. The time for the *Raise the Wage Act* is long overdue, and we cannot delay in working toward its passage.

Protect union / collective bargaining rights of public employees:

The governors of Wisconsin, Ohio and Indiana, as well as an additional two dozen other states have introduced budget proposals which attempt to limit, restrict, reduce or eviscerate the salaries, benefits and collective bargaining rights of state employees. Affected employees include teachers, nurses, police officers and firefighters among others. The NAACP is steadfastly opposed to initiatives which would balance state budgets on the backs of hardworking employees and their families, and intends to fight them at the local, state and federal levels.

The NAACP urges state governments to focus on sustaining and creating living wage jobs and restoring the middle class. Our firefighters, teachers and nurses as well as other public servants are critical, taxpaying members of our communities who provide vital services. Budgets should not be balanced by harming American families. We cannot cut our way out of the recession. Job creation, the development of living wage, sustainable employment, increases our tax revenues and consumer dollars which are the policies that will grow our economy and ultimately reduce our deficit. We strongly urge the restoration of a balance and the growth of America's middle class. We are further convinced that working Americans need to be able to use the strength of collective bargaining rights to fight for better wages and benefits, jobs security and safer work places for everyone.

Led by Wisconsin, Ohio and Indiana, as many as 2 dozen other states are said to be considering similar draconian cuts which may have a debilitating effect on the rights of public employees to form or join a

union and bargain collectively for their salaries and benefits from this year on. If enacted, the impact of these cuts and new restrictions will have serious and adverse impacts on middle class Americans, as well as those aspiring to the middle class. This is especially true of the African American middle class, since 25% of all black college graduates are currently employed in the public sector.

On a larger scale, these fiscal attacks on the American middle class, American families and unions are but one of several areas in which some states are trying to turn back the clock on progress it has taken us so long to obtain. Eliminating the rights of state employees to collectively bargain is the beginning of a state strategy being implemented to curb our rights. The NAACP is also deeply concerned about state attempts to restrict voting rights through discriminatory photo identification requirements and to re-segregate public education.

Ban the use of credit checks by potential employers:

The practice, used by a growing number of employers, to check a person's credit score when considering him or her for a job, is both superfluous and discriminatory. Due to misleading and miscalculated credit scores, African Americans and Hispanics have, on average, substantially lower than scores for Caucasian Americans. The practice is also counterproductive, because normally an individual's credit score in no way indicates or predicts the type of employee he or she may be. Sadly, the use of credit checks to determine employment is not only misleading and discriminatory, but also a growing trend.

Despite the fact that several studies by well respected, unbiased groups have confirmed that an individual's credit history does not predict job performance, currently 60% of all employers admit to performing credit checks on potential employees. This number is up from just over 40% of all employers less than two years ago. This growing trend is extremely problematic for the NAACP, as there appears to be a consensus that credit scores are discriminatory. According to one recent study, the average credit score of African Americans and Hispanics is roughly 5% to 35% lower than the score for white Americans. Furthermore, given the on-going and perilously high unemployment rate among Americans, and the fact that the unemployment rate is consistently almost double the national rate when you are talking about racial and ethnic minority Americans –and the impact unemployment can have on a person's credit history – the NAACP is concerned that these disparities in credit ratings will only grow in the future. Thus reviewing a person's credit background as part of a pre-employment check is akin to subjecting an individual to a classic "catch 22", and this is disproportionately a predicament being faced by people of color.

EDUCATION ISSUES

Reduce financial disparities between schools:

Despite the equal protection clause of the U.S. Constitution, decades of civil rights laws and volumes of talk about improving our schools, a dramatic disparity in the quality of public education continues to plague our nation. The quality of our children's educations, and the amount of resources dedicated to our schools, varies radically based on where you live; yet all children must take the same standardized tests regardless of the conditions of their school. Schools are then rated on how the students performed on these tests, regardless of any other factors, such as the number of certified teachers at the school, the quality and quantity of the textbooks being used, whether modern technology is available, including computers and internet access or the size of the classrooms.

A glaring example of this inequity can be found in the State of New York, which recently released information showing that in the Bridgehampton Union Free School District in Suffolk County, the per pupil expenditure is \$33,408 per year; the Portville School District in Cattaraugus County has an annual per pupil expenditure of \$6,229, a spending gap of more than \$27,000 per pupil per year. The *Students' Bill of Rights* would require states to work on reducing these disparities between school districts.

Full funding for federal education programs:

On 12/10/2015, at a White House ceremony, President Obama signed into law the final version of S. 1177, the *Every Student Succeeds Act*, otherwise known as the reauthorization (or updating) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) or No Child Let Behind (NCLB).

The *Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015* builds on past versions of the ESEA / NCLB law while addressing some of the key challenges currently being faced. Included in the final version of the legislation are provisions which:

- Puts in place new assessments, accountability, and improvement systems that will close achievement gaps with evidence-based strategies that meet the unique needs of students and schools;
- Requires states to set high standards for all children;
- Requires meaningful state and local action in every school where students – or any subgroup of students – aren't learning. It requires that any action taken to support school improvement is driven by student outcomes – and that poverty can't be used as an excuse for not stepping up to better serve students;
- Supports teachers and school leaders with resources and professional development;
- Provides dedicated funding to improve student access to critical support and community services and improved technology in our nation's most disadvantaged schools;
- Helps states and school districts reduce the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices by allowing funding to be used for Youth PROMISE plans;
- Drives federal dollars to the schools and communities that need them the most. It requires transparent reporting of data to ensure schools are responsible for not only the achievement of all their students, but also for the equitable allocation of resources to support student learning. States and districts will be required, for the first time, to address resource inequities in school improvement;
- Recognizes the importance of early learning by authorizing a program to ensure our nation's most vulnerable students aren't starting kindergarten late;
- Ensures the federal government maintains authority to implement the law and to hold bad actors accountable for not complying with federal law.

Public school construction, repair and renovation:

While the average U.S. public school building is 40 years in age, most experts agree that a large percentage of school buildings in low income, urban communities are decidedly older. Surveys have indicated that many of our nation's school districts are facing costs they can't afford for new construction, repair, renovation, modernization and deferred maintenance needs. Conservative estimates suggest that our nation has a school maintenance and repair backlog totaling \$270 billion. Problems include dysfunctional HV/AC systems; broken plumbing, roofs, windows, and doors; fire code and other safety issues; interior and exterior painting needs; sidewalks and parking lots in desperate need of repaving; electrical and lighting upgrades; locker and boiler replacements; bus-depot repairs; masonry repairs; security systems; and outdated technology. Students already encounter numerous distractions throughout the school day without having to work around such issues as cold classrooms in the winter and/or asbestos falling from the ceilings. School districts across the country have been delaying such school improvements for years, even as student enrollment levels have continued to rise, a problem exacerbated during this recession.

At the same time, our national unemployment – which remains above 9% -- rate is unacceptably, stubbornly high. The unemployment rate among African Americans is roughly double the national rate, nearing 17%. Approximately 25 million Americans are currently unemployed or underemployed.

To help address these two major problems, the *Fix America's Schools Today Act*, or the *FAST Act* would immediately put people back to work by investing \$25 billion into deferred maintenance and repair of our nation's public K-12 schools. The \$25 billion investment in public school infrastructure will

modernize at least 35,000 public elementary and high schools. An additional \$5 billion would be invested in renovating and modernizing facilities at our community colleges, the first step in providing a pathway to higher education for millions of Americans. Such a national project would create jobs for construction workers and others affected by the jobs crisis making improvements to the health and safety of our schools with positive ripple effects throughout the U.S. economy. It is estimated that every \$1 billion invested in school construction would create up to 10,000 jobs.

Oppose discriminatory "high-stakes" educational testing of public school students:

Many states are relying on a single examination to determine important decisions (such as graduating from high school or promoting students to the next grade). While these "high-stakes" tests serve an important role in educational settings, they are not perfect and when used improperly can create real barriers to educational opportunity and progress. Furthermore, one-time, standardized tests may have a disparate impact on students of color, many of whom have not had the benefit of high quality teaching staff, adequate classroom resources, or instruction on the content and skills being tested by the standardized tests. The NAACP supports legislation to require that "high stakes" decisions be based upon multiple measures of student performance and, when standardized tests are used by schools and school districts, that the tests be valid and reliable, measure what the student was taught and provide appropriate accommodations for disabled children. The NAACP also supports legislation to require that individual students are not unfairly denied critical educational opportunities because of their performance on a single, standardized test.

Oppose publically funded private school vouchers:

The NAACP has consistently supported investments in our public schools that will benefit all students, not just potentially a few. School vouchers do not offer a collective benefit. Vouchers take critical resources away from our neighborhood public schools, the very schools that are attended by the vast majority of African American students. Furthermore, private and parochial schools are not required to observe federal nondiscrimination laws even if they receive federal funds through voucher programs. In fact, many voucher proposals often contain language specifically intended to circumvent civil rights laws, and many proponents insist voucher funding does not flow to the school but instead to the parent or student precisely to avoid any civil rights obligations. This specificity in language allows private institutions to discriminate on the basis of religion, gender, disability and language proficiency – and even merit, again, despite the fact that they are receiving taxpayer funds.

Maintain the federal role in ensuring a decent public education available to all:

The federal government has, for the past 50 years, played an important and historic role in public education, most notably through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). During the 50 years since the ESEA was originally passed the federal government has promoted educational opportunity and protected the rights and interests of students disadvantaged by discrimination, poverty, and other conditions that may limit their educational attainment. This role must be maintained in any bill to reauthorize the ESEA, along with ensuring that each state adopts college and career-ready state standards, aligned statewide annual assessments, and a state accountability system to improve instruction and learning for students in low-performing schools.

Repeal law disallowing students convicted of minor drug offenses from receiving financial aid:

Under a current federal law that took effect in 1998, if you need some financial help in order to go to college, one drug conviction can make you temporarily ineligible, and multiple convictions may lead to a permanent bar on receiving aid. While the goal of this law, to ensure that drug dealers do not set up shop on our nations college campuses with federal backing, was laudable, the result is in fact racially and economically discriminatory and adversely impacts tens of thousands of lower-income young adults.

In fact, as a result of this law, more than 93 thousand young men and women, a disproportionate number of whom are racial and ethnic minorities and the vast majority of whom come from families with total annual incomes of less than \$30,000, though they've paid their debt to society, are being

unfairly and unnecessarily denied access to a higher education, the only sure way to end the cycle of drug addiction, crime, violence poverty and incarceration. Instead of affecting major drug dealers, the group this law was intended to affect, this provision has in-fact primarily impacted students convicted of minor possession and nonviolent related offenses.

Increase funding for historically black colleges and universities:

There are 103 historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) across the nation. In 1965, Congress officially defined an HBCU as an institution whose principal mission was the education of black Americans and was accredited and established before 1964. HBCUs play a critical role in the American higher education system. For most of America's history, African Americans who received a college education could only get it from an HBCU. Today, HBCUs remain one of the surest ways for an African American, or student of any race, to receive a quality education. Although HBCUs amount to only 3.3 % of all institutions of higher education, HBCU's award nearly 50 percent of all bachelor's degrees received by black students in the natural sciences, a little more than 25 % of all bachelor's degrees award in engineering and nearly 25% of all bachelor's degrees to black Americans. Furthermore, fifty percent of African American teachers with four-year degrees graduate from an HBCU and HBCUs graduate disproportionate percentages of African Americans who go directly into graduate or professional schools. HBCUs are among the most diverse colleges and universities with 30% student diversity and 40% faculty diversity, on average. Perhaps one of the most amazing features about HBCUs is that even with all of these successes, HBCUs cost, on average, \$10,000 less than their private counterparts in higher education.

Despite the compelling and quantifiable positive attributes HBCUs provide to African Americans and our nation as a whole, HBCUs receive disproportionately fewer public and private dollars than other private colleges and universities. The federal dollars awarded to HBCUs have not kept pace with the increasing campus costs associated with expenditures for technology, energy, security, and other expenses.

Make college more affordable for all Americans / Increase funding for Federal Pell Grants:

Federal financial student aid is perhaps more important now than ever before. For years, college costs have risen at rates higher than inflation. Over the last 30 years, tuition at public 4-year colleges has increased by about 50%, and tuition at private 4-year colleges has increased by a whopping 110%. In 2003 the average costs were \$12,841 per year for students attending public colleges and universities, and \$27,677 per year for students at private colleges and universities. Given the growing cost of college, and its increased importance, most (62%) full time postsecondary students received some sort of financial aid, including student loans, Pell Grants, fellowships, scholarships, and work study. The typical student now graduates from college with \$17,500 in total federal student loan debt. According to the US Department of Education, as many as 200,000 potential college students are forced to delay or forgo attending college due to the cost.

Furthermore, it has become increasingly important for workers to possess a college degree. In 1997, college graduates earned 1.7 times more than Americans with a high school diploma. Over a lifetime, an individual with a college degree will earn more than \$1 million more than someone without their postsecondary degree. Currently, although more than 16% of college-aged Americans are black, African Americans represent only 11% of the current college population. Furthermore, 16% of African Americans had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 32% of white Americans.

Pell Grants are awards provided by the Federal government on a need-based basis to low-income undergraduate and certain postbaccalaureate students in order to promote access to postsecondary education. Unlike student loans, Pell grants do not need to be repaid, and are thus increasingly important as student debt is a growing reality for too many Americans. Need-based grants such as Pell grants increase college enrollment among low-and-moderate income students, and Pell Grants make post-secondary options possible for millions of Americans. Furthermore, they are utilized disproportionately by racial and ethnic minority students: more than 60% of African-American

undergraduates and half of Hispanic undergraduates rely on Pell Grants to attend school. Nearly nine million Americans overall depend on Pell Grants to attend and complete college. Research has shown that need-based grant aid, like Pell Grants, increases college enrollment among low- and moderate-income students and reduces their likelihood of dropping out.

Furthermore, a college education is increasingly important: Young adults with only a high school diploma are almost 3 times as likely to be unemployed, and earn less than three-fifths as much as those with a bachelor's degree.

Despite this obvious need for Pell grants, over the last five years Congress has approved their diminishing capacity. As recently as in the 1980s, the maximum Pell Grant covered more than half the cost of attending a four-year public college. In the next school year, however, the maximum Pell Grant (\$5,730) is expected to cover less than one-third of the cost of a public 4-year college—the lowest purchasing power level since the start of the program. As a result of the decreasing power of the Pell grant, grant recipients are already more than twice as likely as their non-Pell peers to have student loans (61% vs. 29%). 9 out of 10 Pell recipients have additional student loans that are on average \$4,750 more than their non-Pell peers. Compounding this problem is the increasing cost of college: due largely to cuts in state education budgets, college tuition has grown by 50% from 2004 to 2014.

To address this problem the Middle Class CHANCE (Creating Higher education Affordability Necessary to Compete Economically) Act would increase the maximum Pell Grant award by \$4,040, restore year-round awards so that more students may continue their studies in the summer, and increase a student's Pell eligibility to 15 semesters so that it aligns with existing satisfactory academic progress regulations. These are critical improvements that will allow the Pell program to better accomplish its mission of helping low- and moderate-income students' access to college.

HEALTH ISSUES

Full funding for aids prevention, treatment & education:

Every hour, two young Americans become newly infected with HIV. This means that every day, almost 50 young Americans lives are condemned to a hell that few of us can even imagine, with no hope of ever seeing or contributing to the future. Furthermore, AIDS and HIV are disproportionately invading and destroying communities of color in the United States as well as around the world. AIDS is the number one killer of African American men ages 25 to 44 and the number one killer of African American women ages 15 to 44. While African Americans make up approximately 12% of the entire U.S. population, we account for 45% of all cases of AIDS reported in 1997. There are fewer HIV-positive people in seven of the 15 target countries of the Global AIDS Initiative than there are HIV-positive African Americans here at home.

Hispanic Americans, like African Americans, are also disproportionately affected. While Latino Americans comprise only 12% of the overall population, they account for 21% of the AIDS cases reported in 1997. AIDS is the second leading cause of death for Hispanic Americans between the ages of 25 and 44. Compounding the horror, African American children account for 58% of pediatric AIDS cases in the United States. Hispanic American children account for 23% of the cumulative pediatric AIDS cases.

While much was done to increase AIDS awareness in ethnic minority communities in the United States, there is still much more to do. Thus the NAACP Washington Bureau is committed to working with Congress and the Administration to increase monies for AIDS prevention and treatment. The Washington Bureau is committed to working with the NAACP Health Department to see that everything that can be done is done to stop the dramatic increase of AIDS in our communities.

For more than two decades, however, Washington has been fighting the AIDS epidemic with one hand tied behind its back. Studies have shown that Syringe Exchange Programs (SEPs) are effective in reducing HIV and hepatitis infection rates among injection drug users and their sexual partners. Furthermore, SEPs promote public health and safety by taking syringes off the streets, and protect innocent bystanders, including children, from injuries. SEPs also provide critical health care services including HIV testing, counseling, education, and referral to drug addiction treatment centers. Sadly, since 1988 Congress has banned local and state public health authorities from using federal funds for Syringe Exchange Programs.

In the summer of 2009, the House of Representatives took a historic step by removing the ban on federal funding for SEPs. Unfortunately, in doing so the House added a restriction that requires that federally supported SEPs not operate within 1,000 feet of various places frequented by youth. The NAACP strongly opposed the 1,000-foot restriction as it would have made it nearly impossible to utilize federal resources for most SEPs and severely hamper efforts to implement such programs, especially in congested urban areas where health officials assert the need is greatest. It would have also prevented local authorities from making their own decisions on how to best utilize federal funds in the fight against the spread of HIV / AIDS. Officials in cities like Chicago, New York and Washington say there are few, if any, places that could house a needle exchange under that rule.

Fortunately, Congress has decided to lift the 23-year old ban on federal funding for needle exchange programs and not impose the “1,000 foot rule.” Language lifting the ban and allowing local public health and law enforcement officials to determine where needle exchange programs should be housed – and where they shouldn’t be – was included in the Omnibus Appropriations bill for fiscal year 2010. This bill passed the Congress and was signed into law by President Obama in December, 2009.

Full implementation of health care reform:

The new leadership in the U.S. House of Representatives, which was sworn in at noon on Wednesday, January 5, 2011, is leading a charge to repeal the Health Care reform legislation, which the NAACP fought so hard to see enacted last year. Less than a year after President Obama signed the landmark *Affordable Care Act* into law, a final vote on the proposal to repeal this crucial legislation is scheduled for next Wednesday, January 12, 2011. The *Affordable Care Act* represents a major overhaul of our Nation’s health care system and will provide more than 32 million Americans, who had been uninsured with health care coverage.

Other provisions in this law which were strongly supported by the NAACP would :

- Take an aggressive approach to address the health care disparities that continue to plague so many racial and ethnic minority communities.
- Outlaw discrimination against Americans with pre-existing conditions.
- Not allow insurance companies to deny coverage to a person because he or she has gotten sick.
- Expand dependent care so that older children can be covered under their parents’ policies.
- Create state-based exchanges through which people without employer-provided coverage can purchase health insurance.
- Provide federal subsidies to people who must purchase their own health insurance and earn between 133% and 400% of the federal poverty level (\$24,352 and \$73,240 for a family of 3 in 2010).
- Increase in the number of children from low-and middle-income families who have health insurance.
- Shave \$130 billion off the deficit, according to the Congressional Budget Office, the entire package will cost \$940 billion over 10 years. It is also, expected to cut more than a trillion dollars from the deficit over 20 years.

Now is the time when we should be concentrating on fully implementing this new law so that the maximum number of Americans can enjoy the benefits of health insurance while at the same time minimizing the costs and risks associated to businesses and the economy overall. We have come too far

in the struggle for health care equality to turn back the clock to the days of too many Americans being uninsured or facing distasteful medical decisions because they are underinsured.

End childhood obesity:

Childhood obesity occurs among African American children at disproportionate rates: African American children and adolescents are more likely to be overweight and obese than their Caucasian peers. Currently, over 35% of African American children ages 2 to 19 are overweight or obese, compared with less than 32% of the general population in the same age range. Furthermore, although the percentage has decreased, the current obesity rate, as defined as being in the 95th percentile for BMI (Body Mass Index) among African American youths is still higher by almost 4% than the national average of 16.9%. The consequences of this disparity are as glaring and as dangerous as you might expect. Overweight and obese children are more likely to suffer from serious, lifelong illnesses than their healthy-weight peers. The higher prevalence of overweight and obesity among African American children places them at a greater risk of developing chronic diseases including Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and other cardiovascular disease risk factors, asthma, sleep apnea, and social discrimination.

To address these problems the “Fit for Life Act of 2014” increases access to healthy food in many of the neighborhoods where fresh produce is rarely seen, and among many of the federal programs which serve primarily low income and disproportionately racial and ethnic minority children (such as school lunch programs); it improves prevention and treatment measures; and it promotes physical activity.

Protect Medicare & Medicaid

Created in 1965, Medicaid currently serves more than 50 million Americans. It was originally intended to provide health care to low-income Americans who would not otherwise be able to afford it. Medicaid is jointly funded by the states and the federal government, and is managed by the states.

Dramatic cuts to Medicaid would be disproportionately severe among racial and ethnic minority Americans since we currently comprise 56% of the Medicaid population. Specifically, in 2009, 27% of African Americans—10 million people, including 6 million children—were covered by Medicaid. African Americans account for 1 in 5 Medicaid enrollees. In 2009, 27% of Hispanic Americans—13 million people, including 9 million children—were covered by Medicaid; Hispanics account for 1 in 4 Medicaid enrollees.

To compensate for the steep reductions in federal funding, states would be forced to make up the difference by contributing more or, if they cannot or will not provide additional funding they will likely cap enrollment, substantially scale back eligibility, and / or curtail benefits. Since most states in our country are suffering from budget shortfalls now, it is unlikely they will be able to compensate for any reduction in the federal contribution. Those most at risk of not receiving adequate health care under this proposal are seniors (communities of color currently make up roughly 43% of the elderly Medicaid population); people with disabilities (communities of color currently make up roughly 43% of the Medicaid population with disabilities); children (59% of children currently enrolled in Medicaid represent communities of color); working parents and pregnant women (communities of color represent 61% of the adult (parents and pregnant women) Medicaid population).

VOTING RIGHTS

Expand access to the polls for all eligible voters

In 2002, following the 2000 Presidential election debacle, Congress passed the *Help America Vote Act*. The NAACP supported the *Help American Vote Act* as we saw it as an important step toward ensuring that every eligible American who wants to vote can, and that every vote is counted. While we have seen some real progress since the enactment of the *Help America Vote Act*, the 2004 and 2008 Presidential elections and the 2006 mid-term election clearly demonstrated that there is still much more to be done.

To address many of these problems, the NAACP calls for stronger federal laws to protect and enhance the rights of all Americans to cast a free and unfettered vote and to ensure that their vote is counted. Specifically, the NAACP supports the Voter Empowerment Act, would expand and protect voters' access to the polls and would increase accountability and integrity among election officials and poll workers. It also would expand eligibility to allow all ex-offenders who have been released from prison (even those who may still be on probation or parole) to register and vote in federal elections.

Specifically, the *Voter Empowerment Act* would:

- guarantee early voting – require that every state establish early voting sites that are open at least 15 days prior to a general election day;
- require automatic registration – the bill would use modern technology to automatically and permanently register all eligible voters;
- allow same-day registration throughout the country – it would ensure allow voters to register to vote on election day at their polling place;
- ensure on-line voter registration – the *Voter Empowerment Act* would ensure that on-line voter registration is a viable option nationally;
- outlaw “voter caging” – makes illegal a practice by which mail is sent to a registered voter's address and, if the mail is returned as "undeliverable" or if it is delivered and the voter does not respond, his or her registration is challenged;
- clarify and strengthen the use of provisional ballots – ensures that provisional ballots are counted;
- make voter intimidation and deception punishable by law – with strong and tough penalties so that people who commit these crimes suffer more than just a slap on the wrist, and establish a process for reaching out to misinformed voters with accurate information so they can cast their votes in time;
- re-enfranchise ex-offenders – it incorporates the provisions of the NAACP-supported “Democracy Restoration Act” by allowing ex-offenders, once they are out of prison, the opportunity to register and vote in federal elections without challenges or complication;
- encourage youth voters – the Voter Empowerment Act requires colleges and universities to offer and encourage voter registration to all students;
- assure voting by overseas residents – it increases assurances that Americans who may be living overseas, especially those serving our country in the armed services, can cast a valid vote and be assured that their vote was counted.

The right of all eligible citizens to vote and to have their vote count is the cornerstone of our democracy, and it is a fundamental civil right guaranteed by our Constitution. The NAACP believes strongly that it is the obligation of Congress to ensure that everything that can be done will be done to ensure that every eligible American is allowed to vote and to be sure that his or her vote has been counted.

End deceptive practices in elections:

Unfortunately, some people are so desperate to win elections that they resort to deceptive practices – misinformation and lies – to try to keep legitimate voters away from the polls or to support candidates whom they might not otherwise vote for. It is even more unfortunate that these practices often target and exploit vulnerable populations, such as racial or ethnic minorities, the disabled and / or the poor.

To address these undemocratic, disenfranchising and immoral activities, the *Deceptive Practices and Voter Intimidation Prevention Act* seeks to address the real harm of these crimes – people who are prevented from voting by misinformation – by establishing a process for reaching out to misinformed voters with accurate information so they can cast their votes in time. The bill also makes voter intimidation and deception punishable by law, and it contains strong penalties so that people who commit these crimes suffer more than just a slap on the wrist.

Oppose photo identification requirements for voting:

The right of all eligible citizens to vote and to have their vote count is the cornerstone of our democracy, and it is a fundamental civil right guaranteed by our Constitution. The NAACP believes strongly that it is the obligation of Congress to ensure that everything that can be done will be done to ensure that every eligible American is allowed to vote and to be sure that his or her vote has been counted.

Unfortunately, some Members of Congress are also seeking to limit voting rights by introducing legislation to require that all Americans present a government-approved photo identification before voting. Specifically, some bills would place an added burden of requiring a government-approved photo identification before voting. This flies in the face of our Constitutionally guaranteed right to cast a free and unfettered ballot, as well as the intent of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which prohibits state and local governments from establishing laws or policies which would have a discriminatory effect on the ability of certain groups to vote. This requirement would have a disparate impact on the ability of certain groups, most notably racial and ethnic minority Americans, the elderly and low-income Americans, many of whom are less likely to have or carry a photo ID or have the means to secure such an identification. Lastly, these bills do nothing to address many of the actual, documented problems of election and voter fraud which continue to plague our electoral process and our democracy, including the improper purges of voters, distributing false information about when and where to vote, stuffing ballot boxes, and tampering with registration forms, most of which are perpetrated by corrupt election officials, not voters.

Campaign Finance Reform:

It is no secret that the role of money in politics is ever increasing, who stands for office, who wins, and, most critically, the eventual public policy Congress enacts. Big money is the main reason Congress is increasingly out of step with the interests of hard working, everyday Americans, particularly on issues of economic insecurity, and particularly with racial and ethnic minorities and low-income Americans. It is becoming increasingly clear that income and wealth inequality is rooted in political inequality. Until we break this dependence on big money special interests in our campaign system, the policy agenda for everyday Americans will be thwarted – whether it be improving Americans’ economic security, fighting for workers’ rights, improving stewardship of environment, you name it. The two basic imperatives of a healthy democracy— the right to vote and the right to have your voice be heard, for your vote to *mean something*, our protections against big money buying elections —desperately need to be strengthened. Too many candidates are too busy talking to Political Action Committees (PACs) or special interests to listen to their local community-based constituents.

To address this compelling problem, the NAACP supports the *Government By the People Act* in the U.S. House of Representatives; and the *Fair Elections Now Act* in the U.S. Senate as well as a proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution which would allow the U.S. Congress and States to limit campaign contributions. The *Government By the People Act* and the *Fair Elections Now Act* are comprehensive reform packages designed to combat the influence of big money politics, raise civic engagement and amplify the voices of everyday Americans. Specifically, this legislation would provide all Americans with a \$25 refundable tax credit to help spur contributions to candidates for Congressional office and establish a fund to multiply the impact of small dollar donations (\$150 or less per election cycle) by matching the donations, as long as the candidate receiving the donations agrees to forgo big money donations from special interests. The legislation would also prevent Super PACs and Dark Money interests from drowning out the voices of constituents by providing citizen-funded candidates who are able to raise at least \$50,000 in additional small-dollar donations within the final 60 days before an election to be eligible for additional resources.

The NAACP supports legislation which would restore the confidence of the voters that their federally elected officials are listening to them. It would also allow candidates to spend less time talking to special interests and more time listening to their potential constituents.

Promote civic participation and rehabilitation by reinstating voting rights for felony offenders who are no longer incarcerated:

Felony disenfranchisement laws, which vary from state to state, currently disqualify almost 4 million, or 1 in 50, American adults from voting. 13% of African American males are prohibited from voting because of these laws. Three-fourths of these disqualified voters are not in prison, but are on probation, parole or are ex-offenders. Moreover, the removal of voting privileges is imposed regardless of the nature or seriousness of the offense; thus in some states, you can lose your right to vote forever because you once wrote a bad check. The *Democracy Restoration Act* would allow felons who are no longer incarcerated to reintegrate themselves back into society and vote in federal elections.

Repair, restore, and strengthen the 1965 Voting Rights Act:

The *Voting Rights Act of 1965* (VRA) was enacted to insure that no one, including federal, state or local government may in any way impede people from registering to vote or voting because of their race or ethnicity. Most provisions in the VRA, and specifically the portions that guarantee that no one may be denied the right to vote because of his or her race or color, are permanent.

Section 5 of the VRA requires certain states or jurisdictions, which have an established history of laws or policies which result in the disenfranchisement of a group of racial or ethnic minority voters to obtain advance approval or “preclearance” from the US Department of Justice or the US District Court in D.C. before they can make any changes to voting practices or procedures. Examples of these changes also include “redistricting,” or the re-drawing of congressional district boundaries or any change in the date, time, place, or manner under which an election is held. Federal approval is to be given as soon as the state or jurisdiction proves that the proposed change would not abridge the right to vote on account of race or color.

In 2013 the United States Supreme Court heard the case of *Shelby County, Alabama v. Holder*, which challenged the constitutionality of the “preclearance” provisions of the VRA. On June 25, 2013, the Supreme Court issued its decision in which the Court did not invalidate the principle that preclearance can be required. The Supreme Court did decide, however, that Section 4(b) of the VRA, which establishes the formula that is used to determine which states and jurisdictions must comply with Section 5’s preclearance, is antiquated and thus unconstitutional and can no longer be used. Thus, although Section 5 survives, it is currently not being used and will not be used until Congress enacts a new formula to determine who should be covered by it.

On June 24, 2015, S. 1659, the *Voting Rights Advancement Act* was introduced in the U.S. Senate by Senator Leahy (VT) and 23 of his colleagues. Companion legislation, H.R. 2867 was introduced in the U.S. House by Congresswoman Terri Sewell on behalf of herself, the Congressional Black Caucus, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and the Congressional Asian and Pacific Islander Caucus. This seminal legislation would: modernize the preclearance formula to cover states with a pattern of discrimination that puts voters at risk; ensure that last-minute voting changes won’t adversely affect voters; protect voters from the types of voting changes most likely to discriminate against people of color and language minorities; enhance the ability to apply a preclearance review when needed; expand the effective Federal Observer Program; and improve voting Rights protections for Native Americans and Alaska Natives. Furthermore, this legislation includes all of the priorities necessary for a strong VRA restoration as established by the NAACP National Board of Directors.

We must tell Congress – both the House and the Senate – that the time to act is now! We must not delay and allow one more American to face unnecessary, unconstitutional, and undemocratic obstacles as they try to vote.

Congressional voting rights / statehood for the District of Columbia:

The residents of the District of Columbia are unique in this country in that they pay federal taxes yet have no voting rights on the floor of the United States House of Representatives or the U.S. Senate.

Furthermore, D.C. residents are the only Americans whose laws can be overturned by Congress, in violation of American principles of local self-rule. Due to the unfair and undemocratic nature of this situation, which results in more than half a million people disenfranchised (and more than 60% of those people are people of color), the NAACP has consistently supported statehood for the District of Columbia.

INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

Eliminate U.S. trade and travel embargos on Cuba:

On December 17, 2014, President Obama announced that the Administration would re-establish diplomatic ties in efforts to normalize relations with Cuba. His actions are in direct correlation with long-established NAACP advocacy policies. Specifically, the President's actions will:

- Re-establish diplomatic relations;
- More effectively empower the Cuban people by adjusting regulations;
- Facilitate an expansion of travel to Cuba;
- Expand general licenses for travel to Cuba will be made available for all authorized travelers;
- Authorize expanded sales and exports of certain goods and services from the U.S. to Cuba;
- Authorize American citizens to import additional goods from Cuba; and
- Initiate new efforts to increase Cubans' access to communications and their ability to communicate freely.

After 50 years, the current U.S. restrictions on trade and travel between the United States and Cuba have proven most effective in creating tremendous and on-going hardships for the people of Cuba and hurting American businesspeople and travelers. The continuation of the embargo on trade between the United States and Cuba has, in fact, proven itself to be counterproductive as it has made the United States the scapegoat for most of the problems facing Cuba today and in many ways strengthened the resolve of the Cuban people to retain their current government. Furthermore, the United States can best support democratic change in Cuba by promoting trade and commerce, travel, communications, and cultural, academic, and scientific exchanges. Expanding bilateral trade with the Cuban people is one of the most effective ways of influencing change from within Cuba's society and promoting progress on human rights and democratic rule.

It is also true that since many United States trading partners, including all other countries in the Western Hemisphere, trade with Cuba, the affect of the United States policy is to disadvantage United States farmers and businesses that could otherwise compete in the Cuban market. These facts have led many leading newspapers, including the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, the Chicago Tribune and the Orlando Sentinel Tribune, to come out in opposition to current U.S. policy towards Cuba. As the Orlando Sentinel recently argued, "The ban on U.S. travel is futile, self-defeating, a waste of scarce resources and inconsistent with other American policies."

Peace in Sudan:

The government of Sudan has allowed an orchestrated campaign of genocide against the black African population in the Darfur region of western Sudan. Furthermore, the Sudanese government has severely restricted humanitarian and human rights workers' access to the area in an attempt to inflict further harm on the Fur, Masaalit and Zaghawa people who live in the region. There have been over 400,000 deaths of innocent Sudanese civilians by government forces and the government-backed Janjaweed militia and there are an estimated 2 million civilians in camps for internally displaced peoples within Sudan and an additional 200,000 people living in camps in neighboring Chad. Reports state that many, many more may die in the upcoming months unless humanitarian aid is immediately delivered to the affected areas; it is now reported that as many as 35,000 people are dying each month and that this number could easily rise to 100,000 per month in the near future.

Despite the fact that the US Congress and the Bush Administration have both declared that the situation in Sudan is genocide, little has been done to ease the killing and misery that rocks the region. Most recently, the United Nations' International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur found that the Sudanese government committed war crimes, including a pattern of killings, rape, pillage and forced displacement but the report stopped short of calling the situation "genocide."

The United States needs to become aggressively involved in addressing this humanitarian crisis. The perpetrators of these crimes must be taken before the International Criminal Court. Furthermore, the United States should seek a United Nations Security Council resolution authorizing a multinational force to intervene in Darfur with a mandate to protect civilians and enforce the ceasefire that the government and the rebels signed last year (which has been largely ignored to date). While a United Nations force would be ideal, it would clearly take time to put together. In the meantime, the 1,000 African Union troops who are currently in the region should be given a greater mandate, and additional resources, and manpower, to protect civilians. Lastly, the refugees must be given the opportunity to return to their homes in safety.

Because the United States has found that the situation in Darfur constitutes genocide, we now have a legal (under the Geneva conventions) as well as a moral obligation to take aggressive action to stop the killings. A decade ago, the U.S. refused to act as genocide unfolded in Rwanda. We must not repeat our past mistakes. Now we must take aggressive action in coalition with the African Union to stop the killings and displacements that are occurring in Sudan.

Furthermore, on January 9, 2011, Southern Sudan voted to secede from the North. This vote was promised as part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in 2005, which ended a brutal civil war between North and South Sudan that claimed some two million lives. The northern Government of Sudan in Khartoum, ruled by Omar al-Bashir, has obstructed preparations for the vote and sent signals that a vote for independence may not be accepted. Southerners have warned of violence if a credible vote does not take place on time. Secretary of State Clinton has called the situation in Sudan a "ticking time bomb." The U.S. Director of National Intelligence called Southern Sudan the place where a new mass killing or genocide is most likely to occur. In addition, the safety of over a million Southern Sudanese living in Northern Sudan is of great concern. As the referendum approaches, reports of inflammatory, racist rhetoric against Southerners in the North – the type that has preceded other outbreaks of genocidal violence - are growing.

The key border town of Abyei – which has been a flashpoint for violence and includes valuable oil reserves – is also supposed to hold its own referenda on January 9th on whether to remain part of North Sudan or join the South. However, talks on preparations for the Abyei referendum recently collapsed, and the chance of a peaceful and on-time vote in Abyei grows slimmer by the day.

The impact of the chaos in Sudan is felt by its neighboring countries. As of 2006, Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Uganda provided shelter for roughly 500,000 Sudanese refugees, this number includes about 240,000 residents of Darfur that were driven from their homes by the Janjawid armed militia and the Sudanese military forces. The United Nations estimates that 200,000 to 300,000 people have died in Darfur since the start of the current conflict in 2004 from direct violence and other conditions related to camp living or deprivation. In the Darfur region of Sudan, out of a total population of around 6.2 million, an estimated 4.7 million people are currently directly affected by the conflict.

The NAACP supports involvement by the United States and international community to prevent a new wave of violence and human rights violations. Specifically, the U.S. should use high-level diplomacy to:

- Press for free and on-time referenda on the status of South Sudan and Abyei, and ensure that Sudanese parties and the international community to respect the outcomes.

- Demand unimpeded access for peacekeepers and humanitarian aid organizations throughout Sudan, and push for robust international human rights monitoring.
- Secure commitments from governments in North and South Sudan to protect human rights before, during and after the referendum, including citizenship rights of Southerners living in the North, and vice versa.
- Push Sudanese parties to reach agreements on key post-referendum issues such as oil and wealth sharing and border demarcation, as well as citizenship and protections for human rights.
- Publically denounce all acts of violence against civilians and violations of agreements by all parties in Sudan, and hold North and South accountable by offering both incentives for peace, and consequences for backsliding.

Enhance aid, trade and development programs throughout Africa and the Caribbean

While legislation was signed into law to expand importation of goods into the United States from countries of sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean and Central America in 2004, several NAACP concerns were left unanswered. Thus, while the NAACP is pleased to see the United States Congress and the Administration recognizing the importance and the potential of these two areas, we hope over the next few years to address concerns such as a protection of workers' rights and the forgiveness of African nations' debt.

Establish a Department of Peace

From the growing rate of domestic incarceration to increasing problems of international violence, the United States has no more serious problem in our midst than the problem of violence itself. Prison-building is our largest urban industry, and we spend over 400 billion dollars a year on military-related expenditures. Yet there is within the workings of the U.S. government, no platform from which to seriously wage peace. We place no institutional heft behind an effort to address the causal issues of violence, diminishing its psychological force before it erupts into material conflict. From child abuse to genocide, from the murder of one to the slaughter of thousands, it is increasingly senseless to merely wait until violence has erupted before addressing the deeper well from which it springs.

The problem of violence has many layers, as will the solution. While no one action -- governmental or otherwise -- will provide a single solution to such an entrenched and deeply rooted problem, we must treat the problem itself as an all-systems breakdown requiring an all-systems response. The campaign to establish a U.S. Department of Peace is only one aspect of a fundamental response to the problem of violence, but it is critical. It represents an important collective effort, as American citizens, to do everything we possibly can to save the world for our children's children.

Domestically, the Department of Peace will develop policies and allocate resources to effectively reduce the levels of domestic and gang violence, child abuse, and various other forms of societal discord. Internationally, the Department will advise the President and Congress on the most sophisticated ideas and techniques regarding peace-creation among nations.

Increase stability in and humanitarian assistance to Haiti:

The catastrophic earthquake that struck Haiti in January 2010 decimated the nation's infrastructure, institutions, service delivery systems and traumatized millions of Haitian families with a residual impact on Haitian communities in the U.S. In this hour of grave crisis, it is imperative that African Americans, other people of African descent and all people of goodwill mobilize/organize to relieve the enormous suffering, aid the recovery process and commit to a long term effort to rebuild/reconstruct the first Black Republic as a beacon of hope and promise for the world.

The NAACP also strongly supports a creating a Haitian Family Reunification Parole Program (FRPP) to expedite parole into the U.S. of many of the 106,000 beneficiaries of *DHS-approved* family-based visa petitions. Such a program would be akin to the Cuban FRPP, under which tens of thousands of Cuban refugees have been allowed to join their families in the United States while awaiting their green card. Currently many of these individuals are forced to languish on wait lists in Haiti for any time between 2.5 to 11 years.