

2007 National Urban League Conference

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The 2007 National Urban League Conference in St. Louis was made most memorable by the visits of the four major Democratic Presidential candidates and their endorsement of the Opportunity Compact. More than a laundry list of wishful thinking, this set of 10 policy recommendations detail a comprehensive plan to close racial disparity gaps, renovate urban infrastructure and economically empower minorities. These programs can best be described as more than a hand-out, but a hand-up to give people the tools they need to climb out of poverty and into self-sufficiency. The Opportunity Compact revolves around four basic principles giving every American citizen the opportunity to: Thrive; Earn; Own and Prosper.

The Opportunity to Thrive principle says that every American child should have access to free, high quality early-childhood and post-secondary education. It also focuses on the need for a health insurance system that supplies universal healthcare to all children. This measure endorses the All Healthy Children Act, a House of Representatives Bill that proposes expanding insurance eligibility for more children and pregnant women living below 300% of the poverty level. Additionally, it focuses on empowering working families with quality childcare assistance, transportation, education and training programs to help them become economically self-sufficient.

The Opportunity to Earn principle takes a look at reinvesting in urban communities through the creation of an Urban Infrastructure Bank to fund community centers, renovated schools, playgrounds in underserved urban communities, etc. Another major component of this policy would be increasing the minimum wage to coincide with the rate of inflation and the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to benefit more working families. The National Urban League recommends expanding the program by: simplifying the process for claiming the credit; increasing outreach to eligible families who have not claimed the credit; and increasing the size of benefits for all eligible families. This opportunity also calls for expanding second chance

programs for high-school drop outs, ex-offenders and at-risk youth to attain GEDs, job training and employment.

The Opportunity to Own calls for incentives to help potential homebuyers save for their homes tax-free; receive free homeownership education; obtain fair and affordable housing and become free from predatory lenders. The compact also recommends that the Hope VI public housing program be reformed to ensure its commitment to low-income families.

The final component of the Opportunity Compact calls for stronger enforcement of minority participation goals in government contracting and building the capacity of minority-owned businesses through the expansion of micro-financing, equity financing, and the development of strategic alliances with major corporations. The success of minority-owned businesses in the United States is truly the final frontier of economic equality in the United States. The National Urban League recommends greater transparency in the government contracting process by: increasing the accessibility of Requests for Proposal; conducting ongoing disparity studies and providing truth-in-procurement spending through full disclosure of the bidding processes.

The Opportunity Compact calls for more than a hand-out from the federal government to African Americans. It calls for the government to promote equal access to opportunity for all Americans and the rebuilding of the infrastructure of its communities. Traditionally, the U.S. has spent billions of dollars trying to stabilize other countries around the world. Now is the time for America to focus on the slow erosion of its own cities and the need to build its domestic structure before it is too late.