

National Urban League kicks off conference with a bang

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Unveils landmark economic plan

By [Alvin A. Reid](#) of the American

National Urban League President Marc Morial chose St. Louis to introduce the nation to an ambitious "opportunity contract" on Wednesday night as the organization kicked off its 96th national conference.

Saying the Urban League wants to "change the conversation of the nation" in regard to economic opportunity in the black community, Morial unveiled the first 10 of 50 economic policy recommendations at America's Center.

"We need concrete, detailed proposals to get our urban communities back on track to economic prosperity," Morial said.

"If we don't close the equality gaps existing between minorities and mainstream America now, we threaten to lose our advantage on the world stage and undermine our standard of living for generations to come."

The Opportunity Compact: Blueprint for Economic Equality's first 10 recommendations are:

1. Commit to mandatory early childhood education beginning at age three as well as guarantee access to college for all.
2. Close the gaps in the health insurance system to ensure universal healthcare for all children.
3. Establish policies that provide tools for working families to become economically self-sufficient.
4. Create an urban infrastructure bank to fund reinvestment in urban communities (i.e. parks, schools, roads).
5. Index the minimum wage to inflation and expand the Earned Income Tax Credit to more working families
6. Expand "second chance" programs for high school dropouts, ex-offenders and at-risk youth to secure GEDs, job training and employment.
7. Adopt the "Homeowner's Bill of Rights" as recommended by the National Urban League in March of 2007. It includes the right to save for homeownership tax-free.
8. Reform public housing to assure continuing national commitment to low-income and working families
9. Strongly enforce federal minority business opportunity goals to ensure greater minority participation in government contracting.
10. Build capacity of minority business through expansion of micro-financing, equity financing and the development of strategic alliances with major corporations

"A nation that can develop the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe, a nation that can create the International Monetary Fund to build the world, a nation that can rally around a war in Iraq can certainly rebuild its urban communities and put its less-fortunate citizens on track to achieving the American dream," Morial said during his keynote address.

"We want to create focus and attention and place the Urban League in the forefront of policy debate."

"I ain't beggin' nobody"

Morial was jovial and appreciative during a press luncheon Monday at the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis offices until asked about presidential candidates who chose to not accept the NUL's invitation to speak on one of Friday's



The National Urban League President Mark Morial presents a proclamation to the great great grand daughter of Dred and Harriet Scot on the steps of the Old Court House in St. Louis, Mo. Wednesday. The National Urban League is holding its national conference in St. Louis this week. In the background is Johnny Furr Urban Marketing and Community Affairs for the Anheuser-Busch Cos. Photo by Wiley Price/ St. Louis American Newspaper

respective panels.

"I ain't beggin' nobody," he said.

'I think those (candidates) that come are those that are serious.'

Morial said candidates skipping the conference "show some lack of insight on how crucial a constituency this organization represents in the 2008 election."

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, a prospective independent candidate for president, spoke at a private luncheon on Wednesday afternoon. A highlight of his remarks was his endorsement of a merit-pay system in the nation's public schools.

The Democratic presidential contenders in Friday morning's forum are Sens. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-Ill.), Barack Obama (D-Ill.), former Sen. John Edwards of North Carolina and Congressman Dennis Kucinich.

The two Republican representatives are Arkansas Gov. Michael Huckabee and Congressman Duncan Hunter of California.

Praise for the Scotts

A scorching St. Louis sun greeted Morial, Jim Buford, Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis president, and other dignitaries on Wednesday afternoon when they and other dignitaries honored Dred and Harriett Scott on the steps of the Old Courthouse.

Lynn Jackson, the great-great-great-granddaughter of Dred Scott spoke on behalf of her ill father and late, historic relatives.

"The is recognition by the Urban league goes first and foremost to my father. He carried the torch for Dred and Harriet Scott for 50 years," she said.

"They came up the steps on the (east) side of this building seeking justice. Today, this courthouse helps us to focus on what we want to do in the future."

Jackson said she is working to establish a Dred Scott educational center and said, "the celebration of Dred and Harriet Scott will not end with the close of this 150th anniversary year of the famous case."

Morial said, "we come not to honor the case."

"We come not to honor this courthouse. We come to honor the courage - the courage of two people to file a federal lawsuit asking the nation to respect the words of its constitution."

Morial called the Dred Scott case and Old Courthouse 'a lighthouse in the battle for justice.'