



THE NATIONAL BLACK CAUCUS OF STATE LEGISLATORS

NBCSL



2012

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

INVESTING IN THE
FUTURE OF THE
AMERICAN ECONOMY

PROVIDING THE VOICE FOR OUR CONSTITUENTS



EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

Rep. Barbara W. Ballard (KS)
President

Rep. Joe Armstrong (TN)
President-Elect

Rep. Thaddeus Kirkland (PA)
Vice President

Sen. Constance Johnson (OK)
Secretary

Sen. Catherine Pugh (MD)
Financial Secretary

Rep. Howard Mosby (GA)
Treasurer

Sen. Hillman Terome Frazier (MS)
Parliamentarian

Rep. Helen Miller (IA)
Chaplain

Rep. Calvin Smyre (GA)
Past President

REGIONAL CHAIRS

Rep. Ernest Hewett (CT)
Chair, Region 1

Assem. Nick Perry (NY)
Chair, Region 2

Del. Nathaniel T. Oaks (MD)
Chair, Region 3

Sen. Yvonne Miller (VA)
Chair, Region 4

Rep. Larry Womble (NC)
Chair, Region 5

Rep. Mia Jones (FL)
Chair, Region 6

Rep. John Rogers (AL)
Chair, Region 7

Rep. Bill Crawford (IN)
Chair, Region 8

Sen. Shirley Smith (OH)
Chair, Region 9

Rep. Tracy Steele (AR)
Chair, Region 10

Sen. David Haley (KS)
Chair, Region 11

Sen. Bettye Davis (AK)
Chair, Region 12

LaKimba B. DeSadier
NBCSL Executive Director

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

The National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) is pleased to convene its second “NBCSL on the Hill” event, July 11-12, 2012. As a two-day meeting, NBCSL leadership spends the first day engaged in panel sessions and the second day interacting with members of Congress and the Administration. The entire event is centered on five legislative priorities selected from policy resolutions ratified by the full membership during NBCSL’s recent Annual Legislative Conference. These five priorities give voice to the issues of importance and concern for state legislators and their constituents throughout the country.

On day one of NBCSL on the Hill, our members will take part in a multi-issue policy forum focused on financial literacy, infant and children’s nutrition and wellness, and health information technology. In addition to educating legislators about national trends, experts will provide concrete legislative ideas our members can take back to their states.

Day two of NBCSL on the Hill allows for meaningful legislative discussion between our members and members of Congress as well as Administration officials about our legislative priorities. In the morning, NBCSL members will hear presentations from and engage in robust dialogue with various members of Congress. In the afternoon, NBCSL members will converse with several key members of the Administration who make decisions regarding NBCSL priorities.

The 2012 NBCSL Legislative Priorities cover five main categories: stabilizing the state economies, health care reform, innovation and technology, energy development, and improving education. We hope collaboration with our Congressional and Executive Branch counterparts will lead to greater results for the American people.

We encourage you and your staff to review NBCSL’s Legislative Priorities and hope you use these recommendations as you consider and implement public policy. Thank you for your tireless work and commitment, and we look forward to working with you to influence strategies that strengthen our communities and unite our Nation.

Sincerely,

Representative Barbara W. Ballard (KS)
President, National Black Caucus of State Legislators

ABOUT THE NATIONAL BLACK CAUCUS OF STATE LEGISLATORS (NBCSL)

The National Black Caucus of State Legislators is a membership association representing over 600 African American legislators from 45 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. NBCSL members represent more than 50 million Americans of various racial backgrounds. NBCSL monitors federal and state legislation and initiatives and provides this information to its members. Each year, NBCSL members pass policy resolutions that directly impact federal and state policy. The organization focuses on U.S. domestic policy and is committed to policies that positively affect all Americans. Learn more at www.nbcsl.org.

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE OF THE AMERICAN ECONOMY

Although the American economy has been improving over the last several years, there is still a tremendous amount of work to be done to restore our economy to pre-recession levels and prevent a double-dip recession—central to which is job creation. States have been forced to make devastating budget cuts to comply with balanced budget requirements, all of which has led to public sector job loss and fewer much-needed services to the public. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) helped to blunt some of these cuts, but, even with those increased resources, states still have faced difficult policymaking decisions. As our economy repositions itself, we must ensure current fiscal priorities and investments pay long-term dividends to future generations.

➔ STABILIZING THE STATE ECONOMIES

This past December, NBCSL passed a resolution in support of the President's American Jobs Act. We applaud Congress's passage of certain parts of the Act that provide support to veterans and help to reform unemployment. NBCSL also applauds the passage of a comprehensive Surface Transportation Reauthorization bill, which allows states to expedite transportation projects and stabilize the Highway Trust Fund. NBCSL further urges the following:

- *Passage of the American Jobs Act*- NBCSL urges Congress to pass the full package recommended by the President, which would help save thousands of jobs for teachers and first responders as well as improve infrastructure.
- *Fund the Community Development Block Grant (CBDG) at \$3.4 Billion*- Communities around the country rely on CBDG funding to leverage federal dollars to rebuild and develop communities.
- *Fund the HOME program at \$1.2 Billion*- The Home Program is vital to the creation and expansion of affordable housing in neighborhoods across the country. NBCSL calls upon Congress to expand funding to allow for the increased need in many communities.

➔ HEALTH CARE REFORM

NBCSL fully supports the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. This landmark legislation has helped and will continue to help millions of Americans receive affordable and quality health care. NBCSL applauds

Congress's inclusion of the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. NBCSL also supports efforts to expand the use of health information technology, as this increases access to quality healthcare, generates costs savings through reduced medical errors and increased administrative efficiencies, and creates jobs both directly and indirectly through the production of HIT devices, networks, and infrastructure. NBCSL further applauds the passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which will help to improve the health of millions of American children. NBCSL further urges the following:

- *Commitment to Funding and Implementing the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA)*- Many states have already begun the process of implementing the ACA. We ask that Congress take steps to protect actions states have already taken and provide them with the resources that will allow for successful execution. We ask that no cuts be made to programs, such as the Prevention and Public Health Fund, and those aiding in the establishment of state exchanges.
- *Pass a Comprehensive Farm Bill Adding Focus on Nutrition*- NBCSL is pleased the Senate included a Healthy Food Financing Initiative in the Senate Farm bill—a model policy pioneered by an NBCSL member—and provided funding for the Hunger Free Communities Incentive Grants. NBCSL further asks Congress to provide increased resources to farmers markets and other community programs encouraging the consumption of locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables in underserved communities.
- *Fully Fund the Community Transformation Grants at \$280 Million*- These grants aid communities in promoting healthy lifestyles and have been funded at a level of \$280 million for FY2013 under Senate Proposals. NBCSL fully supports the Senate Appropriation level, which is an increase of \$54 million over last year's level.
- *Fund the Discretionary Portion of Community Health Centers at \$2.967 Billion*- NBCSL fully supports the level set in the President's budget that funds the discretionary portion of Community Health Centers at \$2.967 billion. These Health Centers are integral to the delivery of care in many communities, and their expansion will reach underserved populations, who would otherwise not have reasonable access to health care.

➤ INNOVATION & TECHNOLOGY

Innovation has always been a cornerstone of the U.S. economy. NBCSL applauds the steps taken by Congress and the Administration to expand broadband usage and build-out, as well as to reform the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office under the Leahy-Smith America Invents Act. NBCSL also applauds the steps taken by Congress and the Administration to develop green technology for energy independence and cost savings. NBCSL further urges the following:

- *Increased Inclusion of Minority-Owned Companies for Contracts*- NBCSL urges Congress to take steps to increase the inclusion of minority-owned businesses along the contracting continuum. Minority-owned businesses employ more than five million workers and generate over \$700 billion in total sales for the U.S. economy. Yet, significant barriers remain to equal opportunities and access to government contracts.
- *Modernize the Toxic Control Substance Act of 1976*- NBCSL recognizes that Congress has not modernized this legislation in over 35 years, as new substances and technologies have come to the market that pose potential health risks to our citizens. We urge Congress to pass a comprehensive reform of this law, while recognizing state regulatory authority, consumer safety, and environmental safety.
- *Encourage Broadband Development, Access, and Adoption*- NBCSL is pleased to see the President issue the Executive Order titled “Accelerating Broadband Infrastructure Deployment” and asks Congress to follow the Administration’s lead in the expansion of broadband, as high-speed internet access is essential to innovation and global competitiveness. NBCSL also reiterates its support for local and state control over implementation and requests that Congress maintains balance as it aids in expansion programs.

➤ ENERGY

NBCSL fully supports a multi-faceted approach to sustainable energy development, and recognizes increased energy costs adversely affect consumers and families during difficult financial times. We urge Congress to examine all options to lower energy costs and lower emissions for consumers. NBCSL also recognizes states must implement their own solutions, as each state has its own unique resources from which it draws to provide energy. NBCSL supports the spectrum of clean and renewable energy alternatives, but also believes the nation must work to lower our overall consumption of resources for a sustainable environment. NBCSL further urges the following:

- *Passage of the Clean Energy Standards Act (S. 2146)*- This bill establishes the first federal renewable electricity

standards. Of note, it encourages companies to increase the proportion of clean and renewable energy sources in their generation and distribution portfolios. The use of sustainable energy sources will help minimize the price fluctuation we have seen in recent years.

- *Provision of full Funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) at \$5.1 Billion*- NBCSL recognizes LIHEAP as the most important program to protect the economically disadvantaged from energy cost spikes.

➤ EDUCATION

Improving education is crucial to the future prosperity of America. NBCSL supports innovative approaches that provide resources to our states while also allowing for flexibility to address unique state needs. NBCSL also calls for the protection of programs that facilitate economic empowerment, success, and social mobility for low- and middle-income students. More broadly, education also encompasses efforts to increase financial literacy among adult consumers and facilitate successful re-entry of ex-offenders back into communities. NBCSL applauds the National Financial Capability Challenge, which challenges high school children to test their knowledge on financial literacy. NBCSL further urges the following:

- *Passage of Comprehensive Reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act*- NBCSL urges Congress to reform the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and include a grant program focused solely on encouraging state education departments to improve financial education in their states and communities across the country.
- *Funding of Promise Neighborhoods at \$100 Million*- NBCSL supports the President’s funding level for Promise Neighborhoods at \$100 million. This important program, which many of our legislators have already seen implemented in their communities, is an important way to engage the entire community in education.
- *Raising of the Maximum Pell Grant Award to \$5,635*- The Pell Grant helps put college within reach for low- and middle-income Americans who might not otherwise be able to afford college.
- *Passage of the Youth Promise Act (HR 2721)*- This bill helps vulnerable children avoid the pitfalls of their surroundings and overcome environmental obstacles.
- *Funding of the Second Chance Act at \$80 Million*- NBCSL supports the President’s level set for the Second Chance Act, as successful re-integration of ex-offenders in our communities is particularly important given the disproportionate incarceration rates.