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**RONALD A. JOHNSON, PH.D.**  
P R E S I D E N T

March 3, 2017

TO: The Clark Atlanta University Board of Trustees

FROM: Ronald A. Johnson, Ph.D.  
President - Clark Atlanta University

**SUBJECT: Washington, D.C., HBCU Fly-In (February 27-28, 2017)**

Please find attached an official summary of the February 27-28 “Fly-In,” during which nearly 90 HBCU presidents met with U.S. President Donald J. Trump, provided by the United Negro College Fund (UNCF). This visit also included appearances by Vice President Mike Pence, Senior Advisors Steve Bannon and Kellyanne Conway, and Office of Public Liaison Communications Director Omarosa Manigault, Ph.D., a key driver in coordinating this meeting with UNCF, The National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education and the Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund.

We appreciate the invitation, the hospitality and the audience afforded us by the White House, and we made the most of this initial opportunity to share our concerns in the time provided. Our expectation upon arrival was that the White House Initiative on HBCUs would be separated from the Department of Education and returned to the White House, as is now the case. We departed with a commitment to reconvene our cohort later this year, as well as the promise of a network that will facilitate continued communication. Both are necessary and encouraging. As I shared with Atlanta Journal-Constitution Reporter Eric Sturgis on Monday, “nothing beats a failure but a try.” Therefore, as I also shared during his interview, “the hard work now begins.”

You are no doubt aware of the polemics surrounding this event, much of it grounded in skepticism. For the record, CAU’s attendance was grounded not in politics, but in a rightful insistence upon educational and socioeconomic equity. In light of such, I find our posture going forward best upheld by clear, strategic case-making and incisive advocacy, particularly with regard to:

- The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965, which includes funding for the Pell Grant and Title III programs;
- Increasing the current Pell Grant cap (\$5,815 annually) and the return of summer session Pell Grants, which would lower the total cost of college for our students;

- Critical funding to address serious deferred maintenance concerns as well as infrastructure needs precipitated by enrollment growth and Atlanta-area development opportunities;
- Facilitation of public-private partnerships that would allow CAU to realize the benefit of tax incentives not presently available to us as a private institution; and, of course
- Increased funding support for academic programs and the expansion of our research enterprise.

We know that HBCUs are a solid investment. Our 105 institutions account for some 400,000 students nationwide, with host community economic impact that in 2001 would have placed us 232nd in the Forbes Fortune 500 list of the nation's largest companies. Our campuses constitute a burgeoning repository for STEM research and innovation--affirming that our graduates are essential in preserving and advancing America's competitive edge. Our role is irreplaceable in America's labor force. HBCUs produce: 18 percent of all African-American engineering degrees; 31 percent of all African-American biological science degrees; 21 percent of all African-American business and management degrees; 42 percent of all African-American agricultural science degrees; and 17 percent of all African-American health profession degrees.

It is frustrating that the case for HBCUs still must be made in the year 2017. But as we press on with our collective due diligence, I am mindful that this task will likely give rise to additional opportunities for CAU to make its individual case with audiences far beyond our great city, state and the Atlanta University Center. I am confident that, with your support and the support of others, starting with our own congressional representatives, we will prevail.

/dlb

Attachment: 1

## RECAP OF WHITE HOUSE AND CONGRESSIONAL HBCU MEETINGS

### White House Meetings

- HBCU presidents spent an eventful two days in Washington, DC with the Trump Administration and Congressional leaders at the highest levels.
- In an unprecedented move, nearly 90 HBCU presidents met with President Trump in the Oval Office and a smaller group of HBCU presidents were invited back a second time to witness President Trump signing a new Executive Order on HBCUs.
- The HBCU meeting with the President also included the President's senior White House team: chief of staff Reince Priebus, senior strategist Steve Bannon, counselor Kellyanne Conway, senior policy advisor Stephen Miller, special assistant Omarosa Manigault, and Domestic Policy Advisor Ja'Ron Smith. They expressed a serious commitment to assisting HBCUs with action, not just talk.
- In addition, both Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary Betsy DeVos address the group, acknowledging the historic role of HBCUs in providing educational access to disadvantaged students. Secretary DeVos stayed for the entire listening session following the meeting in the Oval Office. The high-level meetings were perhaps a first in the modern history of HBCUs.
- The Executive Order on HBCUs issued by the White House differs in several significant ways from the one issued by President Obama.
  - It moves the White House Initiative on HBCUs out of the U.S. Department of Education into the Executive Office of the President.
  - It continues a focus on strengthening HBCUs' ability to equitably participate in Federal programs and exploring new ways of improving the relationship between the Federal Government and HBCUs.
  - It puts additional emphasis on increasing the private-sector role in strengthening HBCUs through enhanced institutional planning and development, fiscal stability, and financial management; and upgrading institutional infrastructure, including the use of technology.
  - It includes a new focus on partnering with elementary and secondary education stakeholders to build a cradle-to-careers pipeline.
- The new Executive Order does not include any specific or aspirational funding goals for HBCUs.

### *Key Takeaways:*

- The Executive Order does not have the funding focus UNCF recommended. While the issuance of the Executive Order was significant; there were no specific funding commitments to HBCUs announced by the Trump Administration at the HBCU meetings. Thus, additional work is needed to ensure that photo ops with the President translate into meaningful allocations of resources.
- Secretary DeVos demonstrated a shallow understanding of the history and culture of HBCUs. She also signaled that obtaining additional resources in the Department of Education may be a heavy lift with her comments following the listening session that "Rather than focusing solely on funding, we must be willing to focus on the structural reforms that will allow students to reach their full potential."
- Despite our best efforts, the HBCU community did not have a unified agenda, with public HBCUs calling for a \$25 billion investment fund, which differed from UNCF's requests.
- UNCF must strengthen relationships with Trump Administration officials, especially with Omarosa, who confirmed her clout in delivering HBCU access to the President, Vice President, and Secretary DeVos.

### **Congressional HBCU Fly-In**

- The HBCU Fly-In provided an opportunity for HBCU presidents to have new conversations with Congressional Republican policy-makers, strengthen existing relationships, and engage in a dialogue about ways in which the Congress can support HBCUs.
- Congressional leaders Mark Walker (R-NC) and Tim Scott (R-SC) led interactive discussions between HBCU presidents and the Congressional leaders; Congressman Trey Gowdy moderated a discussion with defense industry representatives on opportunities for HBCU students and the skills they need to be successful. The convening also was attended by Senators James Langford, Mark Rubio, Lamar Alexander, and Bill Cassidy. House Speaker Paul Ryan and Representatives Cedric Richmond, Alma Adams, Mia Love, and Virginia Foxx also participated.
- The Congressional Black Caucus issued a letter outlining the ways in which the CBC has supported HBCUs over the years through legislation and policy proposals.
- Key themes from the discussion with Members of Congress were the need to control college costs, address college completion, focus on nontraditional students, re-imagine the Workforce Investment Act, and an innovation agenda that anticipates changes in workforce needs.

### *Key TakeAways*

- Congressional leaders discussed their desire to hear from HBCU leaders but made few specific commitments.
- House Speaker Paul Ryan expressed his support for restoring summer Pell Grants. This was significant because the House, unlike the Senate, has not yet funded the restoration of summer Pell in the FY 2017 budget.
- There is an opportunity to work with Speaker Ryan on his antipoverty agenda.
- There is an opportunity to work with the Republican Study Group (chaired by Representative Walker whose wife is an HBCU graduate) on hearings and other ways to highlight the contributions and needs of HBCUs.
- There is a need to continue to work in a bipartisan manner with the HBCU Caucus and Ranking Democrat on the Education and Workforce Committee Bobby Scott.