

National Black Church Initiative

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December 9, 2010
For Immediate Release

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The National Black Church Initiative Condemns Representative Eddie Johnson and Representative Stanford Bishop For Blatant Misuse of Scholarship Funds

*Nepotism is Unethical and Undermines the Success of the Black
Community*

Washington DC – The National Black Church Initiative, a coalition of 34,000 churches, is extremely disappointed to see not one, but two, recent incidents of scholarship misappropriation by Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-Texas) and Representative Stanford Bishop (D-Georgia). We have delayed our response to this story, which broke in September of this year, as we were in the process of assessing the flood of information surrounding this scandal but now feel we are left with no choice but to condemn the actions of these previously respectable representatives. Neither Rep. Johnson nor Rep. Bishop have adequately or plausibly addressed their actions and their apologies and restitutions fall short of remedying the loss the community suffered based on their egregious behavior.

NBCI is an organization committed to eradicating the disparities so prevalent in education, healthcare, technology, housing, and the environment and we take our position as a religious leader very seriously. NBCI's mission is to provide critical wellness information to all of our members, congregants, churches, and the public utilizing faith and sound science methodologies. We are a champion for the African American community and our commitment to education is what spurs us to monitor the leaders elected to fairly distribute funds which benefit those in need. NBCI has several education initiatives in place, one of which is a ten year plan to reduce high school dropout rates and promote African Americans to attend college. The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) Foundation benefits African Americans nationwide and we will not sit idly by as representatives from this organization tarnish its legacy.

The Congressional Black Caucus Foundation annually distributes \$10,000 to each member of the Congressional Black Caucus and stipulates the rules by which these funds can be dispersed. While the regulations of any scholarship program contain lengthy, difficult, and occasionally ambiguous language – ethical guidelines, especially when money is involved, should be straightforward for any politician: do not award scholarships to your relatives. Both Rep. Johnson and Rep. Bishop have failed to adhere to this uncomplicated, universally understood ethical principal and therefore have found themselves embroiled in a scandal that threatens to pollute their political careers.

According to The Dallas Morning News, 23 of the scholarships Rep. Johnson awarded since 2005 – more than a third – went to two grandsons, two great-nephews, and two children of her top aide - none of the recipients residing in the district she represents. Her blatant misuses of these scholarship funds have done a great disservice to the qualified and in need students in her district, especially during this historic recession.

Since the story broke Rep. Johnson's statements regarding her responsibility and involvement have been implausible and vague. First, she asserted that she had no personal hand in the distribution of the scholarships and blamed her chief of staff. However, documentation proves that she instructed to whom and how the scholarship funds should be distributed on her official letterhead – sometimes stipulating that checks should be made out to the individuals instead of the schools they were attending. (<http://texasgopvote.com/images-upload/EBJ%20Transfers%20funds%20to%20family.pdf>) Then, despite the fact that scholarship applications require applicants to assert that they aren't related to anyone involved in selecting winners or running the program, including members of the caucus and their aides, Rep. Johnson contended that neither she, nor her relatives, were aware of CBC regulations. In interviews when pressed to provide the documentation to back up her claim that the applications did not include this regulatory language, Rep. Johnson insists that a disgruntled former employee removed the files from her office upon being fired.

Continuing attribute blame on third parties, Rep. Johnson then accused the Dallas Morning News of having a long term grudge against her, alleging that she has been unfairly portrayed by the newspaper and that the author of the original article has “been trying to find something negative” about her for a long time. However, the Dallas Morning News recommended Johnson for office going back to her days in the Texas Legislature in the 1980s and has continued to support her in her re-election bids.

Notwithstanding these denials, she is also accused of under publicizing the CBC Scholarship program in an effort to retain more control over the recipients of the scholarships. Critics say it's implausible that only a dozen or so students from her district would apply each year, had she taken adequate steps to publicize the opportunity and foundation officials have denounced Rep. Johnson for "self-dealing" and a lack of integrity. Rep. Johnson has since paid back \$31,000 to the foundation despite the fact she says that, at the time, “I did not have an ethical alarm bell go off”.

Rep. Bishop has similarly violated CBC Scholarship regulations, awarding three scholarships to his stepdaughter and his wife's niece between 2003 and 2005, according to records from the CBC. While information regarding the exact amount that each relative received are not yet available, the chairman of the CBC has promised an "extensive audit of the scholarship program" run by the organization in an attempt to curb the unethical distribution of scholarship funds. Melanie Sloan, president of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, a watchdog group, has said Bishop and Johnson were engaged in "reprehensible conduct." "Any member of Congress should know that if there is a chance to award scholarship money, it shouldn't go to family members," Sloan said.

Rev. Anthony Evans, President of the National Black Church Initiative says, "The behavior of Rep. Johnson and Rep. Bishop is very disturbing in light of the enormous struggles of African Americans in this country – both historically and during this trying economic downturn. The Black Church did not endorse their elections so that these officials could turn around and undermine our character. Education is, and always will be, the ticket to freedom and prosperity. Any group or individual within our community that creates roadblocks to this path of success violates the sacred ethics of the African American community and distorts and tarnishes the legacy of the many that fought and died for the right to equality and educational freedom. The Black Church will not tolerate this behavior – we do not care who you are or who you represent. We are taking this unprecedented step to call out our own because we deeply care and hope that our disapproval will aid these representatives in changing their behavior and righting this wrong."

About NBCI

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The National Black Church Initiative (NBCI) is a coalition of 34,000 African American and Latino churches working to eradicate racial disparities in healthcare, technology, education, housing, and the environment. NBCI's mission is to provide critical wellness information to all of its members, congregants, churches and the public. The National Black Church Initiative's methodology is utilizing faith and sound health science. The National Black Church Initiative's purpose is to partner with major organizations and officials whose main mission is to reduce racial disparities in the variety of areas cited above. NBCI offers faith-based, out-of-the-box and cutting edge solutions to stubborn economic and social issues. NBCI's programs are governed by credible statistical analysis, science based strategies and techniques, and methods that work. Visit our website at www.naltblackchurch.com.