states that he is "encouraged by assurance that the labor provisions cannot be read to require compliance with ILO conventions," we should be more than skeptical.

While we have all heard that the Peru trade agreement text improves labor and environmental standards, we fail to hear that they were added on top of the same old NAFTA and CAFTA text. The bottom line: this is another Bush NAFTA expansion.

Key unions are worried about the labor provisions. The new provisions require countries to adopt, maintain, and enforce only the terms of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

The new FTA language does not require signatories to meet the ILO conventions. That’s the binding standards. The declaration is a nonbinding statement.

It is highly likely that changes to the environment and labor provisions will have no real effect on the ground. We all know that the Bush administration has a long record of not enforcing the standards of past trade agreements. Why should they start now?

Another bone of contention with the Peru Free Trade Agreement is that the new FTA language does not require signatories to meet the ILO conventions. That’s the binding standards. The declaration is a nonbinding statement.

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from my district that I now represent, which is the northeastern corner of North Carolina. Eight of those were from South Carolina, which is the district that my good friend, the majority whip of this House, Congressman Jim Clyburn, represents. But we have only had 122 Africans to serve in this body. We have come a long way to have 42 African Americans serving in the House and one in the Senate.

We have a lot of work to do, and I am going to close by simply saying that we had a great week, a very educational week. I know it’s self-serving for me to say this, Congresswoman, but I think it’s the best conference that we have had in our 37 years. So many people deserve the credit.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. Before you leave, I want to congratulate you on your choice of prayer breakfast speaker. Dr. Clifford Jones out of North Carolina was a wonderful speaker, and his theme, “Somebody Pray for Me,” I think it was self-serving for me to say this, Congresswoman, but I think it’s the best conference that we have had in our 37 years. So many people deserve the credit.

Mr. BUTTERFIELD. We had a southern missionary Baptist preacher who came to Washington and delivered a powerful sermon. When I first suggested Dr. Jones’ name a few months ago, we were skeptical because they had not heard of him before. When they came up with their name, I had not heard of their name before.

So I thought it was time to have a southern minister. Dr. Clifford Jones did a wonderful job, as did Rev. William Barber from Goldsboro, North Carolina, who delivered the prayer for the Nation. Dr. Barber is also the State president of the NAACP in North Carolina, and it was just a wonderful occasion.

Dr. Clifford Jones had to have had to have been there to really appreciate it, and hopefully persons who didn’t come this year may see fit to come next year.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. I wasn’t part of the choice, but I knew a minister named Jones had to be a really good person. Thank you so much for the choice.

Mr. BUTTERFIELD. Thank you, staff. Thank you all of you who had a hand in making this happen, including the staff of the Chair and the Black Caucus itself. I failed to mention the name of CAROLYN CHEEKS KILPATRICK. Congresswoman KILPATRICK is leader of the Congressional Black Caucus, and that’s a tough job, leading 43 diverse politicians. But she recognizes all of our differences, all of our views and leads the Black Caucus with great distinction. Thank you as well to Congresswoman KILPATRICK.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. It gives me great pride to be able to send to my colleagues and good friend, Congresswoman DONNA CHRISTENSEN. She cochairs the brain trust for the Congressional Black Caucus. She represents the Virgin Islands. She has done a great job and always been a great friend since I have been in the Congress. This year, along with G.K. BUTTERFIELD, she cochaired the annual conference for the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, “Unleashing Our Power.”

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Congresswoman TUBBS JONES, it’s a pleasure to be back with you on the floor this evening. We were here together last week discussing SCHIP and the situation in Jena with the Jena 6 high school students. So both of our conversations, a very integral part of our discussion at the annual legislative conference.

We were very fortunate that while we were there, Mychal Bell was released from prison, and we were able to have the lead attorney, Lewis Scott, come up and join us for a session.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. Absolutely. Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. But this was our 37th Annual Legislative Conference and since I have heard of you, was “Unleashing Our Power.” That is exactly what we here in the CBC and our constituents across the country intend to do going forward, unleash our power.

I also want to join my cochair in thanking the Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, KENDRICK MEEK, for his strong and visionary leadership of the foundation and of the conference, and to thank our CBC chairwoman, the Honorable CAROLYN CHEEKS KILPATRICK, for her stellar guidance. As we have come into the majority, she has coalesced and directed our power to influence the product of what I think will be a historic 110th Congress.

I also, as you heard just a few minutes ago, had a great partner in my cochair, Congressman G.K. BUTTERFIELD of North Carolina, whose input, vision and hard work really helped to make this week a successful and momentous one as it was.

Of course, as he said too, the ALC could not have been successful without the work of our staff, his staff and my staff and the staff of the foundation under the excellent and skilled leadership of Dr. Elsie Scott, its president.

As this year’s cochair, it was a special pleasure for me to welcome Generation Now and other Virgin Islanders, including Neville Peter, who sang at the table breakfast.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. He was excellent. He was excellent. Wow.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Both singers were great, but it was really inspiring. We were really pleased he was able to join us.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. Why don’t you tell us a little bit about Neville Peter? Some people across the Nation may not know about him.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. He is a young man, born in the Virgin Islands in the U.S. Virgin Islands. He started his musical career very early, at about 5, mostly in the piano and one other instrument. But at about 12, he pretty much lost all of his sight. He became blind at about age 12.

That didn’t stop him, though. He went to college at the University of Miami and studied music there, actually specializing in jazz and some other kinds of music. But he always had a voice, and he has turned his talent to the service of the Lord, and he has been a gospel singer, writer. He actually performed one of his original compositions, which, as he said, was a testimony of his own life and finding God; it was personal. Now it’s personal.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. Yes, now it’s personal. We remarked, as we were sitting at the table listening to him, that his look was much like a Stevie Wonder look with the braids. When he turned to the side, the profile was much like Stevie Wonder.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Yes, he has a great voice and a great talent. We look forward to him to go to great places in the future.

So we have him and we have the Generation Now, and, of course, many of us in the Congressional Black Caucus also had our emerging leaders come up from our district that wonderful attorney Mark Hodge and Natalie Humphries, also of Generation Now, the last person. So that was exciting.

Our opening session, of course, featured our Chairs, including my colleague here, Mrs. STEPHANIE TUBBS JONES, Congresswoman STEPHANIE TUBBS JONES, but also Chairman RANGEL, Chairman CONyers, Chairman THOMPSON, and of course, our whip, Jim Clyburn. That was a think, a powerful way to start off a conference, a weekend that was all about power.

It wasn’t only about power in the Congress, but it was about a power in our community that is still really untapped and unleashed. We could really be agents of change for our community and our country if we were to really come together and use the power that is ours.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio, I am with you. Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. I wanted to focus the rest of my remarks on the town hall, though, and on the health sessions that I was a part of. There were many health sessions. There were many sessions, period, on a number of issues, and all very informative.

The town hall, first, was a real powerful discussion on ways to eliminate or reduce the factors that lead so many African-American women into prison. We called it “Disrupting the Prison Pipeline” because we wanted to focus on positive action to really stop what was happening over the years.

Too, our session was attended by, I think, over 1,000 people who were at that town hall that morning. And we discussed the disparities in education, health, including mental health and substance abuse, how poverty and unemployment in the criminal justice system contribute to the disparities, and how we can create a pathway to incarceration rather than college for so many in the African-American community.
We had wonderful speakers. We had Reggie Weaver, the president of the National Education Association; Dr. Marian Wright Edelman, the president of the Children’s Defense Fund; Dr. Beny Primm was a drug addiction expert from Los Angeles, Dr. Debra Prothrow-Stith, a public health expert who focuses on violence prevention; attorney Rhonda Stewart from North Carolina, an expert on child and family judicial issues; Janks Morton, who is a writer in D.C. representing the media; and several others, who have made a dramatic turnaround in their lives.

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We want to thank them, as well as our moderator, Leon Harris, and the Members of Congress who participated; Congressman Bobby Scott, who chairs the Crime Subcommittee of the Judiciary and has turned that into, has begun to focus that committee on prevention, which we have long looked forward to doing; Danny Davis, who heads a subcommittee himself on health under the Government Reform Committee. But primarily he was there as the leader of the State of the Black Male Initiative that the CBC Foundation has been working on and, of course, Chairman Range, who brought the economic opportunity piece to that discussion. They brought their expertise, they brought the work that they’re engaged in, both inside and out of Congress to help disrupt the prison pipeline.

What’s clear is that there's too many communities where a young black male in this country has no alternative opportunities, nor is he provided with adequate opportunities to be able to succeed on the path to college. And the two unfortunate recent examples are the Jena high school students and Garanel Wilson who is still in prison in Georgia. What we will do from here, though, is a crucial time that the CBC Foundation must be there.

The first health session, which I co-chaired every year with Congresswoman Barbara Lee on HIV and AIDS, global HIV and AIDS focus on the growing role and the influence of the faith community in combating the HIV/AIDS crisis in the African American community. Ten years ago we called for a state of emergency and a minority AIDS initiative for our community and other communities of color. This administration has taken it far away from the original intent of building the local capacity of our communities to address this epidemic. And the consensus in that conference was that we need a national plan, as we discussed with the Black AIDS Institute on the Hill last week and it’s time to reissue that call for the state of emergency and reclaim our minority AIDS initiative.

Also, on Thursday afternoon there was a discussion on the disparity elimination corporation, State, and union leaders into the disparity elimination partnership. With the ongoing need for corporations to provide health care and the extreme pressures of its rising costs, they will be looking for ways to cut these costs. The health care age will continue to be a major cause of contention as unions negotiate contracts, and States are beginning to take coverage for all of their residents into their own hands.

We called on business, union and State leaders, we called them together for this dialogue because we want to make sure that as all of this begins to take some kind of shape into a health care reform initiative, that closing the gaps in health care and in health status and that’s focused on racial and ethnic minorities and rural residents in this country, that those issues would be at the center of that reform and we intend for that to be an ongoing dialogue.

The last session that I’m going to mention is the Friday session on demanding opportunity and justice for African American health care providers. It spoke to challenges that are almost as disturbing as those we discussed on the pipeline discussion. Our keynote speaker, Dr. Sullivan, gave us an update on the still low representation of African Americans and other minorities in health professions schools and in practice, far below our representation in the Nation and woefully inadequate to meet the needs of our diverse society.

We heard from hospital administrators, doctors, dentists and others, including students, about the barriers to getting into the health profession school and staying there. Those stories were bad enough. But there was more. We then heard from African American doctors and other health providers, those in practice, about the difficulties they face in staying in practice, given exclusions from certain facilities, faculties and organizations, unfair investigations and sanctions that hold them to a far higher standard than other providers, and also disparities in reimbursement.

We have a long way to go in coming out of this crisis that must be prevented if we are ever to eliminate health disparities, if we’re ever to improve health care for everyone in this country, and if we’re ever to stop the skyrocketing rise in health care costs. Those are just three of the many outstanding issues we discussed, informed, inspired, and invoked action on the part of the black community.

As I close, I want to thank all of my CBC colleagues, including you, Madame Speaker, for your support. Because of your hard work and that of your staff, we had one of the best annual legislative conferences ever and I want to thank all of the speakers, the exhibitors, and all who attended from all over the country, and even some from beyond and outside of our country, from the Caribbean, from Africa and other areas of the world. Because of the input that you brought, and the support that you gave to this conference, we, as a community, stand more ready than ever to unleash our power.

Mrs. Jones of Ohio. Thank you, Madam Chair, Donna Christensen, the Delegate from the Virgin Islands, one of our co-chairs for the conference. It gives me great pleasure at this time to yield 5 minutes to my colleague and good friend, Diane Watson from California, our former ambassador to Micronesia.

Ms. Watson. Thank you, Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs Jones; and thank you, Madam Speaker.

I want to congratulate Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs Jones and the Black Caucus Foundation and the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, and Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick for putting together a most excellent Congressional Black Caucus annual legislative week. The event was very well attended, and the many issue forums were informative and enlightening.

I held three issue forums, one on African American entrepreneurship in South Africa, and one on African American celebrities and their too often unreported commitment to social issues.

And my third panel, entitled “Finding Justice for the Black Cherokee Indian Freedmen,” looked at the current Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma's efforts to expel its black Cherokee citizens. I was pleased to have a number of Cherokee citizens, including Joe Byrd, the former principal chief of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, Jon Velle, attorney for the Freedmen, and Marilyn Vann, president of the Freedmen Descendants Association.

In the year 2000, the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma attempted to disenfranchise its Freedmen descendants. The circumstances were nearly identical to the current efforts of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma to rid itself of descendants of the Freedmen who are rightfully citizens of Cherokee Nation. The Bureau of Indian Affairs took a proactive stance against the Seminoles, cutting off their funding for many years for reasons including their refusal to conduct gaming.

Interestingly, the Bureau of Indian Affairs first declared the Cherokee Freedmen situation identical to that of the Seminole Freedmen. Then the bureau did a 180-degree flip flop, taking a hands-off approach to the Cherokee Freedmen. The BIA chose to shirk its fiduciary responsibility, even as the Freedmen’s rights were obviously being trampled on by the Cherokee leadership.

On March of 2007, the Cherokee Nation held an election to expel the Cherokee Freedmen, in violation of the 1866 treaty which granted full citizenship...
rights to Cherokee Freedmen shortly after the Civil War. That is when the plight of the Cherokee Freedmen first came to my attention.

I immediately wrote a letter to Assistant Secretary Artman of the Bureau of Indian Affairs requesting an interpretation of the vote. The letter was signed by 25 of my congressional colleagues. The response I received from Secretary Artman almost a month later was unsatisfactory. In effect, the Secretary said that the bureau had not taken any administrative action and would continue its careful evaluation of all facets of this matter. In effect, I was told that the BIA would continue to monitor a situation that didn’t need further monitoring, but immediate action.

It is only when I discovered that the BIA would not move proactively, that it would not forcibly and vigorously stand up for and protect the rights of Cherokee Freedmen as it had done for the 145 years of our existence, did I introduce H.R. 2824 to sever the United States relations with the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma until such time that it restores full citizenship rights to Cherokee Freedmen.

My legislation has been characterized by Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma as a termination bill, which is blatantly false. There is not one sentence in the legislation that addresses terminating the Cherokee Nation’s Federal recognition or membership. The Cherokee Nation has made the argument that Congress should not intervene until the courts have resolved the matter. It made this point the centerpiece of its public relations campaign to disenfranchise the Freedmen descendents. But the past actions of the Cherokee Nation belie its commitment to its treaty rights that entitle them to stand up for and protect the rights of Cherokee Freedmen as it had done for the 145 years of our existence.

The Cherokee Freedmen are African descendents of the former slaves and their descendents, called the Freedmen, who proceeded to approve a referendum to disenfranchise the Freedmen citizens, to vote, to hold office and to have equal rights with other Cherokee citizens.

Madam Speaker and Representative STEPHANIE TUBBS JONES, I appreciate the time you have given us, and I think we were very successful this weekend in gathering information and enlightening our public who attended from across the country and around our Nation. Thank you very much.

General Leave

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the subject of this Special Order today, the annual legislative conference of the Congressional Black Caucus.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. At this time it gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity to yield 5 minutes to my colleague and good friend from the great State of North Carolina, the immediate past Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, Mr. MEL WATT.

Mr. WATT. Thank you, Madam Speaker, and my colleague, Representative TUBBS JONES, that I was honored to get back to being able to do just my thing again this year. And it had a delightful discussion about the Voting Rights Act in my issues forum.

Last year we had just passed the 25-year reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act, and so we took that year to kind of pat ourselves on the back and talk about what we had just accomplished. But we knew the onslaught would be coming immediately. And within that 1-year period, there has been a concerted effort, litigation has been filed, which is a direct frontal attack on the Voting Rights Act and its reauthorization.

Some of the first part of my issues related to that legal attack, which had just been argued in a court of appeals about 2 weeks ago, and I had the lawyer from the NAACP Legal Defense Fund there with all her brain power to talk about that attack and its likelihood for success. And I’m happy to report that we do not believe it is a serious attack, although there will certainly be others to come.
That presentation was followed by a presentation by Donna Brazile on the various methods that have been used throughout the country to discourage minority participation in the voting process and what we plan to do about it in the 2006 election. And importantly, perhaps, in the 2008 Presidential election cycle, some of the strategies that we plan to follow to combat those efforts to diminish and reduce minority participation in the voting process. And then our third panelist was a district election in Florida who talked about the desirability of creating a paper trail so that people who do show up and vote at the polls can reliably be certain that their vote will be counted and properly assessed.

So we just had three panelists. They did outstanding jobs. We had ample time for discussion and participation by the attendees at the conference and at our issues forum. It was a delightful experience and one that I look forward to being around next year at this time to replicate.

I again applaud you for convening this special Order tonight to allow us the opportunity to talk about not only the fun things that happened at the conference, but, more importantly, the wonderful substantive discussions that take place around every issue that impact our community.

With that I will thank our convener this evening.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. I had a recent discussion with our colleague KERTH ELLISON from Minnesota, and he was telling me that in the seventh circuit that it had been granted to go to the Supreme Court on a voter ID. That will be an interesting case to watch as it goes forward as well.

Mr. WATT. We did talk about that, and we are watching that case very carefully, as well as another case out of North Carolina, which is an attack on whether the Voting Rights Act protects congressional districts that are not majority minority, such as the one I represent, which is only 40 percent or so African American, and the ones that are represented by most of the members of the Congressional Black Caucus today.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. Madam Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman for his leadership on getting the Voting Rights Act reauthorized. Congressman MEL WATT of North Carolina.

It gives me great pleasure at this time to yield to my colleague and good friend, a former judge from the great State of Texas, Congresswoman SHEILA JACKSON-LEE.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Madam Speaker, let me thank my distinguished colleague and friend, chairwoman of the Ethics Committee from Ohio STEPHANIE TURMS JONES, for more than this one night. I think that we are back on course again, and I applaud the fact that the Congressional Black Caucus, the conscience of the Congress, is now reporting the ills and pages and, if you will, thousands upon thousands of items that we work on and solve on a daily basis here in the United States Congress. So I want to thank her for guiding this for a period of time, and I want to then acknowledge and appreciate that the 37th Annual Legislative Conference, the Honorable DONNA CHRISTENSEN and G.K. BUTTERFIELD, who did an outstanding job. And as well might I acknowledge and thank, and I know that he will be reelected, the chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Chairman KENDRICK MEEK, and thank him for his leadership and also for the opportunity to now journey on the foundation board as a new member.

As I am a new member of the foundation board, I am delighted to be able to collaborate with him on some of the many, many issues that the board will tackle.

Success; inspirational; exciting; fun; learned; and, of course, message giving. That was the 37th annual legislative session that we just finished here in Washington, D.C.

Allow me to acknowledge the importance of the Voting Rights session that MEL WATT and I, having served on the Judiciary Committee, worked on as we moved to reauthorize the Voting Rights legislation in the last session.

And just to bring to the attention of my colleagues, the reason why that is so important is because that session that race again is becoming a dividing issue in America. And I just want to remind my colleagues, or maybe bring it to your attention, I am going to sort of merge it into the review of the particular session. I had, but I just want to announce to my colleagues that Ward Connelly has managed to get the question of affirmative action on the ballot of nine States. My understanding is that that question which revolves around race will be on the Presidential election. It is my understanding that it will be on the ballot in November of 2008. I am going to investigate that issue, but I wanted to just bring that to the table because a number of our sessions had to do with trying to grapple with this question of race. And certainly the Voting Rights Act and the interpretations that the Supreme Court will make on additional cases involving race really emphasize that.

And I must say that I enjoyed co-hosting a series of sessions with BONNIE SCOTT. There was a session that, although I was detained, I was able to get in for a brief moment, but I wanted to compliment him and acknowledge that some of the aspects that was spoken about was the recent decision dealing with race in schools on the Supreme Court. So you can imagine if there are ballot issues dealing with affirmative action, it just converges on a number of these issues. And that session really emphasized the importance of that decision as it relates to the results, meaning that Brown versus Board of Education might be challenged under that decision. Something for us to be concerned about.

So I enjoyed participating in that one and thought it was a very important, instructive session, as well as cochairing the child welfare session that we had. And I want to mention that came out of that that really cries out for legislation is the fact that foster children age out of protection, age out of a home at age 18. And for those of us who have children that know that we are still mothering them at 21, 22, 23, 24, and they have a home, our children can come back to a home or have a roof over their head that we may have, but foster children get out of the system. There is no obligation to provide them with housing or schooling or anything. What a tragedy, which is why you see that many foster children are homeless, many foster children can't finish college. They get no stipend, and it is a crisis. And it was an outstanding series with Historically Black Colleges.

Let me then indicate that the series that I had involved the energy brain trust, which was historic. And let me quickly say that the presentation from Shell and CAMAC energy and the CEO of CITGO; from Venezuela, the Venezuelan ambassador; the ambassador from Algeria; Milton Scott, who owns a very important African American enterprise, Steve Hightower, African American owner of an energy company; George Person; Lisa Jackson; Gary Heminger; Hugh Depland from BP; Gary from Marathon; Frank Stewart from the American Association of Blacks in Energy; Willie Trotty. And the key element, high gasoline prices and high utility costs, building bridges. We have a commitment to convene the energy brain trust at the OTA, the Offshore Technology Conference, but the main thing we have a commitment to is getting African Americans in the ownership wealth part of energy and making sure that there are African Americans in the corporate aspects of these major Fortune 500 companies and, as well, increasing more ownership.

Lastly, we did a provocative session on hip hop, "The Culture of a People, the Language of a People," and it actually got people talking. Julianne Malveaux, the president of Bennett College; Azim Rashid, senior VP of operations at Warner Music, J. Xavier, 350-time performer, 15-year-old clean hip hop artist. And Tun Muhammad, the president of The Real Hip Hop Network. Aisha Jenning, Igniting Media Station in Houston, and JMAC. And then Reverend Ben Chavis and Charles LeBoef.

Let me conclude by saying that we opened up the door of communication to understand hip hop from both perspectives in art, but also accountability. I look forward to continuing those sessions.
But more importantly let me thank the convener, because we were able to say it was vital, it was important, and there was so much learning going on. Now we’re going forward with the legislative initiative for the CBC legislative working group.

I yield back to the distinguished gentlady. Thank you for the time.

The issue of energy is one of the most important national security issues which face our nation. Our increasing dependence on foreign sources of energy, often times from volatile parts of the world. My braintrust seeks to highlight and remedy the lack of adequate outreach to and participation by the African American community in America’s energy industry. This is exacerbated by the inherent barriers present in the energy industry to African American community and America’s energy industry.

There is no issue more integral to our nation’s economic and national security than energy independence. This Energy Braintrust, which is comprised of some of the most prominent members of America’s energy industry, is designed to be a clarion call to action, in order to build bridges and synergies between the African-American community and America’s energy industry. The purpose of this Braintrust will not only be the discussion of, but more importantly, the transformation of dialogue into action and legislation to address and bolster the relationships between the energy industry and African American consumers, entrepreneurs, investors, workers, and students. My hope and expectation is that six months from now each of today’s presenters will join me to collectively and individually issue a plan of benchmarks, goals, and pathways to build concrete and coherent bridges and synergies between the African American community and America’s energy industry. Moreover, part of this plan will be a formal mechanism such as a progress report to measure how each of today’s prominent panelists and the companies they represent implement and achieve the benchmarks they have established. This will ensure that we transform today’s substantive discussion into pragmatic action.

Energy is the lifeline of every economy, especially ours. Producing more of it leads to more good jobs, cheaper goods, lower fuel prices, and greater economic and national security. However, the U.S. is more than 60 percent dependent on foreign sources of energy, twice as dependent today as we were just 30 years ago. America’s growing and dangerous energy dependency is a result of a host of factors. This will ensure that we transform today’s substantive discussion into pragmatic action.

Energy imports now make up one-third of America’s trade deficit. America must improve the strength and balance, lower consumer prices, and vulnerabilities in our national security.

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The energy industry in Houston exemplifies the stakeholders who must be instrumental in devising a pragmatic strategy for resolving our national energy crisis. It is crucial that while seeking solutions to secure more energy independence within this country, we strike a balance that will still support an environment for continued growth in the oil and gas industry, which I might add, creates millions of jobs across the entire country.

We have many more miles to go before we achieve energy independence. Consequently, I am willing, able, and eager to continue working with Houston’s and our nation’s energy industry to ensure that we are moving expeditiously and environmentally and economically viable energy policy. Furthermore, I think it is imperative that part of this policy includes increased involvement by small, minority and women owned businesses, and independent energy companies as companies that they represent some of the hard working Americans and Houstonians who are on the forefront of energy efficient strategies to achieving energy independence.

I will conclude by also emphasizing that renewable and alternative sources of energy must be part of our energy future in order to achieve energy independence. Replacing oil imports with domestic alternatives such as traditional and cellulosic ethanol can not only help reduce the $180 billion that oil contributes to our annual trade deficit, it can end our addiction to foreign oil. According to the Department of Agriculture, biomass can displace 30 percent of our Nation’s petroleum consumption.

Along with traditional production of ethanol from corn, cellulosic ethanol can be produced domestically from a variety of feedstocks, including switchgrass, corn stalks and municipal solid wastes, which are available throughout our nation. Cellulosic ethanol also relies on its own byproducts to fuel the refining process, yielding a positive energy balance. Whereas the potential production of traditional corn-based ethanol is about 10 billion gallons per year, the potential production of cellulosic ethanol is estimated to be 60 billion gallons per year.

I will close by emphasizing that we must be balanced and prudent in our approach to address our energy needs. By ensuring access to the African-American community and investing in renewable energy, I believe we can be partners with the responsible members of America’s energy producing community to present today to achieve our collective goal of reaching energy independence and increased inclusion of the African-American community.

CHILDREN’S ISSUES FORUM: HIP HOP: THE CULTURE OF A PEOPLE

The Annual Legislative Conference is an opportunity for us to discuss and engage with some of the difficult issues that face us as a community and as a nation. This year, it was my honor and pleasure to host a Children’s Issues Forum entitled “The Language of Hip Hop: The Culture of a People.” This timely and thought-provoking discussion and examination of the impact, both positive and negative, of hip hop on our community featured panelists from the hip hop industry, as well as academic and educational professionals.

As a Member of the Congressional Black Caucus, Chairwoman of the Congressional Children’s Caucus, and most importantly a mother, it is my priority to address issues relating to the health and well-being of African American youth in the 21st century. I recognize that Hip Hop culture has had a tremendous influence on the artistic and musical expression of America’s youth today. Many view the culture of Hip Hop as a negative and provocative phenomenon due to some of the negative images and harsh lyrics that some artists use to express themselves. I believe that before we condemn Hip Hop, we must first try to understand it. The Children’s Braintrust sought to reach such understanding.

Throughout history, music originating from America’s Black communities has always had an all encompassing influence of the political, social and economic conditions of the time. Rap is no different. The history of our music often exemplifies a deeper reflection of the goings on in society—from Billie Holiday’s solemn song characterizing those who were lynched to Strange Fruit to John Lennon’s musical commentary in “Mississippi G—D—” expressing her disdain for the rampant killings in the South, to Tupac’s expression of sincere compassion for poor black women, whom he urged to “keep your head up” deploring the fact that society has turned its back on you.

Hip hop is the culture from which rap emerged. Hip hop is a lifestyle with its own language, style of dress, music and mind set that is continuously evolving. We have seen hip hop go from competitive freestyling to breakdancing battles to East Coast-West Coast rivalry. Surely, we lost two extremely talented individuals in Tupac and Biggie, much too soon. We all know their lives did not have to end so violently. But knowing this, we must ask ourselves, why does the violence continue to take so many of our youth?

My Children’s Issues Forum was an opportunity to talk with each other, rather than at each other. Panelists and participants came together to discuss solutions, and to look for a way forward that embraces the hip hop artists in their quest to fulfill their dreams but rejects the lethal language that often lends itself to less than desirable outcomes for our children. More and more, we see some of the negative messages affecting the way young people make decisions about engaging in sex, drug use and using violence as a means to resolve conflict. The self esteem and desire of many young listeners to achieve greatness are being deflated by stereotypes and explicit lyrics in some Hip Hop lyrics.

While I uphold America’s fundamental right to freedom of speech and believe that artists have a right to creative expression, a middle ground needs to be sought in order to allow artists to create music without demeaning and degrading others. It is difficult to progress as a community if we never take the time to carefully dissect the influence of Hip Hop on our children.

During my forum, panelists examined whether Hip Hop language is culture, creativity...
We had a great workshop on education with the education brain trust. We had one session on desegregation of schools and how, notwithstanding the Seattle and Louisville cases, we can still, with a little hard work, make sure those schools are desegregated. We also had another workshop on voting rights. Every aspect of legislative services, financial issues, civil rights, voting rights. Every aspect of legislation that you can imagine, we had the nationally recognized experts. They were open to the public, the public had an opportunity for questions and answers and input. These were great workshops. I participated in four of them. The town hall forum entitled “The Cradle to Prison Pipeline” that talked about the unfortunate situation where so many of our young people start off and gradually, slowly but surely, get in trouble, drop out of school and end up in prison, and how with appropriate investments, strategic investments we can change that pipeline to a cradle-to-college pipeline, which is so much better for humanity, so much better for our communities, and that we could do that in a cost-effective way.

I participated in a budget forum where we had budget experts talk about the fact that in 1993 we began eliminating the deficit. By the year 2000 we had gone into surplus. And, in fact, in 2001, we had a projected $5.5 trillion surplus over 10 years, and how, unfortunately, over the last few years, we have converted that $5.5 trillion surplus to a $3 trillion deficit, a swing of $8.5 trillion. And how, with appropriate changes and some of the changes we’re trying to make in Congress today, we can change that back to a surplus. And how, with the Intelligence Community, we need to invest in health care, and education and other important investments.
Buffalo Soldiers. So the Amistad Committee of New Jersey is integrating African history into the regular textbooks.

Then, of course, as you all know, we deal with the Africa brain trust, the theme of Africa: Opportunities and Challenges,” President Wade of Senegal and former President Obasanjo of Nigeria, and Under Secretary Henrietta Fore, Ambassador Ali, AU Ambassador to the U.S. And we had Dr. Adas Zika, who was representing Kofi Annan’s new group on the “Greening of Africa.” And Ambassador Lyman, former Ambassador from the U.S. to South Africa and Nigeria. And Dr. Juma from Harvard talking about education.

So we really had standing room only. I recall 19 years ago, when I started the brain trust, we had a difficult time. We used to run in the halls and just drag people, beg them to come in. Now, unless you’re there before 9 o’clock, you’re not going to get a seat. So it shows that the Congressional Black Caucus, the constituency for Africa has grown very strong, and the members of the caucus are so supportive of the efforts we’re doing, not only in Africa but in the Caribbean. And in Latin America, where Afro-Latinos are saying we want our share, too. We have, in Brazil now, an affirmative action program where in their colleges, they will have to admit the qualified blacks who’ve been ignored, and in Colombia.

So we have seen in the “hands across the ocean,” as I often say, that the blood that connects us is much thicker than the water that separates us.

So with that, I will yield back the balance of my time.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. Thank you, Congressman PAYNE, from the great State of New Jersey.

I am going to close out this hour and take the balance of minutes. One of the things that you make a mistake about when you leave a Special Order is you yield to everybody, and you forget to talk about your own workshops. So very quickly, I am going to talk about the two workshops that I did. The first one was “African American Athletes: Roles, Representation, and Expectations.” It was a wonderful opportunity where I had the opportunity to host Jim Brown, the former Cleveland Browns player, renowned athlete, to talk to us about how he has been involved in outreach and mentoring. I had Keven Davis, a partner at Garvey, Schubert & Barer, who provided an overview of how African American athletes are represented in financial transactions. Carlos Flemming, a VP of IMG, who represents Venus and Serena Williams. Everett Glenn, the president and CEO of Entertainment & Sports Plus, who is an agent. Ken Harvey, president and CEO of JAKA Consulting, a former NFL player and a representative of Nance, who was the executive director of the LeBron James Family Foundation. And finally, William Rhoden, who is the author of “Forty Million Dollar Slaves,” and is a sportswriter for the New York Times.

And I particularly want to thank him for taking care of the workshop while I was required to be here on the floor voting on some other issues. It was a great opportunity, and we talked about a lot of issues around African American athletes.

My second forum was focused on the declining enrollment of African Americans in law schools across the Nation. My panel consisted of Christopher John of Vanita Banks, the president-elect of the National Bar Association; John Nussbaumer, associate dean of Thomas Cooley Law School; Dwanye Murray, the Grand Polemarch of Kappa Alpha Psi; John Brittain, a lawyer from the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights; Karen Weaver, associate dean for academic affairs and diversity; and Pauline Schneider, on behalf of the ABA. She’s at Orrick & Harrington.

And the one issue around law schools is that African Americans do have a decline in enrollment and that ABA is responsible for accreditation.

So with that, Madam Speaker, I want to yield back my time and say thank you for introducing the AABC this Special Order to focus on the ALC weekend. It’s not a party; it’s a legislative conference with great import for all people across the country.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Madam Speaker, last week the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation held its 2007 Annual Legislative Conference. Each year, I have convened the Science and Technology Braintrust. The Braintrust is a discussion forum aimed at bringing together America’s brightest minds to share ideas on how to diversify our science and technology workforce.

I have remained committed to hosting this Braintrust each year, because I believe that engaging young people in the fields of science and technology is one of the most important things we can do for the future success of America.

With India and China producing more than five times the number of engineers, computer scientists and information technology professionals in 2005 than we did, our nation is losing its competitive edge.

The Science Committee ushered through a $33.6 billion package of Innovation policies that are designed to help early career researchers, better train math and science teachers, and industry and universities to partner with local high schools to improve science instruction.

Having a dialogue with students and with the science education community is another way to exchange ideas and assess the needs of our population.

My Braintrust consisted of two panels. The first panel consisted of high-level individuals who have risen to great heights in technology and engineering fields. They provided an ex-ecutive perspective of the educational experiences that are needed for tomorrow’s high-tech graduates to be globally competitive.

Panel 2 featured bright, innovative minds from individuals who work with technology in unique ways. The goal was to convince everyone that a career in math, science or engineering can be fulfilling, challenging and fun.

Madam Speaker, more than 150 local, African American high school students attended my Braintrust, and many of them participated in the discussion by interacting directly with the panelists.

It is my feeling that a few hearts and minds were changed that day, in the Science Committee hearing room. If only one student was influenced toward a career in science, technology, engineering or mathematics, I will be satisfied. This focus has been a major goal of my work as an elected official.

In the 1990s, we responded to the digital age with breakthroughs in computer science and information technology.

Today’s greatest challenge will be to meet the needs of the Innovation Age. We must compete at a global level.

CONGRESSIONWOMAN EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON’S SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY BRAINTRUST—EDUCATION AND SKILLS NEEDED FOR THE DIGITAL TO INNOVATION AGE

PANEL ONE

EDUCATION AND SKILLS FOR TOMORROW’S HIGH-TECH GRADUATE:

THE EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE Moderators: Sam Ford, Reporter, ABC7/WJLA-TV Panelists: Dr. Samuel Metters, CEO, Metter Industries, Inc. Mr. Scott Mills, President, BET Networks. Dr. Cheryl Shavers, CEO, Global Smarts, Inc. Mr. John Thompson, Sr. VP and General Manager, BestBuy.com

PANEL TWO

INNOVATORS AT THE CUTTING EDGE Moderators: Derek Lloyd, Professor and Senior Network Systems Engineer, Howard University. Panelists: Ms. Lyn Stanfield, Strategic Relations Manager, Apple Inc. Mr. Darrell Davis, Director, DEA South Central Laboratory. Mr. Rob Garza and Mr. Eric Hilton, Thievry Corporation band. Dr. Anna McGowan, Manager, NASA Langley

NEW FISCAL YEAR

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker’s announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentlewoman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. It is such a pleasure to come to the floor tonight as we start a new fiscal year for the U.S. Government.

A new year is a time where you get to look back at what happened last year, where you get to redirect your focus and talk about what your priorities are going to be and the goals that you want to set.

Now, we all do that with our families as we get to the end of the calendar year and start the new calendar year in January. It is a time that we enjoy.

I hope for each of us, as Members of the House, as we start this fiscal year, that we will put some attention on what we spend and how we spend.

Now, Madam Speaker, over the weekend, I had the opportunity to do a town hall with some of my constituents. We