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STATE NEWS

Wednesday February 17, 2010

Racial divide persists in state

by Sara Gavin
Daily Mail Capitol Reporter

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Blacks living in West Virginia have substantially higher poverty rates, earn considerably lower salaries, are less likely to own a home and yet are equally as educated as whites in the state, according to a report released this week.

The study called "Legacy of Inequality: Racial and Economic Disparities in West Virginia" was compiled by the Partnership of African American Churches, the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy and the American Friends Service Committee.

Leaders of the three groups presented their findings during a press briefing at the state Capitol Tuesday.

Those findings include statistics that show black children under the age of five are more than twice as likely than white children to live in poverty.

The report also found that the infant mortality rate for blacks in West Virginia is 12 per 1,000, which is worse than in Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Russia, Ukraine, Costa Rica and Bosnia.

While the per capita income for black residents is more than \$6,000 less than what whites earn, blacks earn high school diplomas at about the same rate as Caucasians in the state and lead whites by six percentage points in earning some form of college or associate's degree.

Although the study's sponsors say they hope the data will be "eye-opening," they are more interested in the results it may inspire.

"If we just talk about it, nothing will get done. We need to change these cold hard facts," said the Rev. James Patterson, president of the Partnership of African American Churches.

Patterson anecdotally compared the situation facing the state's black population to the one that unfolded on the West Virginia Turnpike in December.

A major snowstorm and related tractor-trailer accidents shut down the roadway and left motorists stranded for up to 20 hours. Since the incident, Turnpike and transportation officials have come together to address concerns and brainstorm solutions for the future.

Patterson said he hopes the findings in the report will elicit the same type of response from state leaders.

"We have African Americans who are stranded on the Turnpike," he said. "We need to call everyone into action and do something about it."

The groups are supporting several legislative and policy initiatives they say would address key issues highlighted in the report.

A bill currently pending in the state House of Delegates calls for the creation of the Herbert Henderson Office of Minority Affairs.

According to language in the bill, the office, named in honor of the late civil rights attorney from Huntington, would provide a centralized forum for issues affecting minorities in the state, make policy recommendations, award grants and loans for minority affairs programs as appropriated by the Legislature, and provide recommendations to the governor and lawmakers about programs and services to support minority groups.

Delegate Cliff Moore, D-McDowell, is one of the main sponsors of the legislation.

"I do not want to be known as the delegate who's only concerned about minority affairs," Moore said. "Having said that, I do believe if one group lags behind, we all fail."

He added, "We want to ensure every West Virginian has a full seat at the American table of opportunity."

According to figures calculated by the Governor's Office, start-up expenses for an Office of Minority Affairs would cost the state close to \$350,000.

Moore predicted the figure would cause some people to speak out against the bill.

"Whenever we don't want to do something in West Virginia, we don't have the money it seems," Moore said.

Other initiatives authors of the study are backing include:

- Reauthorizing professional development schools in counties with high-minority and low-income populations.

- Enacting a state Earned Income Tax Credit.

- Extending unemployment insurance to a portion of workers who are currently excluded.

- Appropriating more state funds to support economic development projects in communities with large black populations.

Contact writer Sara Gavin at sara.ga...@dailymail.com or 304-348-5149.

COMMENTS (57) ON "RACIAL DIVIDE PERSISTS IN STATE"

POST COMMENT

Posted By: **keerist** (6 minutes ago)

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This thread is beginning to look like a Klan meeting. And people wonder why West Virginia is the laughingstock of America.

Posted By: **Damn right** (26 minutes ago)

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@kdmc47

I'm not sure I understand your comment. But regardless, I'm female and therefore do not have a wife. And you asked why so much hate? I did not mention hate, I merely mentioned facts.

Posted By: **varmint** (48 minutes ago)

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My chicken went across the road.

Posted By: **YIA** (50 minutes ago)

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My husband and I were talking about this just the other day. Neither of us were raised in an even remotely racist home, we weren't friends with racists growing up, we were never even around black people until we became adults. And yet both of us as well as our siblings have formed a very negative opinion of black people. It doesn't say much for your race when people start off as a blank slate but end up not liking you after they've experienced being around you.