



THE CPAC INFORMER

Political Issues Impacting the
Caribbean American Diaspora

Volume 5 Issue 1 SPRING – SUMMER 2018

Letter from the Chair

Welcome! As we pause and bear witness to the assault on immigration, and the rancor in which we are now immersed, we must remain vigilant and work to be part of the solution in addressing it. Whether documented or undocumented, we are all impacted. Currently, congress is being encouraged to stop legally documented immigrants from sponsoring extended family members who want to move to the United States. This is done under the guise that so-called “chain migration” poses a threat to national security. The crack down on illegal immigration also continues with the call for a wall along the Mexican border, and more arrests of people living in the country illegally.

In the midst of the depravity of a national policy of placing in cages, the children of refugees who perilously flee for their very lives to this country, it is obvious that freedom, justice and indeed human dignity, compassion and sanity, is imperiled. Let us be the proactive people we are known to be. We, the sons and daughters of the Caribbean, should strive to make a difference in the face of this human tragedy. Let us shout, run, walk or limp if need be to offer our help. Above all, let us pray! We should act decisively at this crucial moment in our national story. We have lots to do.

In this issue we introduce you to Jheanelle Wilkins; a dynamic young politician from our community. We encourage you to let us know about other members of the Caribbean Diaspora who are involved in the political arena and are making a difference. I invite you to consider volunteering with C-PAC. We currently have numerous opportunities available. Volunteering is an excellent way to get to know the organization and your fellow Diaspora colleagues. You can reach us at: cpac.dmv@gmail.com.

REGIONAL ELECTION UPDATE

This year, Caribbean-American Heritage Month coincided with primary elections in the Washington Metro Area. As we have done previously, we attempted to keep the Caribbean community abreast of the issues facing our region. We encouraged our community to vote. To that end, we shared regular updates through the C-PAC CHAT regarding the various regional primary elections. By means of questionnaires, we sought various candidates’ views on issues of importance to us. Responses to the questionnaires can be seen at <http://www.caribbeanpac.org/candidates-forum.php>.

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REGIONAL ELECTION UPDATE *(continued)*

Using the online Survey Monkey tool, members of the Caribbean community were encouraged to vote, and did vote, for the candidates that they thought C-PAC should endorse and financially support in a number of races. C-PAC honored the responses and supported the candidates with the majority of votes. See the candidates C-PAC members endorsed here: <http://www.caribbeanpac.org/documents/PRESS-RELEASE-2018-REGIONAL-PRIMARIES.pdf> www.caribbeanpac.org. The complete Washington, D.C. Primary Election 2018 results are available at https://electionresults.dcboe.org/election_results/2018-Primary-Election. Congratulations to the winners. We look forward to working with them to advance the political agenda of

the Caribbean community in the DMV. Look out for more results in upcoming C-PAC communication.

Washingtonians adopted the Minimum Wage Amendment Act of 2017. This initiative mandates a gradual increase of the minimum wage in the District of Columbia from \$7.25 per hour to \$15 per hour by the year 2020. It also gradually increases D.C.'s minimum wage for tipped employees to the minimum by 2026. Furthermore, it requires D.C.'s minimum wage to be increased in proportion to the consumer price index beginning in 2021. The amendment excludes D.C. Government employees and contractors from the wage increases.

C-PAC 2018 IMMIGRATION TOWN HALL MEETING

In recognition of Caribbean American Heritage month, C-PAC, in partnership with Peoples Congregational United Church of Christ (UCC) held an Immigration town hall meeting at the church on June 1. The meeting gave residents of the DMV an opportunity to ask questions and share their concerns with an expert panel of immigration legal scholars. Rev. Dr. Ronald Hopson, designate Senior Minister of the church welcomed the group and brought greetings on behalf of the church. In her opening remarks, Dr. Goulda A. Downer, C-PAC's Chair, shared that the United States has a long and proud history as an immigrant nation. "But," she asked, "when you hear the word immigrant, what comes to mind? For most people the word is tethered to illegal. We must change that narrative."

The meeting focused on regional immigration issues, and highlighted how they are being addressed. On hand to inform and address the group were: Jaye A. Lowe, Esq., Principal of the Immigration Law Practice and Co-Chair for C-PAC's Advisory Board; Naznin Saifi, Esq., Executive Director for the Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center; Iris Figueroa, Esq., Staff Attorney for Farmworker Justice; and Karl A. Racine, Esq., Attorney General for the District of Columbia.

A.G Racine was introduced by Kayla Kelley, a member of C-PAC's Young Adult Initiative. He provided an overview of regional immigration issues, and explained how they are

being addressed by his office. He also discussed issues relative to the emolument clause to the constitution which he and his office believe that the president is violating. The panel then addressed a number of issues including student visa; the plight of farm and guest workers; challenges around green card applications; concerns around citizenship rights; the future of chain migration; human trafficking; asylum seekers; aggressive deportation; and the separation of children and parents in the "Trump era."

A lively discussion then ensued. This was followed by a question and answer period. As one attendee, a green card holder shared, "this has allowed me the opportunity for face-to-face discussion with people who are knowledgeable and can help us. I'm glad I came. I feel less scared now." The event was moderated by Derrice Dean of CARIBNATION TV. Closing remarks were given by Dr. Solanges Vivins, C-PAC Founding Patron & Advisory Board Member.

YOUNG CARIBBEAN DIASPORA POLITICIAN ON THE GO



Born in Kingston, Jamaica, **Jheanelle Wilkins** is a progressive, community-driven advocate dedicated to policy change that makes a difference in people's lives. Jheanelle proudly represents the 20th Legislative District in the Maryland House of Delegates. She serves on the influential Ways and Means Committee where she plays

a lead role in the state's education, revenue, and election law legislative areas. She has sponsored and championed successful legislation to curb racial profiling, improve maternal health, increase equity in our schools, advance gun safety, protect our environment, and reform the state's justice system. She also serves on the bipartisan House Opioid Workgroup, which drives state policy on ending the opioid crisis.

Despite a rising trend, gender balance in politics is far from a reality in the US. This includes at the municipal level as well. What are your ideas to try to redress this imbalance?

When women are at the table, we help build consensus and bring a variety of talents to address pressing community issues. It's critical that political leaders seek out, mentor, and support women to help achieve gender balance in politics. Intentional mentorship and support to create opportunities for women is important to correcting this imbalance.

When it comes to public office in particular, one of the biggest challenges women face in achieving success is the ability to fundraise. Strong fundraising affects the ability to compete and win. It's critical that we implement systems that help equalize the fundraising playing field, such as public financing for all local and state offices. Montgomery County, Maryland successfully utilized public financing this year for its county executive and county council races, and it allowed more women to compete.

When did you find yourself fascinated by politics and making a career out of it?

I was always passionate about helping people. As a young person, I won awards for community service, and enjoyed doing my part in the community. When I was in college at the University of Delaware, I started to learn more about policy, and how it affects different groups of people. The more I learned about the impact that policy has on people's lives, the more I became interested in becoming a policymaker. My passion for politics is rooted in being an advocate for policies that transform lives.

Is there a cause you're particularly passionate about?

I am passionate about many issues, including educational equity, health care access, and economic security. However, the rights of immigrants is one of my greatest passions. My family and I migrated to the United States when I was five years old. Before I was born, I had family members in the country who lacked status. The mistreatment of immigrants—from

any country – is an injustice, and I'm passionate about furthering the rights and opportunity of all immigrants in the United States.

What do you perceive is the most pressing political issue for Caribbean nationals residing in the DMV?

Caribbean nationals believe in education as critical to success. We instill the value of education into students starting at a young age. One of the most pressing issues is lack of equity in education for students of color. Black students are underperforming when compared to our counterparts in every jurisdiction in the DMV. As a result, Black students, including Caribbean nationals, are unable to fully achieve the promise of a high-quality education.

How important was volunteering to your decision to enter the political arena?

Volunteering was my first form of service, and it was very important to my decision to enter the political arena. I spent a lot of time volunteering in my community – from soup kitchens to the boards of community organizations – before I entered public service. Volunteering helped me to get to know my community and issues that my neighbors and fellow residents were facing.

Our young adults often report feeling alienated by electoral politics. How do you suggest we connect with young voters?

As a millennial myself, I think it's important to reach young people with the issues most pertinent to them and reach them in the places where they engage. Young people care about student debt, affordability of their housing and community, transportation access, etc. We have to reach young people in the places they congregate, using the methods and people they listen to, and empower them to get involved in the issues that they care about.

What is your favorite Caribbean Dish?

My mother's curry chicken!

What Inspires You?

I'm inspired by my mother who brought my brother and me to the United States with very little here except her family. She opened a small business, and struggled on her own to raise my brother and me. She ensured that we took advantage of every opportunity this country had to offer, and raised two children who are able to make an impact on people's lives every day.

DID YOU KNOW.....

CARIBBEAN-AMERICAN FIRSTS AND NOTABLES

In 2007, President Bush signed Proclamation 8153, recognizing June as Caribbean-American Heritage Month.

The proclamation included the following:

- We recognize Caribbean Americans and celebrate the many ways they contribute to our nation.
- They helped shape the spirit and character of our country.
- They enrich the American experience by sharing their traditions, history, and values.
- Our Nation is deeply grateful to the Caribbean Americans who defend our liberty as members of our Armed Forces.
- The service and sacrifice of these courageous men and women are helping lay the foundation of peace for generations to come.

MEMBERSHIP

C-PAC is built on a strong foundation. We have developed a solid and efficient organizational structure which now gives us the ability to move beyond the administration of the organization as we continue to build a dynamic program. As a membership organization C-PAC continues to work on maintaining an accurate database of our members and supporters. We encourage you to spread the word about C-PAC; renew your annual membership and become vested in the organization. Visit <http://www.caribbeanpac.org/about.php>

Here are some Caribbean-Americans that have made significant contributions to the US.

- *Shirley Chisholm* – First African American woman elected to Congress. She was also the first African American woman to run for the Presidency.
- *Donna Christensen* – First female physician to serve in Congress (C-PAC Advisory Board Member)
- *Eric Holder* – First African American U.S. Attorney General.
- *Antonia Novello* – First female U.S. Surgeon General.
- *Sidney Poitier* – First African American actor to receive the Academy Award for best actor.
- *Colin Powell* – First African American Secretary of State.
- *John Russwurm* – First African American editor of a U.S. newspaper.
- *Kamala Harris* – Second African American woman elected to the U.S. Senate.
- *James Weldon Johnson* – Writer of the prominent African-American National Anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing”.
- *Dr. William Thornton* – Physician and architect who designed the U.S. Capitol.

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NEWS You Can Use!!!

C-PAC Annual Founding Patrons' Luncheon:

Saturday, October 13, 2018 from 12:00-3:00 PM. The event will be held at the DoubleTree by Hilton in Silver Spring, MD

Annual General Meeting:

November 3, 2018 from 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM!! Details to follow.

C-PAC Executive Board:

Chair: Dr Goulida Downer
Member-at-Large: Dr. Frances Jefferson
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WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Here are some ways you can support C-PAC - stay engaged. Invite Caribbean Americans and friends of the Caribbean across the metropolitan area to get involved.

Know someone who needs to become a member of C-PAC? Download our membership application form and get folks plugged in! Regular membership is \$50.00 and \$25.00 for students and those over 65 years of age.

Follow C-PAC on Twitter @CPAC_DMV. We follow back! Are you on Facebook? Like our page and invite your friends to like us too!

Already a C-PAC member? Join a committee! Do you want to serve in Membership, Fundraising, Political Advisory, Communications, or Outreach? Take your pick, bring your ideas and be ready to serve.

Keep in touch. Have an idea? Want to help plan or host a community forum? We're only an email away! Send us a message at cpac.dmv@gmail.com.

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