

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH DR. MICHAEL L. LOMAX

SUBJECT: CHALLENGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION FOR PEOPLE OF COLOR

MODERATOR: MYRON BELKIND, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

LOCATION: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB HOLEMAN LOUNGE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 12:30 P.M. EDT

DATE: TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 2014

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**MYRON BELKIND:** (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome. My name is Myron Belkind. I'm an adjunct professor at the George Washington University School of Media and Public Affairs, and Graduate School of Political Management, a former Bureau Chief for the Associated Press, and the 107<sup>th</sup> President of the National Press Club. The National Press Club is the world's leading professional organization for journalists committed to our profession's future through our programming with events such as this while fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). And to donate to programs offered to the public through our National Press Club Journalism Institute, please visit [www.press.org/institute](http://www.press.org/institute).

On behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and those of you attending today's event. Our head table includes guests of our speaker as well as working journalists who are Club members. If you hear applause in our audience, I'd note that members of the general public are attending, so it is not necessarily evidence of a lack of journalistic objectivity.

1

I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and Public Radio audiences. You can follow the action on Twitter using the hashtag NPCLunch. After our guest's speech concludes, we'll have a question and answer period. I will ask as many questions as time permits. Now it's time to introduce our head table. I'd like to ask each of you to stand briefly as your name is mentioned.

On my left, your right, Mark Hamrick, Washington Bureau Chief of BankRate, and former NPC President; Troy Johnson, WNEW, WHUR, and NBC 4; Joe Madison of SiriusXM Satellite Radio; Jerry Zremski of *Buffalo News* and chair of the NPC Speakers Committee, and a former National Press Club President.

Skipping over our speaker for a moment, Captain Kevin Wensing, U.S. Navy retired, and Speakers Committee member who organized today's event. Thank you, Kevin. Tamika Smith of Radio One; Larry Bivins, Gannett retired and former NPC board member; and Nyree Wright, MSLGroup/Qorvis and chair of the NPC 5k committee. (Applause)

They are called historically black colleges, and they have produced alumni who have made history. From the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. to Justice Thurgood Marshall to Toni Morrison to Spike Lee to Congressman John Lewis, whom we are expecting to have with us today, I think he's coming right from the Hill, all of these graduates of these schools have gone on to lead in fields ranging from politics to literature to the arts. And for 70 years, the United Negro College Fund has been the financial lifeline that's allowed many of the students at historically black colleges to thrive.

Every year, the fund provides more than \$100 million in scholarships to tens of thousands of students. Over the decades, the fund has raised and distributed more than \$3 billion in educational assistance. And in 1999 was the beneficiary of a \$1 billion gift from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. A billion dollars may seem like a lot of money even here in Washington, but the need is so great that for the United Negro College Fund even a billion dollars will run out eventually. And that's just one of the challenges the United Negro College Fund faces as it enters its eighth decade.

Here to address those challenges is our guest today, Dr. Michael L. Lomax, President and Chief Executive of the United Negro College Fund. A native of Los Angeles, Dr. Lomax graduated from Morehouse College and embarked on a career as a literature professor. He later served as President of Dillard University before taking the helm at the College Fund in 2004. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in giving a warm National Press Club welcome to Dr. Michael Lomax. (Applause)

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** Thank you, Myron, thank you ladies and gentlemen. And great thanks to all of you for joining us today to discuss the current state of educational opportunities for college students of color in the country. And particularly the challenges facing our historically black colleges and universities, or HBCUs.

As I look around the room, I feel certain that a great majority of you know exactly who we are at the United Negro College Fund and what we do. I'm also aware that many Americans of a diverse background know us primarily for our iconic motto, "The mind is a terrible thing to waste" without knowing precisely what our role is. Let me take a few moments to clarify. UNCF was formed in 1944-- yes, we are in our 70<sup>th</sup> year of existence-- to consolidate the fundraising for a group of America's historically black colleges. UNCF's core

mission has always been to help fund these vital institutions that have brought educational opportunities to African-Americans for over 100 years. During our 70 years, we have helped more than 400,000 students graduate from our partner schools by raising nearly \$4 billion.

Over time, we have developed a profile as a premium, well run nonprofit and an efficient manager of donated dollars. This led the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to entrust us with \$1.6 billion in grants beginning in 1999 to be used for scholarships for all communities of color. Today, we support more than 12,000 students at 900 schools across the country each year. But our core mission remains our partnership with 37 private four-year HBCUs and to advocate for all 105 HBCUs, a number that includes the state supported historically black institutions as well.

Today, our member schools are facing a financial crisis as severe as any in UNCF history. Pressured by years of rising costs, even though UNCF member schools have operating budgets that average less than 50 percent of those of other four-year private colleges. That is to say they tend to have much lower tuitions and are, in many ways, a best buy in education.

The irony of this situation is that the financial crisis comes at a time when interest by African American high school students in attending HBCUs has been on the rise for over a decade. Between the 2001 and 2002 academic year, and the 2012-2013 year, UNCF member institutions saw a 78 percent rise in applications and a 64 percent increase in admissions. These numbers are comparable to all four year institutions, but while enrollment at all four year institutions rose by 21 percent over that period, enrollment at UNCF's member HBCUs remained essentially flat, rising by only 5 percent.

Why? The answer is simple: lack of funding for scholarships. HBCUs tend to draw students from comparatively low income families and the need for financial aid is significant. UNCF is working hard to meet the strong demand by young African-Americans for an education at our member schools, but donations have not kept pace with that demand particularly in the aftermath of the great recession.

The good news is that the demand is there. I'm often asked how colleges that serve an almost exclusively black population can still be relevant in today's world. Why, I'm asked, would a young African American want to attend one of these institutions? Well, for one thing, HBCUs do a very good job educating these students. HBCU graduates are laser focused on getting jobs. That's why they go to college. They understand the critical importance of a college degree in today's economy.

Most HBCU students major in business or a business related field like accounting. Many are interested in the STEM subjects; science, technology, engineering and math. They know where the jobs are.

There are deeper reasons for continued demand for HBCUs, however. I talk to thousands of students about their interest in attending an HBCU and they tend to raise three points to explain why they want to attend an historically black college. First, they say the

schools feel like home. They feel like family. Second, they believe HBCUs will let them explore themselves as an individual rather than as a statistic.

And finally, at an HBCU, they feel they can learn more about where they come from. This is a powerful set of motivators that echoes research from UNCF's Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute, and I believe will continue to motivate students for years to come.

Desire and high motivation, however, are not the same as scholarship funding. I have found it personally painful to see the number of applications for the scholarships available through UNCF skyrocket while the number of scholarships themselves has grown much more slowly. The ratio of applications to available scholarships is approaching ten to one. At UNCF, we all agree that this has to change. We have redoubled our efforts to increase donations and revamped our operations to better serve UNCF members and our students.

The reality of these bright young people with dreams for a college education, but desperately needing scholarships, led to last year's update of our fundraising campaign which we call Better Futures. We need to raise the level of urgency of our appeal to donors and highlight the impact of a college education for everyone. But particularly for African Americans and students of color.

We needed to look at funding for scholarships at HBCUs less as an isolated donation and more as an investment in the future. It is an investment in the future of young black men and women, an investment in the future of their communities, and an investment of the future of well being of our society.

So, our iconic motto recognized, according to research, by over 90 percent of Americans, has been changed to reflect the urgent need to create better futures. Our new motto reads "A mind is a terrible thing to waste, but a wonderful thing to invest in." And investing in students through UNCF works. Our Patterson Research Institute examined the effectiveness of our scholarships and found that an African American freshman who receives a \$5,000 UNCF scholarship returns for her sophomore year at a 94 percent rate; graduates in six years at a 70 percent rate, which is considerably higher than the 59 percent six year graduation rate at all of our four year colleges. And sees her likelihood of graduating increase by over seven percentage points.

So let me make this point clear for you. The six year graduation rate for African-Americans is 40 percent. If we could increase that rate by over seven percentage points, we would graduate close to 16,000 more African-Americans with bachelor's degrees each year. That is a investment that pays dividends not only for those students, but also to the investors and the country at large. This data and other economic impact research under girds our campaign. So when we talk about an investment in UNCF as an investment in better futures, we have the numbers to back it up.

Feedback on the new campaign from supporters has been positive and we are optimistic for the future. But the financial crisis at our HBCU members is happening right now,

today. It is real and it has been made worse by changes made by the Department of Education in October 2011 to the credit requirements for parent plus loans. These loans are one of the most important supports for higher education provided by the U.S. government. And they happen to be a major funding source for college by African American parents who are willing to make great sacrifices to help their children realize their dreams of a college degree.

We were blindsided by the changes that literally, from one day to the next, made many thousands of these parents ineligible for parent plus loans. The impact on students who depended on parent plus funds was immediate and devastating. Many who arrived at their college dorms after the summer break in the fall of 2012 were literally turned away at the door. Eventually, some 28,000 HBCU students felt the shock of the changes to parent plus. Many were forced to drop out of school. HBCUs themselves lost \$155 million in revenue in 2012-2013 alone, further straining already tight budgets.

It is astounding that this administration that has set itself up as a great promoter of education could have pursued a policy change so detrimental to the education of so many young people. And to make the change with no public discussion, no advance communications, and zero effort to give parents and students timely information and potential alternatives was simply irresponsible.

After more than two years, this situation has remained essentially unchanged despite widespread concerns by parents and the efforts of a broad coalition of organizations with a leading role played by members of the Congressional Black Caucus. The only effort to rectify the situation has been a letter by Secretary Duncan to the CBC to announce a program to allow parents to appeal their parent plus status and a plan to take a look at the credit criteria through a lengthy regulatory process. Not an acceptable solution.

In the face of this situation, UNCF has made a special appeal to our supporters for emergency funding to replace the lost parent plus loans with scholarships for students forced to drop out of school. I want to thank the many individuals, philanthropic and corporate donors who have responded to our appeal.

Let me be clear, that UNCF believes that both parent plus loans and the more widely used Pell grants, as well as all the federal loan programs, need attention by the government so they will better serve students facing today's realities in college education. Draconian, overnight changes are not the way to proceed. What's needed is a more thoughtful, collaborative process. However, we are also aware that in Washington, collaboration is lamentably in short supply.

You know, there was a time when partnership did not stand in the way of progress. That when, pardon me, when partisanship did not stand in the way of progress in Washington. Coalitions built with members of both parties were able to find common ground to move forward on important initiatives for the public good. But we have now entered a time of widespread paralysis in our nation's capital. Combined with a decade or more of cuts to higher education at the state level, that have forced public college and university tuitions to rise far beyond the affordable level for a large portion of Americans, we now see higher education in

crisis mode throughout the country.

While UNCF will continue to advocate for change in Washington, we have responded to the paralysis by increasing our traditional focus on the private sector. With our updated campaign and emphasis on donations as an investment, we are sparing no effort to meet and form relationships with individuals and organizations interested in supporting higher education. All we ask is that they believe in our mission and in the reality that a mind is a terrible thing to waste but a wonderful thing to invest in.

And with that, let me share a recent experience related to our new, better futures campaign, as I think it provides a window into just how polarized our world has become. Sadly, it's a world that puts politics before a student's education and her future. Many of you have probably heard of the Ad Council, but may not know what they do. They provide free public service announcement time on television and radio for nonprofits such as UNCF. The time is donated by the stations and other sponsors.

A number of times last year, our PSA announcements aired for free on Rush Limbaugh's program and on the Al-Jazeera network. Well, I bet you can guess what happened. We received angry letters and calls from all across the country asking how we could possibly support Rush Limbaugh and Al-Jazeera. The reality is we did not, and do not, financially support them. But we did want their audiences to hear our message.

While I'm not certain we received huge traction or new donors, what I do know is that our message about the importance of investing in students, in students of color, should be delivered whenever and wherever there is an audience. There should be no litmus test on who wants to support UNCF and HBCUs. Ours is not a partisan message. It is a universal appeal and one we believe all Americans should support.

In the end, I bet we did get a couple of new supporters. But the bottom line is education for low income minority students must transcend politics if we are to succeed. It's important to emphasize that UNCF does not consider the crisis facing HBCUs as the only or perhaps even the most important issue in education today. It is simply the one most central to our mission. We are advocates for education in a number of areas. One of them is college readiness and the primary and secondary school initiatives designed to make those schools more effective at providing solid learning and preparation for college and careers.

Research by the testing firm, ACT, last year indicates that only 5 percent-- I'm going to say that again-- only 5 percent of recent ACT tested African American high school graduates measured by combined scores on English, reading, math, and science benchmarks, that only 5 percent of those tested students are college ready. This has to change. And it can change when students take a rigorous college preparatory curriculum that includes a core of four years of English and three years each of math, social studies, and science. The authors of the ACT study say that they have consistently found the students who take the recommended core curriculum are more likely to be ready for college or a career than those who do not.

ACT data show that African American high school graduates who have taken core or more, as they say, curriculum meet college readiness benchmarks at much higher rates than those who do not. This tells me that two new nationally adopted curriculum standards in English and math called Common Core that have caused heated debate must be preserved in the form that gives our students the rigorous preparation and basic courses they need to succeed in college and careers.

At the end of the day, I go back to our better futures campaign. We serve our partner HBCUs to create more economically secure young people. And this reverberates through the community and our society. Education is the best form of economic development. It is the best pathway to better futures. HBCUs have played, and continue to play, an outsized role in the education of African-Americans dating from the time in which blacks were excluded from public land grant universities and most other institutions of higher learning and continuing right through today when HBCUs that represent only 4 percent of the nation's four year colleges and universities account for almost 20 percent of African American bachelor degree recipients.

HBCUs have proven their value. We all have a role to play in overcoming the current crisis and insuring their success and long-term viability. UNCF has accelerated and intensified its appeal for donations from individuals, philanthropies and corporations. We believe that all who have a serious interest in higher education should consider donating to HBCUs through UNCF. And please remember, a mind is a terrible thing to waste but a wonderful thing to invest in. I'm delighted to take questions. (Applause)

**MR. BELKIND:** Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome me in joining the Honorable John Lewis, who came from a busy morning on the Hill and who I mentioned in my-- (Applause)

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** I'm honored to have my Congressman of the 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District of George join us and an alumnus of an HBCU member institution, Fisk University. Congressman Lewis, thank you for being here today. John, I've got to do what you probably have to do all too often. I'm supposed to answer questions at this point. I may have to call on you to help me out.

**MR. BELKIND:** Dr. Lomax, you mentioned that UNCF donations have not kept pace with demand. Why is that?

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** UNCF donations have been going up, but not at the same pace as the demand because the demand is so great. For every scholarship that UNCF provides, and this year we'll provide about 12,000 scholarships with a dollar value of \$100 million, we turn down nine students for every scholarship we award. The demand is ten to one and UNCF is committed to redoubling our efforts to increase the amount we have to provide scholarships to individual students and support to private historically black colleges. And that's the way we're here today, to let the country understand that there's a crisis at HBCUs. They are there to educate first generation low income students. They don't have the resources to do it and those students don't have the financial wherewithal to pay for tuition and they need

scholarship support that UNCF provides.

**MR. BELKIND:** After 70 years of success, the UNCF has had leaders go into many fields. Has the success of your students translated into significant grants and endowments and aided fundraising efforts?

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** We're in the final stages of this year's annual campaign, which will end on March 31<sup>st</sup>. When we close our books, we expect to have raised somewhere between 70, 75 million dollars this year. We will have a base of tens of thousands of individual donors, as well as corporations and foundations that will have helped us raise that. We will have had almost 50 special events in cities all across this country. And throughout that network of support, UNCF alumni, both our scholarship recipients and the graduates of our colleges, have provided yeoman's labor to help us raise those dollars.

The fact is we get strong support from our alumni. We want it to be stronger. But we also have got to get even more support from America's wealthiest individuals, from major corporations and foundations, to insure that we can address the crisis of affordability and resources for students today to pay the tuition, to attend the college of their choice. And if we are not able to do that, they will suffer, their communities will suffer and our nation will.

**MR. BELKIND:** The Gates Foundation money is substantial. Is it structured into an endowment? And if so, why can't it meet the demand for scholarships?

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation awarded UNCF initially \$1 billion in 1999, to award 20,000 four year scholarships to African American students, Latino students, Native American, Asia Pacific Islander students. Year to date, we have awarded 17,000 of those scholarships. We will award 3,000 more scholarships in the next three years, a thousand scholars a year. This is a program which has a defeasance strategy. It's going to run out, although there'll be a surplus of about \$300 million at the end of the scholarship period. I see my chief financial officer shaking his head, maybe a little less than that.

They did not want an endowment. They wanted this to be a defeasance program and even \$1.6 billion can't pay for everybody. And so what UNCF has done is to share with the nation the impact of that scholarship which by the way these students can take-- we make this award their senior year of high school. These are high performing, low income students, most of them first in their families ever to go to college. They can take this to the college of their choice and we have them attending 900 colleges and universities. And they graduate at a 90 percent five year rate. And we also will support them through the Ph.D. and the STEM disciplines and in public health.

8 So it's been an incredible demonstration of the power and impact of scholarships. And we'd like to see more people step up like Bill and Melinda Gates have and support more young people as they work to realize their dreams of a college education.

**MR. BELKIND:** The Night of Stars led by Lou Rawls was always a great source of



funding. Does it still support UNCF's mission?

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** An Evening of Stars started almost 40 years ago. Nancy Wilson and Clifton Davis were the first two stars to step forward and create the program in Los Angeles. Lou Rawls became the guiding light for it for many years, the late Lou Rawls. We continue to have the show. We have, however, made some changes and this year we will tape it in Atlanta, Georgia, not in Los Angeles on April the 6<sup>th</sup>. It will be broadcast on BET on April the 13<sup>th</sup> and then in syndication.

And it is returning to its roots as a fundraiser. It was an old telethon with people sitting at a long table answering phones. 21<sup>st</sup> century, we don't do it that way. There'll be a 1-800 number, there'll be a text to give and there'll be a lot of social media. And it is our plan that this will reenergize a new generation of funders around this critical time of supporting individual students in need of financial support for a college education and historically black colleges which are in crisis financially today.

**MR. BELKIND:** Why do you think the Obama Administration has been so unresponsive to your concerns about parent plus loans?

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** It's been a bit of a conundrum to me why the administration has dug in its heels on what is by even their own admission a bad policy and a bad process at arriving at that policy. I'll let Secretary Duncan and his team make the case for why they have maintained the policy. But I'll make the case today that parent plus, federal financial aid, all of their loan programs, need a comprehensive and thorough review which is part of the reauthorization of the act that creates these programs.

My view is that they need to turn the clock back, return to the policy that was in place prior to the change that they made, and then have an open process for considering this and other changes which need to be made. The reality is that there's a huge pipeline of low income first generation students queuing up to go to college. They've worked hard, they learned what they were supposed to learn, they've done what they were supposed to do. They're at the doors of college classrooms all across this country including HBCUs. They have the academic preparation, they don't have the financial capability of paying tuition and room and board.

We need to find a way for them to get private scholarships, and that's the work of UNCF. The federal government needs to get the Pell grants so that they actually pay for more of that college experience wherever the students go.

We also need to recognize that students are going to have to have skin in the game. They're going to have to borrow. They and their families are going to have to make some decisions. And we need to structure the loan programs, parent plus and other loan programs, so that the interest rates are appropriately low, so that the repayment plans are taken into consideration whether a student is employed and how much he or she is making after graduation. And also, finally, so that the collection of those loans is not on the backs of colleges and universities, but is undertaken by the federal government itself.

In Australia, if I borrow to go to college the equivalent of the IRS is responsible for collecting my debt. And they know how much I earn and they know how much I can pay back. Today, that responsibility is on the backs of colleges and universities across this country. It's a distraction from the work they need to be doing, which is insuring their students graduate with the skills and capabilities needed to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Why the Obama Administration has focused just on parent plus and made such a bad fix and told us so little about it, I think they need to defend. I think we know that it's had adverse impact on the students and their families who are trying to get a college education. And that's why UNCF is continuing to speak on this issue, and very importantly why we continue to raise dollars to try to help those students with private scholarships.

**MR. BELKIND:** One more question about President Obama. President Obama recently launched his My Brother's Keeper initiative aimed at "to help more young men of color facing especially tough odds to stay on track and reach their full potential." Is the United Negro College Fund a part of President Obama's effort, and do you see this as an area where you can play an important role?

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** So, we want to model partnership and civil disagreement. We can disagree with the Obama Administration on an issue, and we do on parent plus and we're vigorous in our disagreement. But we can also lift up the incredible work that the President, First Lady and the White House and the Department of Ed are doing to focus on students of color, low income, first generation students, who are trying to get a college education. And nowhere have they done a more important job than in focusing on boys. And yes, we look forward to partnering with them and had a suggestion recently from a Department of Ed official that we focus in on the successes we've had with African American, Latino, Native American and Asia Pacific Islander youth in the Gates Millennium Scholars Program. Because 50 percent of all the Gates scholars are boys and they have a graduation rate almost as high as the girls which is-- and the across the board graduation rate is 90 percent.

And what we've demonstrated is when you remove the financial barrier and you provide social and cultural supports to these young people who are pursuing something which is really hard, going to college, leaving home, leaving their support, if you provide them supports they will soar. And that there are other examples within the UNCF scholarship portfolio of success with young men and we look forward to highlighting those and getting others to replicate them.

**MR. BELKIND:** Regarding your support for the Common Core national curriculum, what would you say to Common Core critics who say it's a top down takeover of local education?

10 **DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** You know, Common Core curriculum, which is really just setting very high standards in math and English and writing and reading for understanding was something that was embraced by most of the states, governors and departments of education around the country. And it's only been in the implementation that suddenly there's been this vocal group of critics who have said that this is some kind of way of centralizing the

role of the federal government in controlling what happens in local education.

Our kids need to be competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They don't need to learn English in one way in one community and English another way in another community; math in one way in one community and math in another way in another community. These are fundamental building blocks for all education. And I think our kids can be taught at a highly rigorous and demanding level and they can rise to that occasion.

The students they're competing with are not just the kids in the suburbs. Our kids are competing with kids in China, in India and Western Europe. And if they're going to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they're going to have to work harder and they're going to have to learn more and they're going to have to learn at exacting, rigorous standard levels. And that's why I support Common Core.

I'll make one other point. For years, the curriculum for low income kids of color has been dumbed down. It's been the general education courses, the basic courses that those kids have been exposed to which has neither prepared them for citizenship, for career, nor for college. I want low income African American, Latino and other kids of color, to get the chance not to be low income. And the best chance for them is to get the education that will prepare them for college and to get the support that will enable them to graduate from college. That's why I support Common Core.

**MR. BELKIND:** The level of education in reading and writing proficiency among many high school graduates has fallen in some places in recent years. Are UNCF schools seeing this? And how would you rate the quality of incoming freshmen today compared with those from 10 to 20 years ago?

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** Well, I taught freshman composition beginning in 1969 at Morehouse College. I have a pretty good recollection of just how good those young men were nearly 45 years ago. Many of the kids that I taught in an earlier generation wanted to go to college but they had gone to segregated schools in the deep south and they hadn't gotten the kinds of educational preparation. And we spent a lot of time at Morehouse in the 1960s doing remedial work. Every student took reading and took basic writing courses and they had to work very hard to be able to get proficient so that they could move into the advanced courses.

Today, the good news is that we're seeing more young people who have gone to demanding middle and high schools who are graduating college ready and are coming to the institutions prepared to do for credit work, for credit work. The ACT tells us that it's only 5 percent who are college ready in all four disciplines. And what they mean by that is a student has a 75 percent chance of getting a C in one of his courses, or a 50 percent chance of getting a B<sub>1</sub>. And so they may not be proficient in all four of those areas, but maybe in three or two of them.

I think we're seeing more kids who know that college is important, are motivated and are doing everything that they can to succeed, not always with the preparation. It's uneven. I

spoke with one college president a year or so ago as we were facing the parent plus loan problem. And he said, “You know, the irony of today being a college president is I'm seeing students come to us how are academically better prepared but who are financially more challenged.” And so, I'd say even as we solve the academic preparation issue, we've got to solve the financial capability issue and government really has a very important role to play there.

**MR. BELKIND:** How has access and the rapid growth of online education courses affected the historically black colleges? And how do you see online education affecting the business model of these schools in the future?

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** We continue to see significant increases in applications to historically black colleges, up as I said, close to 80 percent over the last decade. Admissions are up, acceptances are down. We don't think that-- we think the reason why these students don't come is because we can't offer them more scholarship and financial aid, not that they think there's a better school for them to attend or that they want to go online.

Today, online is a vital and vibrant and growing sector. It continues to attract older learners who are already in the workforce who want to enhance their skills or get another degree. I don't see them as competitive with HBCUs. I would say that they are laboratories for best practice on how to instruct using technology. And I think that all bricks and mortar colleges and universities would be well served partnering with online education and learning how you instruct effectively using that medium. It's a new pedagogy and one that not everyone understands.

One bright spot at many historically black colleges is that members of our faculty and staff who are working full time in administrative and in faculty positions, have chosen online universities as places to pursue doctoral degrees. And so I would say that that's been a good thing and I think online is here. You disregard it at your own peril. I believe there is, however, an important role going on into the future for historically black colleges to provide the kind of nurturing, family, supportive environment that many of these first generation high school students are looking for and have said they want and can only find not online, but at an HBCU.

**MR. BELKIND:** There has also been great growth in for profit colleges and universities in recent years. What is your opinion of the education they provide and their cost?

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** Some are good, some are very good, and some are bad. And it's the role of the federal government through its accrediting and oversight to determine who the bad actors are and to get them out of the marketplace.

**MR. BELKIND:** I know you touched on this briefly in your remarks, but let me ask. Some people suggest that a college degree is not for everyone and that trade schools or community colleges with technical programs are a better use of funds and provide more job opportunities than traditional four year colleges. What do you think of this train of thought and has it had an impact on historically black colleges?

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** There are a lot of answers to this one. One of them is that people who always talk about college as not being valuable any longer are people who if you asked them what they're telling their own kids or their own grandkids, they're telling them, "Go to college." College remains the gold standard. A four year degree is a great investment for any young person. They'll double their earnings over a lifetime and we've just gone through a terrible recession. And as bad as the unemployment has been in the African American community writ large, it has not been as severe for our college graduates. African American unemployment for college-- for African American college graduates has been about 8 percent. Unemployment writ large during the recession was about 16 percent. So it's been a good buy.

College isn't for everyone, but everybody should be ready for college. And I think that we shouldn't assume that certain kids are not going to go to college. Because when we start assuming that, we always look at the black and brown kids as the ones we assume are not college material. There are some great jobs out there that don't require a college degree. But most of those great jobs require a certification or some postsecondary education. And so, if you're going to be an auto mechanic working on BMWs, you're going to do that with a computer in one hand and another piece of electronic equipment in the other. It's not going to be your manual labor as we used to think of it.

So I would say that we need to prepare all of our kids for the skills that are going to be required in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. And that means some postsecondary education whether it's a certification, whether it's an associate of arts degree or a four year baccalaureate.

One other point on that, most Americans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are going to pursue education episodically. They're not all going to graduate from high school, immediately enroll in college and complete in four years. That is, today, the minority of students. The majority of students are going to finish high school, go on and get some college, go into the workforce, decide that they need to up their skills and go back in and go back and forth throughout their lifetime.

So, I think we need to think of a different paradigm. We need to have supports for those students wherever they are on that journey including financial supports and financial programs that recognize that people are going to go in and out and that incent them to get more education, up their skills and improve their earning capacity. And I think that's the work of the Department of Education. And it's also the work of organizations like UNCF that provide scholarship support to these students throughout their educational journey.

**MR. BELKIND:** American universities continue to attract students from around the world. Do historically black colleges and universities attract and seek out international students, and in what numbers?

13

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** HBCUs are diverse institutions. If you go to Xavier University in New Orleans, you'll find that there's a large group of first and second generation Vietnamese who are studying pharmacy at that institution. If you go to Houston Tillotson in Austin, Texas, you'll find they have a significant double digit percentage of their students who

are Mexican American, many of them first generation. That's the case at HBCUs across the country. In Florida, many of the students are first generation Haitian Americans.

More often than not, HBCUs are attractive institutions to new Americans. But they're also institutions which have international reputations as places where students of color have had an opportunity to get a good degree. And one of the countries that has focused a lot of attention of late on HBCUs has been Brazil with strong programs with Howard University here in Washington, D. C., with Morehouse and Spellman and Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta, sending students to study in the U.S. and those institutions sending their students to study abroad.

So there is an international dimension to HBCUs. There's a diverse population of students, and these institutions open their arms and embrace anyone who wants to come there to learn.

**MR. BELKIND:** We are almost out of time but before asking the last question, we have a couple of housekeeping matters to take care of. First of all, I'd like to remind you about our upcoming events and speakers. On March 31, Senator Creigh Deeds, Virginia State Senator, will discuss mental health. And on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, the IRS commissioner John Koskinen will be speaking. And please feel free to come and hear him. (Laughter)

Now, Dr. Lomax, I'd like to present you with the traditional National Press Club mug which we give to our many distinguished visitors from around the world and the United States. I'm honored to do so.

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** Thank you very much.

**MR. BELKIND:** Thank you so much for coming today. And my last question: your iconic motto is, as you said during your remarks in the Q&A, a mind is a terrible thing to waste. But with Colorado and other states having legalized marijuana, do you worry that more students will be wasted on campus and that they might waste their education as a result?

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** No. (Laughter) As I have a few minutes remaining, I'd like to ask my good friend and my Congressman John Lewis, if he would just say a closing remark about the importance of an HBCU education? John? (Applause)

**CONGRESSMAN LEWIS:** Thank you very much, Dr. Lomax, for all your great and good work. Thank you for all that you do. If it hadn't been for these colleges and universities, I wouldn't be standing here today. First one in my family to finish high school, first one in my family to go off to college. Education is a pathway to the middle class in America, it helps make us all good citizens. If it hadn't been for these colleges and universities, we wouldn't have had a modern day civil rights movement. Maybe a Martin Luther King, Jr. or Whitney Young, a James Farmer, a Julian Bond, or so many others. The students sitting down are standing up. These colleges and universities help bring about a nonviolent revolution; a revolution of values, a revolution of ideas.

And while I have the podium, I want to take a moment to yield to a friend of mine, a colleague of ours if it's okay.

**MR. BELKIND:** We were just going to introduce him.

**CONGRESSMAN LEWIS:** Danny Davis.

**MR. BELKIND:** That's right of Illinois. We're so honored he could be here, too.

**CONGRESSMAN LEWIS:** And Danny serves on the Ways and Means Committee with me. And he is, I'll tell you, when it come to education, he is a champion. Danny, thank you. You want to say a word?

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** Come on up.

**CONGRESSMAN LEWIS:** Congressman Danny Davis of Chicago. (Applause)  
You know, Danny is a native of Arkansas.

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** Arkansas?

**CONGRESSMAN DAVIS:** Oh, yeah.

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** Well, but he's got HBCUs now.

**CONGRESSMAN DAVIS:** Oh, HBCUs even then. Actually, two of my heroes have already spoken here. There isn't much else that I would need or desire to say except that these schools have provided and continue to provide not only the experiences that John has had, but experiences that thousands of young people all over the country. It may not have been a Morehouse, it could have been an Arkansas or A&M or a Southern Illinois, Southern University in Louisiana. Or, it could have been all kinds of institutions who did it. Please give if you have the resources. I share with Dr. Lomax when he talked about the U.S. Office of Education and the struggle that we had with them. And I share with John all of the struggles that he has had throughout his life and the fact that he is such an inspiration to all of us. So thank all of you.

**CONGRESSMAN LEWIS:** Thank you. (Applause)

**MR. BELKIND:** Thank you all for coming today, and a special thanks to Dr. Lomax, to Congressman Davis and to Congressman Lewis. This has been somewhat of a spontaneous ending, but I think it's ending on the right note.

**DR. MICHAEL LOMAX:** I brought my posse with me.

**MR. BELKIND:** Right. I'd also like to thank the National Press Club staff including its Journalism Institute and Broadcast Center for organizing today's lunch. Also, if you'd like to get a copy of today's program, or to get more information about the National Press Club, please check out our website at [press.org](http://press.org). Thank you, and we are adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

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