

Written by Kathy

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Pictured are NAACP President Derrick Johnson (wearing eye glasses), Nina Turner and United States President Joe Biden

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By Kathy Wray Coleman, associate publisher, editor-in-chief (Coleman is a former biology teacher and a seasoned Black journalist, and an investigative, legal, scientific, and political reporter who trained for 17 years at the Call and Post Newspaper in Cleveland, Ohio).

WASHINGTON, D.C. –The NAACP, the nation's oldest Civil Rights organization for Blacks,

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criticized President Joe Biden's federal student loan debt forgiveness program saying Wednesday that it does not go far enough and that it goes against what he promised Black people when he successfully campaigned for president in 2020 with overwhelming support from America's Black community.

Now is the time more than ever for the president to step up and to do right by Black people, they say, a reference to the upcoming November midterm elections in which the Democrats, who control the House of Representatives and narrowly the Senate, are predicted to keep control of the Senate and possibly lose their grip on the House.

Though diplomatic about it, NAACP national leaders say Biden's debt relief proposal, which he implemented via executive order, is steeped in red tape and political wranglings.

"Our continued focus remains on closing the racial wealth gap and we will continue to press for scaled solutions," said NAACP President and CEO Derrick Johnson in a press release. "We encourage the Biden administration to grant qualifying borrowers the promised relief quickly, without the red tape and bureaucracy that prevented millions from receiving public service loan forgiveness. The NAACP will continue advocating for equitable relief for the millions of borrowers who are caught in the student debt crisis."

Biden announced the student loan forgiveness program, which is only applicable to federal student loans, on Wednesday from the White House, saying "I made that commitment and I am honoring it today." The president also extended the federal government's pause on student loan repayments during the pandemic until the end of the year.

The long awaited initiative, which critics say is hardly enough to address the country's student loan debt during a debilitating economy, would essentially cancel up to \$10,000 of qualifying federal student loan debt and \$20,000 for those who received pell grants. Also to qualify, an individual's annual income must be \$125,000 or less with married couples capped at \$250,000.

The initiative would instantly eliminate all outstanding federal student loans for up to 32% or 14.6 million borrowers who held less than \$10,000 in debt as of the end of last month. It will also erase at least half of the student loan debt held by the 20.5% of borrowers who owe between

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\$10,000 and \$20,000, and will serve to reduce \$20,000 to \$40,000 owed by another 21.4% of borrowers.

More than 40 million Americans are in student loan debt for seeking an education, owing a cumulative \$1.7 trillion. But Republicans in Congress, fueled by conservative mainstream media pundits, say that Biden is fiscally irresponsible and too generous with taxpayer money, and that it is not the role of the federal government to forgive its high-price student loans with "handouts." Republicans call the initiative "a \$300 billion student loan bailout."

President of the NAACP since 2017, Johnson stopped short of lambasting the president outright and said that while the NAACP is appreciative that the president has taken a historical step in securing some relief for people from federal student loan debt, it is, on the other hand, preposterous to stop now. Simply put, the NAACP says that \$10,000-\$20,000 of loan forgiveness is far short of the relief expected, particularly when considering outrageous collection fees, interest, and other add-ons to the loans over a period of time NAACP leaders want the president to revisit the issue, and to either substantially up the amount of federal student loan debt waived through his program, or to eliminate the debt altogether.

A Democrat and the vice president under former president Barack Obama, the country's first Black president, Biden took office as president in January of 2021 after defeating then president Donald Trump, a Republican, in a heated election in November of 2020. On the campaign trail in 2020, and when the coronavirus pandemic was at its peak, he promised that financial relief would come to Americans if he were elected president, and that student loan relief would come too, though unlike Sen Bernie Sanders, who pushed for full relief from student loan debt as a presidential candidate that year, Biden was more cautious. He would not promise to push for full loan debt relief.

Former Ohio senator Nina Turner of Cleveland, co-chair of Sanders' campaign for president in 2020 who lost a crowded special Democratic primary to now 11th congressional district Congresswoman Shontel Brown in 2021 and a primary bid to unseat her earlier this year, said President Biden is letting women and Black people down and that he is essentially doing nothing to eliminate federal student loan debt that is financially crippling people.

A potential 2024 presidential candidate, Turner has been on a soap box against student loan debt for some time and often gave speeches at campaign rallies on the issue for Sanders' unsuccessful runs for president in 2016 and 2020. In a tweet on Wednesday she praised the

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NAACP and president Derrick Johnson for standing up to the president "as he should."

Turner told Fox News for a news segment that aired on Wednesday on its national cable channel that Biden's student loan debt bailout does little to alleviate loan debt for Black women and called it "structural racism." She tweeted later that that the president's student loan forgiveness initiative does little to help young people strapped with debt due to student loans

"Millennials are crushed by student debt, unable to buy a home, and strangled by stagnant wages," Turner tweeted. "They're locked out of the prosperity that prior generations were blessed with. It's time to #RaiseTheWage. It's time to #CancelStudentDebt."

During his 2020 bid for the Democratic nomination for president, Bernie Sanders nearly won Iowa, coming in second place to Pete Buttigieg, now the U.S. Secretary of Transportation, and he went on to win New Hampshire and Nevada. But Biden, powered by the Black vote and an endorsement from Black U.S. Rep James Clyburn, later won South Carolina, and Super Tuesday, and ultimately the Democratic nomination, and the presidency.

And Black leaders, from Blacks in Congress to Blacks like Derrick Johnson who leads the NAACP, say Biden owes the Black community because Blacks are why he won the Democratic nomination, which catapulted him to the presidency. They argue that reasonably forgiving federal student loan debt for Blacks and other Americans is not too much to ask of a president and of a Congress that has allocated more than \$3 billion dollars in military and other aid to Ukraine for a war with Russia that is only in its sixth month.

Georgia, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Michigan are the states with the highest number of people with federal student loan debt, and all four states are also pivotal states for presidential elections. A vast amount are also poor from low-income backgrounds and people of color.

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el: (216) 659-0473. Email: editor@clevelandurbannews.com.

We interviewed former president Barack Obama one-on-one when he was campaigning for president. As to the Obama interview,

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