

Ford & Gillard: A Powerful Team in Columbia- by Kwadjo Campbell

State Senator Robert Ford and State Representative Wendell Gilliard have come together to form a powerful legislative team in Columbia. One of the obstacles to economic development in the African-American community is the failure of its elected officials to collaborate, cooperate, and coordinate a collective agenda. Senator Ford, and Rep. Gilliard recognize this and together have forged a progressive agenda that is benefitting the constituents of Senate District 42 and House District 111.

Ford- Gillard Agenda Primary Focus: Economic Development and Education.

Economic Development: The renewed focus on economic development is critical as Ford and Gilliard understand that the most pressing need in the community is the need for job creation, job training, and small business development. Together, they have been on the forefront in the battle for economic inclusion in public and private projects having significant impact on Charleston in terms of jobs and dollars. The Boeing project is the latest example of action. The Post & Courier reported:

Boeing officials have been under pressure to steer a portion of work on the 3,800-worker final assembly plant, which has a \$750 million price tag, toward historically disadvantaged businesses. Extra care is being taken to ensure that minorities and women have an equal chance to benefit from Boeing Co.'s expansion in North Charleston. Sen. Robert Ford and Rep. Wendell Gilliard, both Charleston Democrats whose districts include the Boeing site, continue to work with the aviation giant and general contractor New York-based Turner Construction to make sure equal job opportunities are available for all.
—Yvonne Wagner, March 2, 2010

The Ford-Gilliard Team also met with Boeing officials concerning job training and placement programs that targeted some of Charleston's most disadvantaged communities. The 3800 jobs coming as result of the Boeing plant is an opportunity, but the Ford-Gilliard Team also understands that true access will only go to those trained for jobs at the plant. They work to ensure that Trident Tech is appropriately funded to provide the training needed to get these jobs. The Ford-Gilliard Team is now looking at funding for Trident Tech to market and advertise these training programs and ensure the people are getting to the resource. The Ford-Gilliard team is also following this blueprint as they begin talks with the developers of the new Wind Turbine Facility.

Currently, the Ford-Gilliard Team is working on joint legislation that would provide access to the plethora of jobs that will be coming to North Charleston as a result of the Port of Charleston expansion. Representative Gilliard has toured the facilities at the Port of Los Angeles and the Port of Long Beach and plans to use their community training and placement program as a model for the

development of a similar program for North Charleston residents. The idea behind the legislation will be the Port of South Carolina's mandatory training and hiring of residents from the impacted areas including the communities from Rosemont to Liberty Hill.

Education Reform: Education has long been on the radar of both Ford and Gilliard, but since joining forces they have attacked the issue with a new ferocity. 3 out of 10 African- American males graduate from high school in the County of Charleston. That's a 70% drop out rate, and that is unacceptable. The Ford-Gilliard Team is working overtime to this dramatically improve this statistic.

Senator Ford and Representative Wendell Gilliard have different approaches to the issue of education, but that does not prevent them from working together on this sensitive issue. Senator Ford believes that school choice is an alternative that should be explored and has introduced legislation to support this. Representative Gilliard believes that the public school system needs to hold its teachers more accountable, and has introduced legislation to reward teachers that improve children's test scores. Together they have led the fight to 1) Restore revenue for state Institutions of Higher Learning, 2) Increase funding for schoolteachers and public schools, and 3) Get more lottery funding allocated to Pre- Kindergarten through 12th Grades.

South Carolina State College and its accountability issues have been a prime concern for the Ford-Gilliard Team. They have launched an investigation into possible corruption and graft at the state university in that over \$40 Million dollars unaccounted for. The objective for the investigation is to ensure that the young women and men attending the university receive the resources they need to be prepared and compete in the twenty first century.

Conclusion

The unity showed by Senator Robert Ford and Wendell Gilliard is a great example for the Charleston community as we seek answers to some very serious questions. The answers to these questions will only come with unity and solidarity. We must stop the criticizing and offer solutions that can be part of a collective agenda for our community. Stay tuned for more information coming from The Ford-Gilliard Team as they tackle issues such as the development of the African American Niche of the Tourism Economy, and the Rehabilitation and Modernization of Public Schools serving at risk youth.