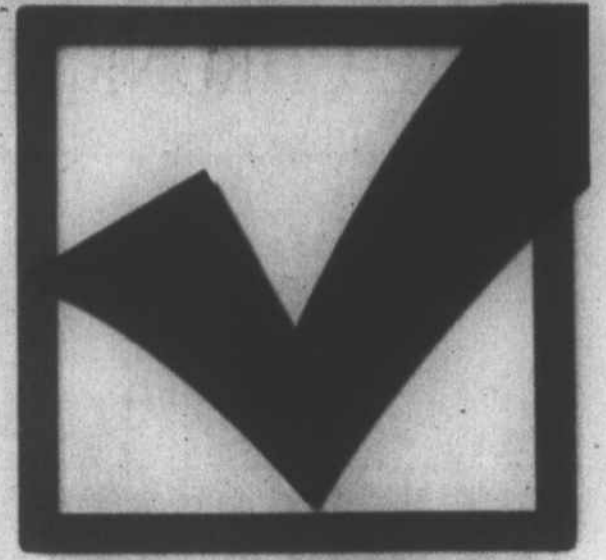


FORUM

Voting is key to education reform



Brian Pauling
Guest Columnist

Education – the answer to many of the problems ailing our country – is getting the least amount of attention from the candidates on the presidential campaign trail.

According to a November 2015 Gallup poll, only 4 percent of Americans consider education or education policy to be the most important problem facing our nation. Respondents instead cited the economy, poorly run government, immigration, gun control and health care of most concern.

While I agree that these are important issues, we at 100 Black Men of America Inc. (The 100) believe that without a quality educa-

tion, many young people, particularly African-Americans, will be condemned to lives of poverty, incarceration and despair.

As a nonprofit mentoring organization, the education of our youth is one of our top concerns. In our advocacy work, The 100 has sought to raise public awareness about the need to reform our nation's education system, especially in predominately African-American and low-income communities where far too many of the schools are failing our children.

We are working to ensure that every child, no matter their ZIP code, has access to high-performing schools. Schools with caring and nurturing environments, high-performing teachers, rigorous curriculum, and the proper materials and technology are some of the key ingredients to preparing our kids to successfully graduate high school, handle col-

lege-level coursework without requiring remediation, compete in a global marketplace and become

tional and decision-making control of failing schools in their communities over to their state governments.

“As voters, we are facing some tough choices.”

-Brian Pauling

productive members of society.

How we get there is the real question. One answer is by voting. When we go to the polls in November, we will not only elect the next president. We will use our voting power to also make important decisions about our children's education. In some states, for example, the electorate will be asked to decide whether to turn the opera-

Others will be asked whether more charter public schools should be permitted to open in their communities to provide families with an option to traditional public schools.

Still others will be asked how money raised through state lotteries, property and sales taxes, and state and federal allocations should be earmarked to support educational initiatives from cra-

ple to college.

As voters, we are facing some tough choices. Many of our local public schools are struggling and some even failing, but is a state government takeover the answer? There has been a decades-long imbalance in the distribution of educational quality and opportunity due, in part, to how public schools are funded, but will proposed funding formula changes address those inequities and produce successful outcomes? If we allow more charter schools, will that irreversibly damage our traditional public schools or will the competition make both stronger?

What happens to the children and schools in our communities will depend largely on the actions we take as voters. Elections at both the federal and local levels – from the school board to the statehouse and from the assembly to the White House – are vitally

important. We need to be talking about education in our households and at PTA meetings, in our barber shops and coffeehouses, and in our workplaces and houses of worship.

But transformation doesn't come by talk alone. We also must take decisive action. We can start by increasing our knowledge of the issues, committing to exercise our right to vote, encouraging others in our communities to do the same and then casting ballots for candidates for whom education and the academic success of our children are top priorities.

The choice – and the vote – is ours.

Brian L. Pauling is national president and CEO of 100 Black Men of America, Inc. Learn more about the work of The 100 at www.100blackmen.org.

To ensure our security: Congress must shine more light on anonymous companies



Frank Knapp
Guest Columnist

The threat from the misuse of anonymous shell companies is real and routine. Criminals use them to scam consumers, defraud the government, and launder money.

They also use them to cheat small businesses.

For example, from 2004 to 2012 a large Virginia-based security firm used a shell company to fraudulently obtain \$31 million in federal contracts – contracts that should have gone to minority-owned small businesses under the SBA's section 8(a) set-aside program.

In a second case, a Maryland woman used multiple shell companies to win contracts to supply the government with paint and other goods. She got subcontractors to supply the goods, billed the government, and then walked away with \$2.3 million in payments she owed the subs.

The first crime used one shell company; the second, more than a dozen, incorporated in six states.

Law enforcement is routinely stymied in its efforts to see and stop these crimes. That's because the companies' anonymity keeps them from knowing the real people who control and benefit from the shells, in legalese, the beneficial owners.

Anonymous companies are also used to poison our politics. Last year more than 200 Limited Liability Companies (LLCs) donated \$11 million to presidential candidates' super PACs, according to the Wall Street Journal. The use of LLCs – whose



owners can be hidden – defeats federal election rules that require super PACs to identify most of their contributors.

Anonymous companies are also used to fund terrorism. Last July, Manhattan DA Cyrus Vance Jr. told a House terrorism hearing that identifying shell companies' beneficial owners would vastly improve law enforcement's efforts to stop terrorism funding.

All of this is possible because our

states rank among the world's easiest places to create anonymous shell companies. To protect our small businesses, defend our democracy and to ensure our security, that must change.

The solution is to require every corporation and LLC to disclose its beneficial owners when it is formed. The states won't do this alone, in part because states are afraid that if they act unilaterally, they will lose incorporation fees to states that do not

act.

As a result, Congress must force them to do this by passing the bipartisan Incorporation Transparency and Law Enforcement Assistance Act (ITLEEA) – which requires all states to identify the beneficial owners of the companies they create. Taking this action would create a level playing field for all states, and make it harder for criminal and corrupt actors to exploit company formation law to conduct business that no state truly wants within its borders.

Complying with the Act would not burden small businesses. Rather it would help to level the playing field between them and large businesses – for example, by providing them with better information when they negotiate with larger partners.

Our presidential campaigns have been dominated by security concerns and yet no candidate has called on Congress to pass the ITLEEA. It's a straightforward, low-cost way to stop the misuse of anonymous companies and the crimes they enable.

By passing this Act, Congress can take a common sense step to boost our security on multiple fronts – and our presidential candidates who care about small businesses, our democracy and our security, should call on Congress to do so.

Frank Knapp, Jr. is the co-chair of the American Sustainable Business Council and president & CEO of the South Carolina Small Business Chamber of Commerce.