

MEMORANDUM

Date: November 6, 2002

To: Michael J. Critelli
Chair of the Board of Trustees

Charles Collins
Senior Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees

Trustees of the National Urban League

From: Hugh B. Price

Subject: *Thanks for the Memories*

There is never a good time to leave the job of a lifetime. But after nearly nine rewarding and intense years at the helm of the National Urban League, I have decided that it is time for me to seek a new professional challenge and for the board to enlist fresh leadership for the 21st century.

Accordingly, I have informed the Executive Committee of my intention to step down as president by mid-April of next year – and sooner if a successor is selected before then. Time has been allocated at next Tuesday's board meeting for the trustees to discuss the succession process. Following the board meeting, Mike Critelli, chair of the board, will designate a search committee to orchestrate the process of selecting the next president and CEO of the National Urban League.

I said at the outset that this has been the job of a lifetime. I mean it. In my first keynote address in Indianapolis in July 1994, I noted that I felt as though I'd been training for the presidency of the National Urban League my entire professional career. I'd certainly dreamt of leading an august organization like the League because of its historic and contemporary importance to African Americans and to America.

I've decided to step down basically for two reasons. For starters, I believe very strongly that leaders of national organizations like the League should not cling to their positions interminably. They should go flat out and then pass the baton to someone fresh before - not after - their own interest and energy begin to flag. Second, after crisscrossing the country on Urban League business, week-in and weekend-out, ever since I became president, it is time to recalibrate the balance between my professional and personal lives.

Leading the National Urban League is anything but a solo performance. Whatever has been accomplished since I became president in mid-1994 owes to the collective effort and commitment of the devoted trustees of the National Urban League, my incomparably dedicated colleagues at the League, the remarkable public entrepreneurs who run Urban League affiliates across this land, the terrific chairs and trustees of affiliate boards, the visionary and hardworking Commission on the 21st Century Urban League, the enthusiastic Urban League Guilds around the country, and the energetic members of our newest auxiliary, the National Urban League Young Professionals.

Looking back over my tenure as your president, I take enormous pride in the contributions we've made together to our Urban League movement, to our people and to our country. In a nutshell, I believe we've successfully revitalized the 93-year-old National Urban League and fortified the Urban League movement for a second century of leadership and service. The Urban League is a work in progress, as is our work itself. Major opportunities beckon us, yet unresolved challenges remain.

Let me take the liberty of highlighting many of our collective accomplishments on my watch:

1. Working together, we have transformed the National Urban League into a 21st century organization with the strategic vision and plan and the organizational capacity to advance our mission of empowering African Americans to enter economic and social mainstream. To be more specific, we have:
 - Reconstituted the National Urban League board of trustees and recruited a formidable array of corporate CEOs and senior executives, including two of the four African Americans heading huge American corporations.
 - Fortified the League's staff and enlisted a talented senior management team and a cadre of strong program directors. Recruited new staff with fresh energy, skills and perspectives. Positioned the League anew as a magnet for talented scholars, program associates and administrative staff.
 - Transformed a more than \$1 million annual operating deficit into six consecutive years of balanced budgets with surpluses, with a projected seventh year in a row in 2002.
 - Instituted the most successful endowment drive in National Urban League history, resulting already in a tripling of capital assets, counting cash received and pledges.

- Reached new high water marks in fundraising by forging numerous multi-year, multi-million dollar strategic partnerships with corporations and by securing the largest foundation grant in National Urban League history -- \$25 million from the Lilly Endowment.
- Established classy, state-of-the-art headquarters on Wall Street overlooking the East River in New York City.
- Brought the League into the 21st century technologically. Progressed from routine usage of an in-house printing press to creation of a sophisticated Internet system for the movement, an acclaimed website, and frequent use of worldwide web-casting to spread our message.
- Orchestrated steady improvements in the quality, execution, media coverage and financial viability of annual conference, culminating in widespread consensus that the 2002 conference in Los Angeles was the best ever.
- Ratcheted up the National Urban League's profile as a forceful advocate and respected policy analyst. Significantly increased national and local media coverage of the policy positions and programmatic work of NUL and our affiliates.
- Created the National Urban League Institute for Opportunity and Equality, which re-established the League as a vibrant and vitally important player in research, policy analysis and advocacy.
- Defined a 21st century mission statement for the Urban League movement that is true to our traditions, that accurately reflects who we are and what we do, and that sets us distinctly apart from all other African-American organizations going forward.
- Effectively branded the Urban League as the oldest and largest community-based movement empowering African Americans to enter the economic and social mainstream.
- Devised organizational slogans and annual conference themes that have demonstrated staying power. These include: *Our Children = Our Destiny*, *Achievement Matters*, *Read and Rise*, and *Economic Power: the Next Civil Rights Frontier*.

- Authored two books -- *Achievement Matters: Getting Your Child the Best Education Possible*, published by Kensington Books; and *Destination: the American Dream*, a compilation of my speeches and position papers, published by the League;
 - Established a robust publications unit whose major products include our landmark, *The State of Black America* report, the revived *Opportunity* journal, periodic compilations of our weekly "To Be Equal" columns, and occasional policy booklets.
2. Through our concerted and collective effort, we have fortified Urban League affiliates and positioned our venerable and revered 93-year-old movement for a second century of leadership and service. To be more specific, we:
- Created the broadly representative Commission on Standards and Attributes for 21st Century Affiliates that methodically appraised every facet of the affiliate movement and promulgated operating standards to help ensure that affiliates survive and thrive in the 21st century.
 - Instituted a new affiliate CEO certification procedure, an equitable affiliate dues structure, an affiliate performance assessment system, and guidelines for CEO compensation and the composition of affiliate boards.
 - Undertook a rigorous organizational check-up of all affiliates and provided intensive technical assistance to help struggling affiliates shore up their governance systems and operations. Taken the difficult step of weeding out weak affiliates that aren't viable over the long term.
 - Developed and officially adopted new "Terms of Affiliation" that will govern the fundamental relationship between the National Urban League and Urban League affiliates for years to come.
 - Brought representatives of the affiliate CEOs, board chairs, and Guilds onto the national board of trustees.
 - Substantially increased the amount of grants that flow from the national office through to affiliates annually.
 - Spawned the fast-growing National Urban League Young Professionals as a vibrant new auxiliary in the Urban League movement.

3. Through strategic deliberations and program collaboration, we have formulated and implemented the movement's three-pronged agenda, namely:
 - a) Ensuring that our children are well-educated and equipped for economic self-reliance in the 21st century;
 - b) Helping adults attain economic self-sufficiency through good jobs, homeownership, entrepreneurship and wealth accumulation; and
 - c) Ensuring our civil rights by eradicating barriers to the economic and social mainstream of America.
- Conceived and spearheaded the Urban League's historic Campaign for African-American Achievement, which has been instrumental in spawning a grassroots academic achievement movement across the country.
 - Positioned our movement nationally and locally as the leading voice on K-12 education for black children.
 - Helped instill a positive attitude among our young people toward academic achievement by creating the National Achievers Society, a prestigious community-based mechanism originated in Florida that recognizes youngsters who've earned B averages or better in school. Inducted upwards of 25,000 achievers since 1998.
 - Forged an unprecedented partnership with Scholastic, Inc. to equip parents and caregivers to help their youngsters become proficient readers. Jointly created the *Read and Rise* guide for parents and secured funding to produce and disseminate 1.75 million copies. Utilized the guide as the fulfillment piece for a Public Service Announcement campaign devised in conjunction with the Advertising Council that is currently running on urban radio stations.
- Crafted and implemented a multi-faceted economic self-sufficiency initiative.
- Fashioned innovative partnerships with major employers to train and place our constituents with their firms.

- Transformed the League's basic housing strategy from scrutinizing mortgage rejections to promoting first-time homeownership. Equipped affiliates to become important local players in promoting homeownership. Forged alliances with major lending institutions.
- Designed and implemented a wealth creation initiative in collaboration with the Investment Companies Institute Foundation.
- Provided proactive leadership in promoting racial inclusion and justice.
- Asserted aggressive national leadership in combating police brutality and racial profiling, promoting affirmative action and decrying excessive reliance on SAT scores in college admissions.
- Promoted racial harmony and reconciliation among blacks, Jews and other ethnic groups.
- Laid the strategic foundation for intensified efforts by the National Urban League to promote a more equitable, affordable and effective healthcare delivery system for our constituents.
- Sustained the Black Executive Exchange Program (BEEP) at historically black colleges and universities, while initiating a new thrust on mainstream campuses.

I cite these highlights, because it's important to remind ourselves of what we've accomplished since 1994. I cannot help recalling that within months of taking the helm of the organization, I was greeted by a cover story in *Emerge* magazine entitled: "Is the National Urban League Dead?" Other pundits openly questioned whether venerable organizations like ours were still "relevant."

As they say in France, "au contraire." Quite the contrary! I'm certain you join me in proudly celebrating – and proclaiming – the fact that not only is the Urban League alive and relevant, we are solidly positioned for a second century of leadership and service to our community and the nation.

Thank you, one and all, for affording me the opportunity to fulfill a lifelong dream of following in the awe-inspiring footsteps of my heroes – from George Edmund Haynes, Eugene Kinckle Jones and Lester Granger to Whitney Young, Vernon Jordan and John Jacob – who've gone before me.

Thank you, my friends, for the inestimable privilege of leading the great National Urban League movement into the new millennium.