Taking a look at the new governor of New York

by Marc_H._Morial

"Let me reintroduce myself: I am David A. Paterson and I am the Governor of the State of New York."

With those words, on March 17, Lt. Gov. David Paterson became New York's 55th governor, the state's first legally blind chief executive and the nation's fourth black governor. Paterson joins Reconstruction-era Gov. P.B.S. Pinchback from my home state of Louisiana, current Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick and former Virginia Gov. L. Douglas Wilder.

Born in Brooklyn, N.Y., in 1954, Paterson developed an infection as a child that left him blind in one eye and severely impaired in the other. That did not stop him from earning a history degree from Columbia University in 1977 and a law degree from Hofstra in 1983.

Paterson's political career took off when he was elected to the State Senate in 1985 to represent the 30th district of New York - Harlem, USA. In 2002, he became the Senate's first Democratic leader of color. In 2006, Paterson became New York's first black lieutenant governor. "I have had this desire my whole life to prove people wrong", said Paterson. "To show them I could do things they didn't think I could do."

In his inaugural speech, the new governor pledged to make the economic crisis that is affecting citizens and leaders of state capitals all over the country a priority. With his long history of empowering urban communities, I'm confident that Gov. Paterson will do everything in his power to ease the burden on low- and moderate-income people.

I encourage Gov. Paterson to embrace the National Urban League's four-point Opportunity Compact for economic equality. The opportunity to 1) thrive, 2) earn, 3) own, and 4) prosper. The Opportunity to Thrive includes treating health care as a right, not a privilege for those lucky enough to afford it. The Opportunity to Earn means that no working American should have to raise a child in poverty. The Opportunity to Own demands that we give more people the opportunity to own their homes and take immediate action to end the current mortgage foreclosure debacle. The Opportunity to Prosper means we must do more to encourage and support small and minority businesses which are the backbone of the American economy.

The National Urban League's Opportunity Compact is a blueprint for economic equality throughout urban America. There is no better place to turn that economic blueprint into action than the great state of New York. There is no leader who better understands the need for economic equality in these times than Gov. David A. Paterson.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

Â© Copley News Service

Taking a look at the new governor of New York by Marc_H._Morial