



News Release



CONGRESSMAN

Chaka Fattah

Second District, Pennsylvania

FATTAH TAKES PHILA. INQUIRER TO TASK FOR BLATANT MISINFORMATION

Congressman Chaka Fattah releases the following letter to the public after the Philadelphia Inquirer refused to make immediate corrections to errors and misinformation in its December 23, 2008 editorial.

Washington, DC - In attempt to correct numerous errors and misinformation written in a Philadelphia Inquirer editorial dated December 23, 2008 my office contacted the newspaper with the accurate facts. The response from the Inquirer was no immediate correction would be forthcoming. To ensure the public has factual information in a timely manner I am releasing a letter written today to the Editorial Page Editor at the Inquirer.

Mr. Harold Jackson
Editorial Page Editor
Philadelphia Inquirer
400 N. Broad St.
Philadelphia, PA 19130

Mr. Jackson;

Included in this morning's (Dec. 23) editorial regarding the Philadelphia College Opportunity Resources for Education (CORE Philly) program that I founded several years ago, are several errors or misstatements that demand correction and/or clarification. In the Inquirer's quest to raise questions about how the program is run, it neglected to ensure that the information presented was completely accurate.

Error: In the most egregious mistake the paper states... "Some quick math shows 3,000 students getting \$3,000 in scholarships each comes to \$9 million. That leaves \$15 million to be accounted for."

Correction: Indeed the paper's math was too "quick." An accurate review of CORE Philly would show that since its inception in 2004, **13,000** students have been awarded just over \$24 million. There is no \$15 million to be accounted for. The 3,000 number used by the paper is for students **CURRENTLY** enrolled in CORE Philly. CORE Philly can provide the name of each and every of the 13,000 students and how much they received in scholarship funds. **Every dollar for scholarships from the city, the school district and federal agencies has gone directly toward those scholarships.** Not a penny is unaccounted for. This information would be known to the Inquirer had the newspaper accepted CORE Philly's invitation to cover its annual awards program held every year to highlight the work of the organization and its scholars.

Error: According to the editorial... "Fattah had big intentions for CORE. Just six months ago he announced plans to raise a \$200 million endowment to fund the program. Then he shuttered the program last month, citing a \$1 million cut in funding from the city."

Correction: The reason for closing CORE Philly was because the City had reduced its partnership share in scholarship funds. In two separate cutbacks - the first coming during the summer - Philadelphia announced a reduction in its total contribution level from \$4 million to \$2.5 million. In November, the city announced yet another decrease in its funding, this time a \$1 million cut. **The combination of both funding cuts represents a 62.5 percent reduction – for the current fiscal year.** That significant decrease in scholarship monies from the city, along with my inability to increase contributions to the separate CORE Philly Endowment, was too much to ensure the continued financial viability of the program. A city with the lowest percentage of college educated adults should have big intentions to encourage a college going culture among our young people.

Misstatement of fact: The Inquirer Editorial Board misstated information from an article in its Sunday newspaper. The editorial read... "The Inquirer reported Sunday that FBI agents have issued subpoenas requesting at least one person who did work for the program to appear before a grand jury."

Correction: The editorial board got it wrong. The person in question, identified as Ms. Connelly was **never** subpoenaed to appear before a grand jury. Copies of her video tapes were requested – and supplied. Because the tapes were the property of her client, CORE Philly, she asked the request be put in writing just as any responsible business person would do.

Misstatement of complete fact: The sub headline to the editorial reads...Fattah: It's an 'audit'.

Clarification: The editorial board abbreviated my quote: the full quote from Sunday's article... "I don't know whether this falls on the side of an FBI investigation or the inspector general. . . . My impression is it falls on the side of the inspector general and that it's an audit," he said.

For information purposes, the work of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is varied. It is to conduct independent investigations, audits, inspections, and special reviews of United States Department of Justice personnel and programs to detect and deter waste, fraud, abuse, and misconduct, and to promote integrity, economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in Department of Justice operations.

In referring to CORE Philly and the Educational Advancement Alliance the paper states...“The two nonprofits were staffed by aides close to Fattah.” After 26 years in public service I have many former staffers working in the area of education. Indeed, both CORE Philly and EAA are staffed by former aides. One of the things I am most proud of regarding some of my past employees is that rather than parlay their Congressional knowledge and experience into a high paying lobbying job, these intelligent and talented individuals chose instead to serve in positions that continue to benefit the educational opportunities of Philadelphia’s students. Whether serving as Secretary of Education for Philadelphia, Chair of the School Reform Commission, or a senior official at colleges like Temple, Penn and the Community College of Philadelphia, these individuals decided to make a difference rather than just making a living. They make up a very small percentage of the people involved in CORE Philly and EAA.

As a Member of Congress, who served on the Ethics Committee and a lead-sponsor of legislation for stricter review of federal spending, I expect programs such as CORE Philly to be fully examined. The editorial correctly suggests of the investigation that “...nothing may come of it. Certainly, no one has been accused of any wrongdoing. Fattah **says** he hasn’t even been contacted by the FBI.” As a Member of Congress, had I been contacted or subpoenaed, the law requires that I would have to notify the House and recuse myself immediately from the Committee of jurisdiction – the Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Subcommittee. Neither has been required because I have not been contacted by the Justice Department.

The editorial refers to pet projects. Notwithstanding the editorial’s view that CORE Philly is a pet project the record will show that my efforts to secure educational opportunities have been my lifetime commitment. There is no member of Congress that has provided more successful educational programs. Locally, there is no person elected or otherwise that has provided from early childhood to graduate school the educational opportunities that I have:

- Founder of GEAR UP, the most highly successful college readiness and scholarship program in the nation. A \$2.5 billion program that has academically prepared more than 2 million low income students for college. Some 30,000 of those students have attended Philadelphia public schools; 1,700 are presently enrolled with a four year guaranteed scholarship.
- Leading Congressional supporter of Project GRAD. Since 1992 the program has provided \$20 million in scholarships to over 6,000 students nationwide. There are 1,200 Project GRAD students in Philadelphia.. Project GRAD has a proven track record of increasing high school graduation and college attendance rates for low-income students.

- Former Chair of the Executive Board of the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency. The organization provided \$1.3 billion to over 200,000 students in the form of grants and loans.
- Founder of the College Retention Program. The initiative has provided more than a million students with financial assistance in the form of grants, low-interest loans and college work-study programs, in an attempt to help meet the cost of attaining a post-secondary education. The program aims to retain students by offering resources to help them complete school and be fully prepared for success after graduation.
- Through the Fattah Conference on Higher Education more than 10,000 students seeking their Masters or Doctoral degrees have received scholarships.
- Lead Member of Congress on a brief filed on behalf of the University of Michigan's affirmative action program. The brief asked the Supreme Court to consider the link between disparities in educational opportunity and achievement for minorities in K-12, and their admission in colleges and universities.
- Former Board Member; Pennsylvania State University, Temple University, Lincoln University, and the Community College of Philadelphia where I assisted tens of thousands of individuals in the pursuit of their higher education.
- Created the Board of Governors Scholarship Program that provided thousands of four year scholarships to worthy Philadelphia and statewide students.

As much as I regret having to end CORE Philly I'm immensely proud that it is but one of many programs which continue to level the academic playing field for Philadelphia students and tens of millions more across the nation.

As the city's senior congressman, I don't expect to be held to anything short of the highest standards. However, casual and reckless editorializing jeopardizes our future work. When Congress reconvenes next month I will introduce The American Opportunity Tax Credit Act, a bill that offers every person seeking a college education the ability to pursue one by investing 100 hours of public service. In exchange for their service college students will be eligible to receive a \$4,000 refundable tax credit.

I look forward to continuing my work in education and to advance the life chances of America's young people.

Very truly yours,
Chaka Fattah
Member of Congress