

COMMENTARY *By* DR. DHANPAUL NARINE

Congressman Meeks:

Why I Boycotted the State of the Union!



Dr. Dhanpaul Narine

“We cannot stop the emigration of peoples of color into the United States of America,” said Congressman Gregory Meeks at a Town Hall meeting in Queens. The notice may have been short but the lines were long to listen to the Congressman.

Mr. Meeks represents the Fifth Congressional District in the House of Representatives in Washington. He took the time last Saturday to meet with the community and to bring it up to date with the latest developments in Washington.

There is the ongoing Russian investigation, the recent shutdown of the government, immigration, the tax cuts and the concerns of residents about local neighborhood issues. Mr. Meeks dealt deftly with them and won the approval of the audience for many of his policy prescriptions.

The Town Hall meeting was held at York College, in Queens. Mr. Meeks thanked the audience for turning up and said that he wanted a community dialogue and conversation in these critical times. He said that he wanted to bring to the audience “some of the craziness that was happening in Washington.”

This is a time for people to talk to each other and he wanted to articulate some of the issues that were happening in Washington. Mr. Meeks also said that he wanted to hear the questions and comments from the floor so he would have a better idea of what his constituency was thinking.

Since the federal, state and city governments were interconnected the Congressman suggested that people should work together. Mr. Meeks drew historical parallels with Abraham Lincoln who had to make difficult choices. Lincoln changed the

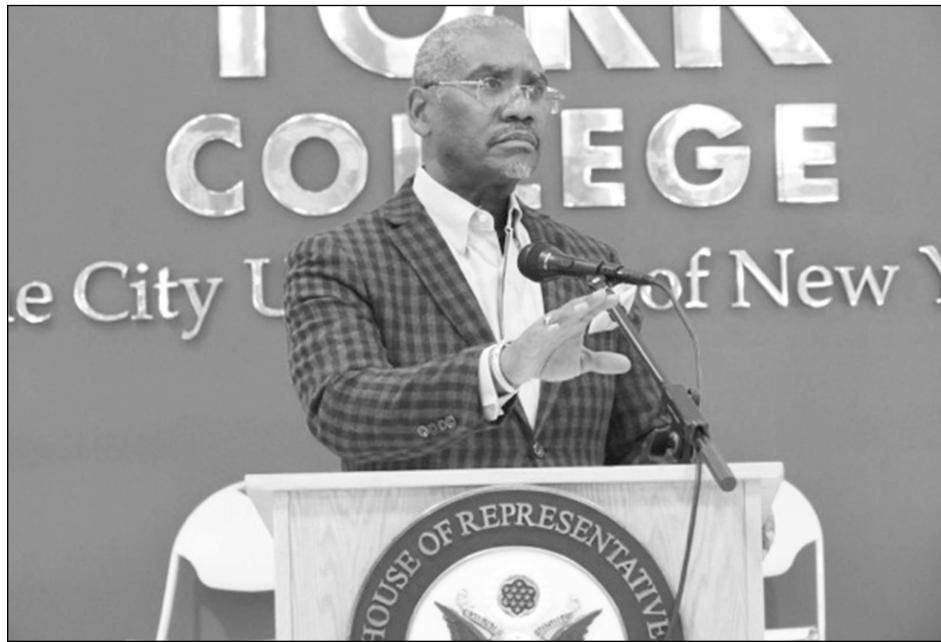
dynamics and began to be inclusive during Reconstruction. But President Johnson rolled back what Lincoln had done, including changing the Supreme Court.

According to Mr. Meeks, “it took 100 years to reverse the damage that Johnson had done. What is taking place now is that we had the 44th President that inherited a mess and he turned it around. He was inclusive. Now we have the 45 President and he seems focused on eliminating everything his predecessor did.” Mr. Meeks examined the

majority. The vote was 238 to 193; there are only 195 Democrats so the Republicans can pass anything that they want, said Mr. Meeks. But it was different in the Senate. The bill could not pass. The Republicans have a 51 to 49 majority

One of the first things I have to do every morning is to see what names the President is calling us. We wouldn’t be where we are if the President had not stopped DACA four months ago,” continued Mr. Meeks to widespread approval.

Trump has flip-flopped on the Dreamers. In one tweet he stated that he would take care of them; he wanted a ‘Bill of Love.’ But Trump changed his mind and pinned a number of conditions to the Bill, including the building of



Congressman Gregory Meeks brings his constituency up-to-date on the recent events in Washington.



A section of the audience at the Town Hall meeting at York College in Queens, New York.

recent shutdown in the government.

He spoke about the Continuing Resolution (CR) and explained that this dealt with the ability of Congress to pass it to continue to pay the employees. The CR failed to pass and the finger-pointing started. The question from all this was: who was responsible for the shutdown?

The CR was passed in the House where Republicans are in the ma-

in the Senate. In certain cases, you have to have 60 votes and in this case the Republicans needed 60 votes to pass the CR. It needed Democrat support that it did not get; some of the Republicans voted against the CR as well.

Mr. Meeks said that the real reason why the CR failed had to do with President Trump. The President, “failed the leadership test and chose to call people names.

The Children Health Insurance Program (CHIP) serves over 44,000 persons in Queens but Mr. Trump has allowed it to expire. This too became a contentious issue. Mr. Meeks said that we have until February 8, 2018 to come up with another budget or there could be another shutdown.

There is no doubt that DACA is at the heart of the debate. Mr. Meeks pointed out that Mr.

a wall for which Mexico will pay.

Mr. Meeks said that the idea of the wall is outdated and that it wouldn’t work. He said that he would not vote for a wall that would cost over 50 billion dollars of taxpayers money “and change who we are as a nation.” He added that CHIP and community health centers are all part of the CR and that DACA was just a part of a bigger program.

Mr. Meeks turned his attention to immigration and looked at diversity visas and chain migration. He said that diversity visas were created because of who we are as a country. The people of a number of countries might not ordinarily have a chance to come to the US and the diversity visas cater for them. The fact is that these individuals are investigated and vetted for years before they are allowed to enter the US.

As far as chain migration is concerned, Mr. Meeks said America is about families. If a person becomes an Amer-

ican citizen that person should have the right to bring his or her parents or children to America. When we deny this right we are breaking up families. “I can’t vote to break up families,” Mr. Meeks said to loud applause.

In dealing with the tax cuts, Mr. Meeks stated that the cuts were really loaded in favor of the rich. He said, “People will think that they win but in the long run they will lose out; the top one percent will benefit. Most of the money will be in the defense side of the budget and not for social programs. It’s a bait and switch program.”

The Congressman made a good case for more funds to be allocated for public housing. He said that the biggest public housing facilities are in New York. He pointed out that he is a product of public housing. Fixing public housing would take six billion dollars. There are other areas to be fixed as well including education, JFK Airport, and transportation, among others.

Mr. Meeks referred to the State of the Union address. He said that he planned to boycott it because Mr. Trump does not respect the community. According to Mr. Meeks, “I can’t sit in there with somebody that doesn’t respect me. I am going to sit in my office in Washington D.C and not go to the State of the Union. But I will hear what Mr. Trump has to say and I will respond.”

Mr. Meeks kept his word and stayed away. **(Next week: Questions and Answers).**

The views expressed in this column are solely those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the views of THE WEST INDIAN.