

# The Washington Times

## NEILY: The Asians 'set me up'

### Marion Barry overlooks poor D.C. schools in knocking outsiders' success

By Nicole Kurokawa Neily  
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Earlier this month, Ward 8 [D.C. Council](#) member [Marion Barry](#) denigrated Washington's Asian business owners, insisting, "They ought to go. I'm going to say that right now." He later attempted to clarify those comments in a Reason TV interview, explaining that his remarks were not racial - he was merely motivated because "95 percent of the carryouts in Ward 8 are owned or managed by Asians." After a public meeting with local restaurateur [Tony Cheng](#) (look, he has an Asian-American friend) the gaffe was swept under the rug. But alas, [Mr. Barry](#) just can't help blaming ethnic groups for the District's woes.

On Monday, he complained about foreign nurses - specifically Filipino nurses - staffing the District's hospitals. As one newspaper reported, "[Barry](#) told the president and board members of the [University of the District of Columbia](#) that the school should be supplying D.C. residents to serve in the 'lucrative' posts of nurses and teachers."

If blame is to be assigned for the shortage of homegrown talent, however, [Mr. Barry](#) might pause to reflect on the role that he and his political allies have played in this crisis. After all, the scarcity of native nursing graduates is merely a symptom of a deeper problem - poor preparation in the District's school system.

District schools spend more than \$16,000 per pupil - one of the highest rates in the country. [Adam B. Schaeffer](#) of the Cato Institute places this figure closer to \$28,000 once costs such as transportation, capital expenses and debt service are factored in. With such a hefty price tag, one would expect phenomenal outcomes. But, unfortunately, D.C. taxpayers don't earn a very good return on their investment.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) statistics from 2011 show that the District has the highest proportion of students scoring "below basic" - often by a wide margin. For math, 40 percent of fourth-graders and 52 percent of eighth-graders fall below basic, while for reading, 56 percent of fourth-graders and 49 percent of eighth-graders do. This

means those students are functionally illiterate and will have difficulty catching up to their grade level.

Not surprisingly, this poor early education carries over to high school. A recent study by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education found that just 58.6 percent of D.C. public high school students graduate within four years, well below the national average of 75.5 percent.

In the face of these sobering statistics, congressional Democrats and the White House have attempted to terminate the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, a program that has helped more than 1,600 low-income students escape dangerous, underperforming public schools and attend private schools of their choice. Mayor [Vincent C. Gray](#) has shortchanged the city's charter schools while doling out supplemental funds to the city's public schools. Eighty percent of D.C. charter school students graduated on time, in case you were curious. Teacher tenure reforms begun under former schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee appear to have been shelved, which means substandard teachers will be allowed to keep their jobs and continue to fail students.

This means the public school system - in dire shape now - likely will get worse in the future as government officials roll back choice programs and protect the status quo at dismal government-run public schools.

This is a travesty. The District's young residents deserve access to quality schooling options, and [Mr. Barry](#), who was elected as a member of the city's first school board in 1971, is well-positioned to advocate for change.

However inarticulately stated, [Mr. Barry](#) obviously is committed to encouraging local residents to become white-collar professionals and entrepreneurs. But to achieve this goal, he needs to stand up to members of the Democratic Party on education reform - not attack other ethnicities.

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