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Biden comes to NYC to address Sharpton's group

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Vice President Joe Biden is traveling to New York Friday to address members of a national civil rights organization founded by the Rev. Al Sharpton.

Biden, who will speak at the National Action Network's 11th annual conference in Manhattan, is the first sitting vice president to attend the Harlem-based group's yearly meeting. Former President Bill Clinton gave a speech to the conference in 2007.

President Barack Obama has chosen Biden to oversee the enactment of the \$787-billion federal stimulus package Obama signed earlier this year.

Some political experts acknowledged the Obama administration doesn't share the same politics on race as Sharpton, but said Obama realizes Sharpton appeals to some. It's why Biden agreed to speak at the event, they said.

"It makes sense to reach out to whoever you can," said Charlton McIlwain, a New York University professor of media culture and communication.

Thursday, Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who is seeking a third term, told those at the conference there is a "critical" need to close the education gap between whites and minorities, calling it "the great shame of our nation."

Sharpton, who introduced Bloomberg, said the mayor has attended the group's annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. dinner for years. "Before cabinet members and vice presidents would come to the National Action Network, he would come," Sharpton said.

Sharpton and Bloomberg have disagreed on several issues in recent years. However, Sharpton began working closely with the Bloomberg administration last year.

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In 2008, Sharpton and Schools Chancellor Joel Klein cofounded the Education Equality Project, a nationwide effort to eliminate the ethnic and racial divide in public schools.

More than 70 percent of the 1.2 million children in the city's public schools are black or Hispanic, city officials said.

Since the Bloomberg administration took over the school system in 2002, the gap between black and white fourth-graders has narrowed 16 points in mathematics and 6 points in reading.

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