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Leaders talk education, employment in D.C.

Ron Field, Tracy Johnson meet with Congress, Bush administration officials at African American Leadership Summit.

BY KARA S. ANDERSON
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FREEPORT — For Tracy Johnson, it was a chance to make contacts that could help his organization achieve its future goals.

Johnson, president of Martin Luther King Jr. Community Services of Illinois, and Dr. Ron Field, president of Highland Community College, last month attended the African American Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C.

The two Freeport leaders were nominated to attend the invitation-only two-day event by U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo, R-Egan, who said his selection was not difficult.

"As president of Highland Community College, Dr. Field is a proven leader of a tremendous institution of higher education in northern Illinois," Manzullo said in a statement. "Tracy Johnson has done tremendous work with the young people of Freeport as head of Martin Luther King Jr. Community Services of Illinois for the past several years. These two were naturals and tremendous representatives for northern Illinois at this national leadership conference."

The event was intended as a forum for

more than 380 black participants from across the country to discuss a range of policy issues with senior members of the U.S. Congress and the Bush Administration.

Field said he was "extremely pleased" to receive the nomination because it affirmed his belief that Manzullo supports his work and the college as a whole. Field previously lived in Washington for 11 years, and said although the experience did not leave him awestruck, it was a good chance to renew some networks.

"It was refreshing," Field said. "I was pleased to see the level of diversity that the president has placed in senior leadership roles in his staff."

To Johnson, the most important part of the event was the chance to meet key national leaders, such as Education Secretary Rod Paige, and to learn what various government agencies could do to help his agency and the Freeport community.

"People of color were able (to talk about) how the Bush cabinet could and should provide solutions," Johnson said.

Johnson said main topics of discussion included health care education, creating jobs and faith-based programming.

Field also said the event demonstrated an effort on the part of the Republican Party to connect with minority communities.

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