

EDITORIALS • COMMENTS • OPINIONS

We Need Pathways Out Of Poverty



Rep. Barbara Lee

By Rep. Barbara Lee
(D-Calif)

NNPA Special Commentary

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - The economic crisis is having a devastating effect on millions of Americans and has resulted in record levels of unemployment. For the first time since 1983, that national unemployment rate has reached 10.2 percent. In my home state of California the unemployment rate has topped

12.2 percent.

Just last week, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that nearly 14.6 percent of American families struggled to find food last year, the highest rate since 1995.

These numbers are painful reminders resulting from the economic policies of the former Bush Administration. They underscore the need for Congress and President Obama to continue to work together to create jobs in our economic recovery efforts.

Sadly, once again communities of color, particularly African-Americans and Latinos, are experiencing the worst of these job losses.

According to the Department of Labor, although the national unemployment rate was 9.8 percent in September, the rate for African-Americans was 15.4 percent and for Hispanics it was 12.7 percent. As

disproportionate as those numbers are, the evidence indicates that the gap in unemployment rates for communities of color is widening. As a result, the pipeline to poverty is being filled with minority children and families at an increasingly alarming rate.

That is why in August the Congressional Black Caucus, along with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, and the Congressional Progressive Caucus sent a letter to the Speaker that called for the extension of unemployment benefits. People need help during this economic crisis, American workers, the unemployed and families are hurting.

I'm pleased that earlier this month Congress sent President Barack Obama legislation fulfilling our request giving an

much needed economic lifeline to help those who've been laid off.

But the truth is that addressing the unemployment gap for minority communities will not happen through an extension of unemployment insurance alone. Millions of Americans are grasping to maintain their quality of life during this turmoil. This crisis is particularly acute among African-Americans. More than 24 percent of African-Americans live below the poverty line and African Americans are 55 percent more likely to be unemployed than other Americans.

The Congressional Black Caucus, in its continued role as the Conscience of Congress, has a moral obligation to address inequality and injustice as never before in history. We are aggressively advancing the role of government to empower and

protect American families by collectively pursuing a legislative agenda that addresses the priorities of our constituents.

We believe that we have a responsibility and obligation to eradicate poverty by utilizing the full constitutional power, statutory authority and resources of our government to provide opportunities for all and to develop pathways out of poverty. Some of these opportunities and pathways include economic opportunities, job training, livable wages, education, mental health services, affordable housing, health care, child nutrition and a responsible foreign policy.

To that end, we need a concerted effort from the Federal government to expand access to education, job training and economic opportunities to provide a pathway out of poverty and ensure that people of color can compete for jobs on a level

playing field.

In addition, we must ensure that banks improve their lending to small, minority and disadvantaged businesses to ensure that jobs are created in our neighborhoods. The legacy of the Bush Administration is failed policies that have weakened our economy and two wars that have sapped resources that should be directed to domestic needs.

Members of the Congressional Black Caucus are working together along with congressional leaders and President Obama to fix our economy and create jobs to address the true depth of this recession.

U. S. Rep. Barbara Lee is chair of the Congressional Black Caucus.

A Word To Tiger: Silence Isn't Always Golden

By David Burnett

NNPA Guest Columnist

(NNPA) - Let me start by saying that I am thrilled that Tiger Woods is healthy and was not seriously hurt in that accident outside of his home the other night. I selfishly want to see him continue to lay waste to his peers, because I am a huge Tiger Woods fan.

But that said, there are still some things I've heard and read about this accident that seem to defy common sense, and because of that, the old reporter in me is overriding the fan.

Making it worse is the fact that we have heard nothing from Tiger. This story is begging for a response from the world's greatest golfer.

As I write this, it has been more than 48 hours since the accident happened and there are still significant unanswered questions about what now appears to be a bizarre domestic incident. But Tiger Woods has said nothing to anyone, not even the police to adequately clear this up.

For me the smoking gun is the report that the air bags in Tiger's Escalade didn't deploy, which unless there was a major malfunction, means the vehicle was not traveling very fast at all when it hit the fire hydrant and a tree. And you have to wonder how do you hit a fire hydrant in the first place - unless you are greatly distracted or enraged?

Further you question how Tiger actually got his busted mouth and was knocked unconscious from what is being called a minor accident.

The other suspect detail is that Tiger was trapped in the SUV and his wife Elin, in the house, heard the noise from the accident and upon seeing Tiger trapped had to use golf clubs to break out the car's rear window to get Tiger out.

The timing for this could not be worse. It happens just as the tabloids are screaming that Tiger is having an affair. And the generally reliable TMZ is reporting that Tiger and his wife Elin, were arguing about that alleged affair just before the accident.

It is certainly possible that an angry wife dealing with rumors of an affair could do a lot of damage with a golf club. I'm not saying that's what happened but most of us would understand if it did.

Obviously, I am speculating. But what else am I left to do? I'm human and celebrities, even the ones I like, are fair game to wonder about. We all do that.

I want to be wrong about all of my doubts, but what we know about this accident is coming from everyone but Tiger Woods and his wife.

And that is never good.

With millions of dollars in endorsements on the line, a reputation to protect, and a legacy to leave, Tiger Woods has a lot to lose by mishandling this incident.

Indeed silence is not always golden. Award-winning journalist David Burnett is former president of the Washington, D.C. Association of Black Journalists.

Afghanistan: The Big Decision

By Ron Walters

NNPA Columnist

(NNPA) - One of the biggest decisions of the young Administration of President Barack Obama will be made a few days after this is written on the strategy of the war in Afghanistan. A CNN poll has just come out that suggests the decision will be confronted by a public - of which I am one - that opposes the war by 62 percent and that support for his new strategy to send more troops is split 50-49 percent. While the split decision may not stay that way due to what CNN calls the "rally effect" of a president's ability to mount a campaign, still it tells us that the margin for error in this decision will be slight going forward.

One of the most striking things about the decision - now that its contents are beginning to dribble out of the Pentagon - is that after 10 "war council" meetings with key military decision-makers, the deliberations yielded a result close to that General Stanley McCrystal wanted. He sounded a note of urgency in his 66-page strategy document which said, in effect, that if he didn't get at least 40,000 troops, he would not be able to check the insurgency and we would lose the war against the Taliban. Well now, if President Obama sends 34,000, the rest will be made up by NATO forces, Korea and probably India and others.

Obama is no fool, so after about the eighth war council meeting, he asked for an "exit strategy," knowing that his Vice President, Joe Biden, Nancy Pelosi and most of the Democratic establishment were

against the war. Furthermore, he knew that if the American people could use the war, in part, to elect the first Black president of the United States, by 2012, they could un-elect him just as dramatically.

So, I think what happened was that the President called Prime Minister Gordon Brown in Britain and UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon to get some help and they proposed that the exit strategy should be internationalized. They then announced that on January 28 of the coming year, there would be a Summit on the elements of self-sufficiency in Afghanistan. Ban-Ki Moon is moving quicker with a high level meeting of various governments in Kabul in a few months with the Karzai government to stress programs for the development of a new police training and security force. Given this cover, the United States could at some point when the military benchmarks, goals an etc. look good, declare victory and move out.

The Obama Administration will have its most serious problems with the Republicans who are fixated on a "win - lose" type of evaluation of American objectives in the region. But they - and the American people - should face the fact that you cannot win a war in Afghanistan with 40,000 troops; if you used General McChrystal's own math for fighting a counter-insurgency war you would eventually need 668,000 troops. That means the whole country would have to be occupied, not just "strategic villages" as the case with his current strategy.

The method that Obama used in arriving at his decision then, was

as much political as military. It was political in that the framework was one in which he knew in advance that he would leave Afghanistan in an appreciable time and so, should not invest the maximum amount of troops, given a hightening economic crisis by voters and the working class calling for jobs on his domestic front. But it was also political in that he had to use a mechanism which would bring along the legitimate voices in the military establishment to support the final policy and the only way this could be done was to bring them to the table, hear them out, offer counter-propositions and obtain their pledge to support the final decision. The consensus might still fall apart, but this was the best way to try to put it together.

Generals always want to fight a war to win, that's their job, but that will always be done in a given political context. The context when the Iraq war started and Obama announced during his campaign that Afghanistan was a "war of necessity" since that was where Al Qaeda that killed 3,000 Americans was hiding. The context has now changed, with 3,000 American casualties in Iraq eight years later and a White House Jobs Summit being held in the same week the new Afghanistan war strategy is being released. Sometimes context is everything, but this time it must at least be given equal time.

Dr. Ron Walters is Professor Emeritus of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland College Park.

To Be Equal

Urgent Action For Jobs Needed Now

By Marc H. Morial

NNPA Columnist

As Congress and the nation focus on the passage of comprehensive health care reform, the latest jobs numbers show that our economy also remains in bad health. And while overall unemployment is now at 10.2 percent, African American joblessness has reached a 28-year high of 15.7 percent, compared with 13.1 percent for Latinos and 9.5 percent for Whites.

Black unemployment has risen to over 20 percent in states like Michigan and South Carolina. There are now more than 15.7 million Americans out of work and virtually every sector, from construction to retail, is hemorrhaging jobs. Clearly, while our overall economy is sick, Black America is on life support. That is why the National Urban League is adding its voice to those in Congress and the civil rights community who are demanding that the White House take immediate action to create jobs and ensure that the economic recovery extends all the way from Wall Street to Main Street.

The first phase of the President's \$787 billion stimulus bill has

provided needed tax relief to homebuyers and businesses and extended benefits to unemployed workers. But, we must do more to create jobs and stem the rising tide of unemployment, especially in hard-pressed urban communities. That means more focused spending on urban construction projects, greater relief for cities and states to prevent more layoffs and the possible creation of a direct government jobs program targeted to communities most in need. We are pleased that the Obama Administration will convene a "jobs summit" next month to consider these and other options.

But, even with friends in the White House and overwhelming support for progressive urban policies in the Congress, there is still a need for the same kind of focused effort from the civil rights community that has taken us to the brink of historic health care reform. Government can't do this job alone. That's why I was pleased to announce last week that the National Urban League has teamed up with On-Deck Capital, a leading small business financial specialist, to provide loans to minority businesses that are struggling to fulfill their mission as engines of job creation in urban communities. The

program will kick-off in Philadelphia and Los Angeles and will expand to other major urban centers in the coming months.

We are also joining forces with the Congressional Black Caucus, the NAACP, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the National Council of La Raza and others who are urging Washington to take action now to address chronic African-American and Latino unemployment. As Wade Henderson, president of the Leadership Conference recently said, "Make no mistake, for us this is the civil rights issue of the moment. Unless we resolve the national job crisis, it will make it hard to address all of our other priorities."

Working together, the civil rights community has recently won a number of crucial battles - from the election of the nation's first Black president to a new hate crimes law to unprecedented progress on health care reform. We are now engaged in a unified campaign to bring jobs and hope back to our communities. We must and we intend to win again.

Marc Morial is president and CEO of the National Urban League.

SEATTLEMEDIUM.COM
ZTWIN.COM