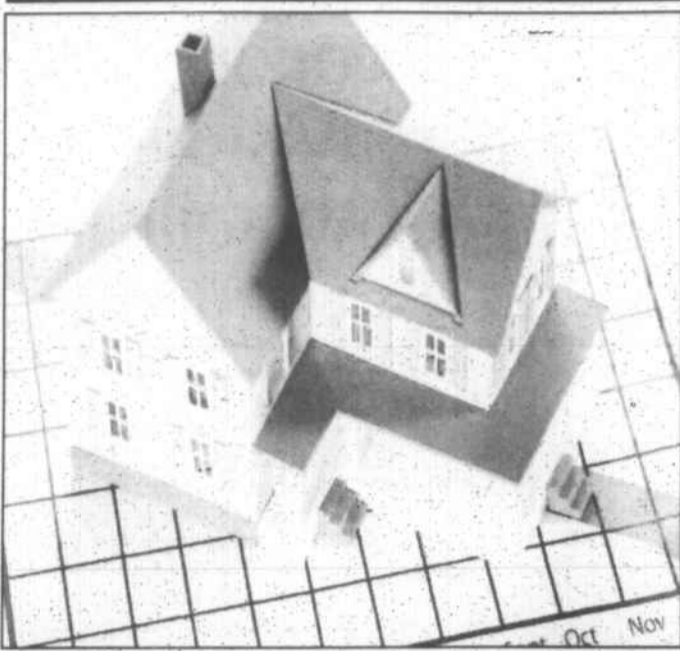


OPINION/ FORUM

THE CHRONICLE 37 Years

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We're On the Right Track



Sen. Harry Reid
Guest Columnist

Even when our economy was strong, it wasn't strong enough to lift everybody. Working people struggled. African-Americans struggled. Many of our cities struggled.

Now, in a weak economy, it is poor, and working people who are again left behind. Unemployment among African-Americans has topped 15 percent - nearly double the national average.

President Obama inherited the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. It will take a long time and a lot of investment to dig out of the ditch President Bush created. We're on the right track this year.

We've cut taxes for working families; ensured men and women get paid equally for equal work; are giving children the care they need to stay healthy; and will make critical investments in health care, clean energy and education.

The steps we're taking today will lay the groundwork for recovery. But as we try to stop the short-term pain, we can never lose focus of our long-term goal: an economy that not only recovers, but lifts all Americans up in equal measure.

Investing in green jobs that can never be outsourced is a great place to start.

There's a myth that green jobs mostly help people in rural areas. It's true that using today's technologies, much of the greatest renewable energy potential exists largely in remote areas.

But if we make the right investments now, we will ensure the clean energy revolution benefits people in every corner of our country, including minority communities, and that cities get their fair share of these jobs.

We're already seeing examples of this success. In Milwaukee, buildings are being retrofitted for energy efficiency, creating jobs for thousands from underserved communities.

In Chicago, a new green-jobs training program called Green Corps Chicago will train local workers to install solar panels for low-income homeowners.

And in Nevada, we're working to deliver clean energy from the remote areas where it is developed to the urban centers around the country where it is needed most.

These ideas are not only starting to create jobs in both urban and rural areas, but will also save consumers money on their energy bills for many years to come. The most cost-effective, job-producing investment is energy efficiency, and we must revive and revise the manufacturing base in our cities to build the supply chain for renewable energy technology.

Clean renewable energy is also about environmental justice. Oil and coal have been polluting our air for generations, but disproportionately threaten our cities and minority communities.

Sixty percent of Hispanics and half of all African-Americans live in areas that don't meet national air quality standards. African-American and Hispanic children in New York City have asthma rates eight times the national average.

This problem only got worse when the last Administration ignored it. But President Obama has made renewable energy and environmental justice a priority.

For example, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, Lisa Jackson, just recently announced a major initiative to identify companies that are polluting near schools.

President Obama's commitment to environmental justice gives me confidence that we will finally fulfill the promise of a national energy policy that not only creates jobs at every rung of the ladder, saves consumers money and reduces our reliance on oil, but also leaves our children and their children with a cleaner, more livable planet.

The path before us isn't easy. We are investing a tremendous amount of taxpayer money, and we take seriously the obligation to spend it wisely and to account for every penny.

But if we set out on that path today, we can make sure that when the economy recovers, it won't lift up only the privileged few, but will be strong enough for us all to succeed.

U.S. Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.) is the Senate Majority Leader.

Challenging world for graduates



Julianne Malveaux
Guest Columnist

Ninety-nine young women walked across Bennett College for Women's graduation stage on May 9, 99 exuberant achievers who have cleared one life hurdle and now have to gear up for another. There are scientists going on to study microbiology, aspiring lawyers heading to Indiana University and the University of Iowa, social workers headed to the University of Pittsburgh and Simmons College, an urban planner going to the University of Illinois, a budding journalist headed to Columbia University.

Some students are planning to work. And a good number are planning to look for work. But where will they look, and what will they find in this challenging 2009 labor market?

Just a day before students graduated, the Bureau of Labor Statistics released unemployment rate data, announcing that unemployment rates are still rising, reaching an official rate of 8.9 percent in April.

That official rate translates into 15.8 percent when all of the people who work part time but want to work full time are counted along with the people who have just stopped looking for work. The rates are more staggering when we look at other populations. The official rate is 15 percent for African Americans and 11.3 percent for Latinos.

If 8.9 percent translates into 15.8 percent for the overall population, then the 15 percent black unemployment rate translates into 26.6 percent. More than one in four African Americans is out of work!

Because the labor market



is dynamic, there are still jobs out there and companies hiring, and there are opportunities in every economy. The team at Bennett has been stressing preparation for students who want to enter the world of work. That means impeccable resumes, top-notch interview skills, overwhelmingly positive attitudes and flexible spirits. And it means a willingness to jump into a job with energy, enthusiasm and gratitude.

Even with all those positive attributes, however, the economy is the context, the water in which we swim. Right now, we are swimming in some mighty muddy water.

Some would say it is less muddy than it has been - while more than half a million jobs were lost in April, that's the lowest level of job loss we have experienced so far this year. Further, President Obama has asked states to change their unemployment insurance rules so that people who are unemployed and in school for job retraining can keep their unemployment benefits.

That's good news - presently, people have to prove

they are looking for work, and their time can often be better spent training for a different line of work.

What does this mean for Bennett students, and for the 1.5 million young people who will complete college this year? Some will find themselves working in unpaid or low paid internships, amassing experience until the economy turns around. Others will go to graduate or professional school if they find the job market uninviting.

Still others will have to make compromises, working not at their "dream" job, but at a job that will help them pay their bills. The average college graduate shoulders more than \$20,000 in student loan debt that they must begin to repay just six months after graduation.

Given the weakness of the labor market, the Department of Education might want to allow students a year or 18 months before beginning to repay those loans.

College career service and alumni offices must also do whatever we can to share job

opportunities with our new graduates. The networks that they developed while in college will keep connections strong after graduation. And the students who learned to develop their networks will do the best in the job market.

High unemployment rates notwithstanding, employers are hiring even as they lay people off. The Class of 2009 faces a far more competitive labor market than any graduating class has faced in the last decade or so.

And if the unemployment rates are any indication, African-American graduates face stiffer competition than others. Those of us who encouraged these students to chase the brass ring of an undergraduate degree are now charged with helping them make the degree meaningful through work or graduate school.

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Quotes that unite and divide



Peter Bailey
Guest Columnist

It's amazing how language has the ability to send subtle or blatant messages that either unites or divides people. The following is a compilation of such quotations from prominent African-Americans:

- Former Secretary of State Colin Powell: "Most West Indians are high Anglicans, the same as high Episcopalians - the higher the better. Their value system is a combination of the family and the British tradition, which was strong in Jamaica. They never forgot that they were British subjects. This makes them somewhat different from other American Blacks." - From the "National Review," April 1, 1991.

- Journalist/Historian Lerone Bennett, Jr.: "The Black middle class can no longer avoid its destiny. The black middle class can no longer avoid the necessity of redefining itself in terms of the needs of black people. It is necessary now for the black middle class to become the servant of the black community and not the mediator of the white community. - It is not necessary for all black people to do the same thing. But it is necessary for all black people to do something. It is equally important for the black community to judge individuals on the basis of their contributions. Some men can write, some can fix cars, some can cook, some can raise hell: all - the writer, the mechanic, the cook, the hellraiser - are valuable because their skills are complementary and not contradictory. - From his book, "Challenge to Blackness."



Justice Thomas

- Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas: "If I ever went to work for the EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) or did anything directly connected with blacks, my career would be irreparably ruined. The monkey would be on my back because I'm black. People meeting me for the first time will automatically dismiss my thinking as second rate." - Pre-Supreme Court Quote from Richmond Times-Dispatch

- Human Rights Leader/Activist Malcolm X: "U.S. politics is ruled by special-interest blocs and lobbies. What group has a more urgent special interest, what group needs a bloc, a lobby, more than the black man? Labor owns one of Washington's largest non-government buildings - situated where they can literally watch the White House - and no political move is made that doesn't involve how Labor feels about it. A lobby got Big Oil its depletion allowance.... Twenty-two million black people should tomorrow give a dollar apiece to build a skyscraper lobby building in Washington, D.C. Every morning, every legislator should receive a communication about what the black man in America expects and

wants and needs. The demanding voice of the black lobby should be in the ears of every legislator who votes on any issue." - From "The Autobiography of Malcolm X."

- Political analyst Juan Williams: "Another telling finding is the difference among black people in how much they feel 'personal factors,' instead of 'racial discrimination' determines how far any black person can expect to get in life. The Pew poll found that 53 percent of black Americans agree that 'blacks who can't get ahead are mostly responsible for their own condition.' That fits with poll findings that two-thirds of all Americans (71 percent of whites and 59 percent of Hispanics) feel that personal behavior - values, education, hard work - is what holds back those black Americans still trapped in poverty." - Washington Post Op-ed

- Entertainer Whoopi Goldberg: "Call me an a-hole, call me a blowhard, but don't call me an African American. Please. It divides us as a nation and as a people and it kinda pisses me off. It diminishes everything I've accomplished." - From her book, "Book: Whoopi



Colin Powell

Goldberg" - Civil rights leader/activist Martin Luther King, Jr.: "There are already structured forces in the Negro community that can serve as the basis for building a powerful united front - the Negro church, the Negro press, the Negro fraternities and sororities, and Negro professional association. We must admit that these forces have never given their full resources to the cause of Negro liberation.... But the failures of the past must not be an excuse for the inaction of the present and the future. These groups must be mobilized and motivated. This form of group unity can do infinitely more to liberate the Negro than any action of individuals. We have been oppressed as a group and we must overcome that oppression as a group." - From his book, "Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?"

Journalist/Lecturer A. Peter Bailey, a former associate editor of Ebony, is currently editor of Vital Issues: The Journal of African American Speeches. He can be reached at apeterb@verizon.net.



Juan Williams