

FORUM

THE STATE OF BLACK AMERICA: JOBS

Economic devastation in U.S. is still real for Blacks and Latinos

"The hardest work in the world is being out of work."

— Whitney M. Young, National Urban League President 1961-1971



Marc
Morial

Guest
Columnist

One of the advantages of my position as the president and CEO of the National Urban League is that I have both the opportunity and platform to speak to so many of our nation's young people.

I was presented with another opportunity recently as a featured speaker of the Medgar Evers College Global Lecture Series. As I addressed that crowd of future lawyers, IT professionals and perhaps even a president of the National Urban League, it struck me that for a number of these students — our future workforce — they may encounter an America, and a job market, that is hostile to the principles of economic mobility on which our country was founded.

Five years after the widely-accepted end of the global economic downturn commonly known as the Great Recession, America's economy inches ever closer to full-recovery. In fact, the start of 2015 saw the most sustained period of job creation this century.

But the dark cloud inside this silver lining is that too many people are still being left behind — particularly in our communities of color, where unemployment remains at a crisis level, even as our economy continues to rebound.

For Blacks and Latinos in America, the economic devastation of the Great Recession is as real today as it was when it began in 2007, and what we've found in our newly released 2015 State of Black America® report — "Save our Cities: Education, Jobs + Justice" is a mixed economics bag that reflects a stark tale of two



Americas.

The U.S. economy added 295,000 jobs in February of this year. For the first time since 1997, we have seen 12 straight months of private-sector job growth above 200,000 and unemployment is down to 5.5 percent — its lowest rate since May 2008.

But despite this encouraging news, the Black unemployment is twice that of White unemployment, wages are stagnant and many working people are not earning enough to make ends meet.

The Equality Index in the State of Black America® report catalogued Black, Hispanic and White unemployment and income inequality in the nation's largest metropolitan areas. Overall, the Black unemployment rate was at 11.3 percent and the Latino unemployment rate stood at 7.4 percent versus a White unemployment rate of 5.3 percent. Of the 70 cities ranked for Black-White unemployment, almost

half (33 cities) had a Black unemployment rate above 15 percent. In seven of those cities we discovered Great Depression era Black unemployment rates of 20 percent or higher.

It is clear that for far too many Blacks and Latinos, our nation's economic recovery is only something they read or hear about. According to our analysis, America's comeback is bypassing large swaths of people in Black and Brown neighborhoods — and that is dangerous — not only to those communities, but to our nation. A recovery that leaves millions of its citizens behind will ultimately threaten America's sustained growth.

In a recent report on jobs and unemployment in the Black community, Economic Policy Institute economist Valerie Wilson said, "Even before the Great Recession, black unemployment has consistently been twice as high as white

unemployment. To address this problem, we need to look beyond simply returning to the pre-recession status quo and implement policies aimed at ensuring that every one who is willing and able to work has a job."

A central focus of the National Urban League is workforce development, and being in the business of creating jobs and proposing solutions to our longstanding challenges, our organization has advanced the following public-policy* recommendations:

*Passage of a transportation infrastructure bill with a targeted jobs component.

*Passage of a targeted, large-scale summer youth/young adult jobs bill.

*Raising the minimum wage to a living wage.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Department of Labor published the March jobs report. While we applaud every stride our country makes in resuscitating our once battered economy, we remain vigilant — and concerned — about the disparity of access to these benefits among our nation's citizens as revealed in the State of Black America® report.

I am concerned for all Americans, but especially for all the students I meet who live in those communities in crisis and are working so hard in their classrooms now while they dream of a better future.

For more details and essays from leading figures on the economy, visit www.stateofblackamerica.org.

Marc H. Morial, former mayor of New Orleans, is president and CEO of the National Urban League.

Today is National Health Care Decisions Day



Ann
Gauthreaux

Guest
Columnist

It's been said that in life there are only two things that are certain: death and taxes. Everyone recognizes that April 15 is the deadline for completing your taxes. Not many people know that the following day, April 16, has been designated National Health Care Decisions Day.

In support of this national effort, Governor

McCrory has issued a proclamation designating April 16 "Health Care Decisions Day" for North Carolina.

We plan for college, marriage, a baby and retirement, but we don't prepare for the end of life. In fact, less than 30 percent of all adults have their healthcare wishes documented. In this region, we invite you to participate in changing this trend.

With an aim of reaching healthcare consumers well before a healthcare crisis, several regional healthcare leaders have united to create awareness, provide education and encourage

"Over 55 public and private workshops are planned in April and early May"

— Ann Gauthreaux

important conversations about your healthcare wishes. This coalition is called the Community Partnership for Compassionate Care. We recently launched a campaign called "Got Plans?" to encourage all citizens over the age of 18 to think about who they would want to speak for them if they ever lost the ability to make and communicate their own healthcare decisions. We have created

tools to guide conversations about these issues and make it easy for folks to document their wishes through advance directives. The steering committee of the Community Partnership for Compassionate Care includes representatives from Novant Health, Wake Forest Baptist Health, Hospice & Palliative CareCenter and Rowan Hospice & Palliative Care.

This year, the coalition is spotlighting the impon-

tance of discussing, deciding and documenting your healthcare wishes.

We are encouraging conversations so that your healthcare providers and those you love can know and honor your wishes if you ever lose the ability to speak for yourself. We are united in ongoing regional efforts to provide you with advance healthcare planning tools so that making your plans is as simple as 1,2,3.

Over 55 public and private workshops are planned in April and early May — all of which can be found on our website www.GotPlans123.org

website, under the workshops tab. The greatest gift you can give to a loved one is sharing your wishes about future healthcare and documenting those wishes well in advance of a healthcare crisis.

Register today for one of our free workshops and let us know if you would like to host a workshop.

Ann Gauthreaux is Regional Director of Public Relations, Hospice & Palliative CareCenter. She writes this column on behalf of the Community Partnership for Compassionate Care.



Hospice & Palliative
CARECENTER

N NOVANT
HEALTH

Wake Forest
Baptist Health

The worst proposals thus far in the 2015 legislative session



Rob
Schofield

Guest
Columnist

North Carolina lawmakers treated themselves and everyone else to a spring break last week. Committee meetings and floor votes were suspended and most lawmakers stayed away from the capital city.

In many ways, it was kind of a fitting dead spot in what has been a strange, start-and-stop session. As lawmakers near the midway point of the legislative year, the list of significant accomplishments is a very

short one. And while this is a fact that many will see as a great improvement over recent years in which the flood of radically regressive proposals came on like a torrent, the overall lack of purpose that afflicts the General Assembly speaks volumes about what government looks like when many of the people in charge reject the idea of intentional, public solutions to the problems and challenges that confront society.

Just because there's been a relative shortage of new laws thus far, however, doesn't mean there aren't a lot of terrible and regressive ideas under consideration on Jones Street. The deadline for state House members to introduce bills

won't arrive until this week (a fact that guarantees the arrival of hundreds of more bills) and already, the list of backward-looking and even downright frightening proposals is a long one. Here is a far-from-exhaustive list featuring a dozen, of the worst we've seen thus far:

***Promoting LGBT discrimination** — As has been widely reported, the nation's rapid progress in moving toward providing legal equality to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people has provoked an ugly backlash in some places. Sadly, North Carolina makes that list with multiple bills under consideration to allow discrimination by businesses

that serve the public and government officials who perform marriages under the guise of "religious freedom."

***Reversing the results of local elections** — As Chris Fitzsimon noted recently, the very lawmakers who constantly rail about the supposed mad consolidation of power in Washington with respect to the states have been only too happy to practice what they preach against when it comes to the relationship between the state and local governments. Witness, among many other such examples, the bald-faced power grabs against Wake County and the City of Greensboro wherein state lawmakers have moved to

reverse recent elections by redrawing electoral maps against the will of local communities.

***Another disastrous tax proposal from the Senate** — If there's a most irresponsible proposal of the 2015 session at this point, it's probably the one advanced by Senate leaders to further slash state income taxes. Despite the state's persistent budget shortfalls that have resulted from the Robin Hood-in-reverse 2013 tax cuts, the Senate recently proposed slashing another billion dollars in state revenue by cutting personal and corporate income taxes. When Senator Bob Rucho, one of the plan's chief authors, was asked how he planned

to pay for the additional billion dollar tax cut, his response was: "that's not the issue."

***Raising taxes on people struggling to stay in their homes** — And speaking of regressive tax proposals, one of the more outrageous and least-well reported acts of the 2015 session has been the enactment of a new law — buried in the much-ballyhooed gas tax legislation — that removes a tax break for homeowners who have managed to hold onto their homes by obtaining debt relief assistance. Under the new law, the debt relief will be taxed as income — thus undermining the purpose of the relief in the first place:

See Worst on A8