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Obama Appeals to Public, Private Companies to Reduce Unemployment

By Dorothy Rowley
Special to the NNPA from
The Washington Informer

President Barack Obama is appealing to employers nationwide to help put thousands of jobless people back to work.

Obama, who has vowed to support strategies that help low- and middle-income families rebound amidst a recovering economy, specifically reached out Friday to more than 300 of the nation's largest public and private companies in announcing a \$150 million grant competition through the Department of Labor to place long-term unemployed citizens in vacant positions.

While the economy is getting stronger and businesses like yours have created eight million jobs over the past four years, and with the unemployment rate lower than it's been in over five years, we all know we've still got a lot more to do to build an economy where everybody is willing to work hard and take responsibility to get ahead," Obama said during a Jan. 31 assembly of corporate officials at the White House.

"Getting people back on the job faster is one of our top priorities, but I must confess that last month Congress made that hard by letting unemployment insurance expire for more than a million people," Obama said. He added that with each week Congress fails to restore those benefits, roughly 72,000 people join the ranks of people who've been out of work for more than one year.

According to a fact sheet released following Obama's State of the Union address on Tuesday, research shows long-term unemployed job applicants are frequently overlooked and sometimes excluded from job opportunities - even when they have resumes and skills identical to those of other candidates.

In addition, labor department statistics released in December show that while the overall unemployment rate has decreased from 7.0 percent to 6.7 percent, the joblessness rate for African-Americans hovers at 11.6 percent, and 32.2 percent for blacks between the ages of 16 and 29.

MSNBC commentator and civil rights leader the Rev. Al Sharpton contends that blacks generally face higher employment rates because of where they work.

"Ever since Obama has been in [office] there's been an increase in jobs in the private sector, but black unemployment has increased. Why? Because we work in the public sector," Sharpton told U.S. News last year.

In order to combat unemployment disparities, Obama is using executive authority to issue a presidential memorandum urging federal agencies adopt practices to ensure that unemployed individuals and those facing financial difficulties due to no fault of their own receive fair treatment and consideration for employment.

Among initiatives to buttress hiring are programs to recruit long-term unemployed people and strategies to get them employed in middle- to high-skill occupations.

Other measures call for raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 for employees nationwide and extending emergency unemployment benefits for three months while recipients look for work.



U.S. Department of Labor statistics released in December show that while the overall unemployment rate has decreased from 7 percent to 6.7 percent, joblessness among African-Americans hovers around 11.6 percent. (Courtesy photo)

Parents of Dead Teen Demand Justice

By Zenobia Jeffries
The Michigan Citizen

Warning: This article contains some graphic imagery.
DETROIT - Justice for Kendrick "K.J." Johnson is what his parents want, now.

In a visit to Detroit, Kenneth and Mrs. Jacquelyn Johnson told an overflowing room at the Historic King Solomon Baptist Church they would not give up on looking for their son's killer.

"We are not going to stop no matter what it takes," Johnson told those gathered Jan. 25, for a weekly Michigan National Action Network meeting. Detroit was the Johnson's first stop in a national trek, sponsored by NAN, calling for the truth in their son's death.

"We're continuing to heighten the call from Detroit to Atlanta, from Charlotte to California," Michigan NAN President Rex, Charles Williams told the Michigan Citizen, "to engage people in helping shed light on what we believe is one of the most horrific crimes in the 21st century."

It's been a year since Kendrick's death. The student athlete was found dead Jan. 11, 2013 rolled up in a gym mat inside the gymnasium at Lowndes High School, where he was in the 10th grade. His death was ruled an accident.

The local sheriff said the 17-year-old fell into the vertically positioned mat to retrieve a gym shoe, and became stuck. Four months later an autopsy report ruled Kendrick's official cause of death as "positional asphyxia," meaning he suffocated by his own body weight in the mat. "No foul play," the sheriff said.

The Johnsons don't buy it. There's no way their son could fit into the rolled-up mat, they say. And the sheriff's explanation of how their son died only proves to them someone killed their son, and the authorities are trying to cover it up.

"They said my son was reaching for a shoe. They wanted to make the public believe at first it was a wrestling mat and as we all know it probably takes probably takes 10 people to pick up one. They probably stand 12 feet tall; they stand so tall you probably can't stand them straight up. But it wasn't a wrestling mat it was a cheerleading tumbling mat," said Johnson, standing between his wife and family attorney Chevene King. "It stands about six feet tall. I knocked it over, and King and I picked it up with one hand with no problem. So why is my son going to get over into a tumbling mat to try and retrieve his shoe, when he could have simply pushed it over?"

"It's not possible," he said. "The coroner came back and told us the hole was 14 inches at its widest point. He measured Kendrick's shoulders, Kendrick's shoulders were 19 inches across. So it's impossible."

Another flag for the Johnsons was the shoe which Kendrick was supposedly reaching for. If Kendrick bled out as he hung upside down in the mat, "why wasn't there blood on top of the shoe beneath him?" he asked.

"Blood (was) up under the shoe," Johnson said. "They (re) just so many things." Inconsistencies and questions keep the Johnsons on their quest for the truth. Why didn't someone hear their son's cries for help if he was stuck in a mat when students and staff were in and out of the gym until 8 p.m. that evening? Why weren't they called to identify their son's body until two days after it was found in the

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Atty. Chevene King, Kenneth and Mrs. Jacquelyn Johnson ZENOBIA JEFFRIES PHOTO

U.N. Urges Countries to Shelter Somalis Feeling Deepening War

Special to the NNPA from the New York Amsterdam News (NYAN) - The U.N. refugee agency is appealing to countries not to deport Somali asylum seekers to their country of origin as the situation in southern and central Somalia is still unsafe and Somalis fleeing those areas are in need of international protection.

Asylum seekers who are forcibly returned risk persecution or serious harm, warned U.N. spokeswoman Fatoumata Lejeune-Kaba.

"Monthly fatalities fluctuated between 100 and 600 people," she told reporters. "Last June, fierce fighting resulted in 314 casualties in Kismayo alone. Civilians risk being killed or wounded by crossfire between government forces and al-Shabab militants as well as by bomb attacks and as bystanders in targeted attacks."

Lejeune-Kaba said there is a perception the situation in Somalia has stabilized because it no longer makes headline news. However instead of open warfare as before, she said, the combatants drop a bomb or attack.

Meanwhile, over the past weekend, a U.S. drone killed a senior Shabab commander in a late night missile strike. Using his twitter account, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud called the killing a decisive blow to the militant group. The strike took place just a day after 4,395 Ethiopian troops were formally absorbed into the African Union force, also known as AMISOM, according to the Sudan Tribune.

Ethiopia's contribution takes the AMISOM force to the 22,000-strong level mandated by the UN Security Council. "The Ethiopian deployment will permit Burundian and Ugandan forces to move into parts of Lower and Middle Shabelle," a news release from AMISOM was quoted to say.

A Shabab spokesman responded to the new developments. "We defeated Ethiopia before and we know how to battle them now," he said, adding that the inclusion of Ethiopian forces shows a weakening of the AMISOM force.

"It reflects the fact that Somalia has been partitioned between Kenya and Ethiopia, and the international community is legalizing that partition." Under the new AMISOM concept of operation - to be implemented in the near future - the Ethiopian forces will take over sector 3 and help Djiboutian peacekeepers who are in charge of sector

More desperate spin about the "Carolina Comeback"

By Chris Fitzsimon www.nepolicywatch.com
News Analysis

Here are two things you need to know about this week's news that the state unemployment rate fell half a percentage point in December to 6.9 percent and is down 1.5 percent since December of 2012.

Fewer jobs were created in North Carolina in 2013 than in 2012. That's right, fewer jobs. That's despite Governor Pat McCrory's constant boasting about the "Carolina Comeback" in his first year in office.

And more than 100,000 people dropped out of the state labor force last year, so discouraged in their fruitless search for a job that they gave up looking and are no longer counted when computing the unemployment rate.

That's why the rate has gone down significantly, not because of massive job creation but because people can't find jobs no matter how hard they look.

That's not idle speculation from people opposed to the agenda of McCrory and the Republican leaders of the General Assembly. That's the conclusion from a wide range of economists - scholars associated with universities, major banks and even conservative think tanks.

Wells Fargo Economist Mark Vitner told the News & Observer that the real state unemployment rate is nowhere near 6.9 percent and the recent drop in the rate exaggerates the improvement in the economy.

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