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Diverse Assembly Kicked Off a Year of Voter Empowerment, Nonviolent Direct Action and Litigation

More than 80,000 Rallied Outside State Capitol, Set Justice-Driven Agenda at Moral March

RALEIGH - Protesting against the regressive laws passed by extremists in the General Assembly last year, upwards of 80,000 people marched on the state capitol Saturday morning, according to the march's logistics and planning experts. Called the Moral March on Raleigh, the event's multiracial, intergenerational crowd also advanced an agenda for moral and constitutional public policy.

Convened by the North Carolina NAACP and more than 160 partner organizations in the Historic Thousands on Jones Street (HKonJ) People's Coalition, the march was the largest gathering in the South since the Selma to Montgomery March in 1965. It also marked the eighth annual convening of the HKonJ People's Coalition, bringing together diverse voices from the civil rights, faith-based, labor, student, women's rights, environmental protection, LGBT and immigrant justice communities.

"We are black, white, Latino, Native American," said Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II, president of the NC NAACP and convener of HKonJ. "We are Democrat, Republican, independent. We are people of all faiths, and people not of faith but who believe in a moral universe. We are natives and immigrants, business leaders and workers and unemployed, doctors and the uninsured, gay and straight, students and pa

This year's assembly built off momentum that the Forward Together Moral Movement set in motion last year with more than 30 "Moral Mondays" demonstrations against the General Assembly's regressive agenda.

"Every major faith tradition lifts up the high standard of justice," said Dr. Barber, further citing the U.S. and North Carolina State Constitutions for underscoring government that is vested in the good of the whole. "When we look at these high standards for North Carolina and for America, we must declare there are those who have chosen to live, govern, and act mighty low. In policy and politics, we face two choices: One is the low road to destruction, and the other is a pathway to higher ground. ... Those of us who love freedom and justice are being called to take this state and nation from the low lands of injustice and division to higher ground."

To get there, the NC NAACP has designed a "5-M" grassroots mobilization plan to motivate every citizen to fight against these extremist policies; meet every challenge to suppress the right to vote; mobilize all North Carolinians to the polls regardless of party affiliation; make every effort to fight in the courts against voter suppression and for the restoration of the Voting Rights Act; and move every obstacle that could keep people from voting. (Continued On Page 12)

Black Unemployment Rises to 12.1 percent

By Freddie Allen
NNPA Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - The black unemployment rate increased from 11.9 percent in December to 12.1 percent in January, according to the Department of Labor's latest monthly report.

At 12.1 percent the black unemployment rate is nearly double the national unemployment rate of 6.6 percent. The unemployment rate for black men over 20 years old jumped from 11.5 percent in December 2013 to 12 percent in January, compared to white men who experienced a decrease in their unemployment rate from 5.6 percent in December 2013 to 5.4 percent in January.

The jobless rate for black women over 20 years old didn't change from December to January, staying flat at 10.4 percent, compared to white women who saw their unemployment rate tick down from 5.3 percent in December to 5.2 percent in January.

Young blacks, 16-19 years-old, continue to suffer the highest rate of unemployment among all worker groups at 38 percent. The jobless rate for whites in the same age group is 17.5 percent. Many economists believe that lack of job experience during their teenage years, hinders blacks from learning crucial job skills at a young age, stunting any future job prospects.

The labor force participation rate, the number of people who are either employed or looking for work, rose for all adult worker groups. In a statement on the jobs report, U.S. Secretary of Labor Thomas E. Perez noted the increase in the labor force participation rate and the slowly shrinking unemployment rate as signs of economic progress in the flailing economy.

That progress has not trickled down to the black community, where the jobless rate for blacks is nearly twice the national average. The labor force participation rate also increased among blacks, which may indicate that more blacks were looking for jobs in January, but hadn't found one.



Rep. John Conyers wants emphasis on job creation (NNPA Photo by Freddie Allen)

Last Thursday, Republican senators buried a deal that would have extended unemployment benefits for 1.7 million Americans. Perez said that Congress remains a roadblock to progress.

On a post on the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities website Chad Stone, the center's chief economist, wrote that, "Families rely on unemployment benefits to meet basic needs like food, health care, and housing while they look for work."

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STEM Education Gap Threatens American Economic Success

By Jazelle Hunt

NNPA Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - At a time when 6.7 percent unemployment (or, 11.9 percent among African Americans) is an improvement, the STEM sector still has more available jobs than qualified American professionals. And according to a study released last week, the United States' will halt its economic success unless the racial gap in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education is addressed.

The report, STEM Urgency: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Education in an Increasingly Unequal and Competitive World, examines the inadequacy of STEM education, particularly among African Americans and Latinos, and how that inadequacy impacts U.S. economic power. The paper is presented by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a nonprofit, nonpartisan think-tank dedicated to research and policy analysis on issues affecting African Americans and other people of color.

The Joint Center also convened a panel last week to introduce the paper and discuss its findings.

According to the report, just 17 percent of degreed and employed black professionals hold a STEM degree. In the field itself, African Americans make up just 3.9 percent of the ranks of all science and engineering occupations. White STEM professionals hold 71.8 percent of these jobs.

"While these trends are troubling for the nation overall, a disproportionate number of people of color - particularly African Americans and Hispanics - are even further away from becoming STEM-literate and having the ability to thrive in a hyper-competitive, global marketplace," the report states. "Closing the gap in college graduation rates for African Americans and Hispanics could add a significant number of people to the workforce able to do jobs that require advanced skills and are in high-growth areas of the economy."

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