

Point of View

To Be Equal

OPPORTUNITY FOR THE POOR?

By John E. Jacob

President Reagan's State of the Union message was eloquent in its promise of opportunity for all. The speech

presented a rhetorically seductive picture of liberating "the spirit of enterprise in the most distressed areas of our country."

But the proposals mentioned in his speech, and the budget he has submitted to the Congress, just don't add up to the promises of opportunity.

The State of the Union message touched on a number of familiar proposals, some of them worthy of support. Prime among these was the enterprise zone legislation which has been supported by a broad coalition including many advocates of minorities and the poor.

While no panacea, enterprise zones is a worthwhile concept that should be passed. By cutting through the red tape and taxes that stifle small business development in poverty areas, enterprise zones could indeed result in an economic resurgence in some neighborhoods that creates new jobs.

But it's hard to see much opportunity in some other aspects of the Administration's program. It's doubtful that lower minimum wage scales, for example, will create more jobs for youth. The current law provides for em-

ployer exemptions from the standard minimum wage, yet it has not done much to cut black youth unemployment.

Tenant management of housing projects is a promising idea, provided tenant groups are equipped with technical assistance. But even if it works it would not do



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anything to ease the terrible housing crunch or help the homeless.

And education vouchers would simply undermine the public schools on which the poor must depend for their education.

It's not that the ideas presented in the State of the Union are good or bad; they just don't appear relevant to the real world facts of life faced by the poorest Americans.

Opportunity means a helping hand. The government provides lots of opportunity to the affluent—its tax cuts have helped many to keep more of their wealth and to reap the rewards of the system. But the poor don't benefit from tax breaks—in fact, they're paying more in taxes now than they were before those tax cuts.

Federal intervention can help create opportunities through programs that improve education, train for jobs, and allow minimal standards of food, housing and health care. Unfortunately, the budget presented by the Administration takes opportunity away from those that

need it.

There are new cuts coming on top of massive program cuts in the past four years. The budget proposes spending less on basic survival programs, less on subsidized housing and health care, less on child nutrition and school lunches.

It would kill the Legal Services Corporation, which gives the poor

tagged young people for jobs. It would end urban development programs that create inner city jobs.

The budget's impact must be seen in the context of earlier cuts that reduced opportunities. And it must be questioned whether such cuts are justified in the face of ever-higher defense spending that even fervent supporters

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access to the legal system. It would kill the work incentive program which helps welfare recipients prepare for jobs.

The Budget would kill one of the success stories of the war on poverty, the Job Corps, which trains disadvan-

aged young people for jobs. It would end urban development programs that create inner city jobs.

of a strong military are questioning. So there is a yawning gap between the promise of opportunity made in the President's State of the Union address, and the continued harassment of the poor made in the Administration's budget.

LESSONS OF PAST RELEVANT TODAY, USWA VICE PRESIDENT STRESSES

Pittsburgh, PA, Feb. 18—In a Black History Month statement recalling the role of blacks in the American labor movement, United Steelworkers of America Vice President Leon Lynch emphasized that working people move ahead when racial and ethnic diversity is used, not as a cause for division, but as a source of strengthened solidarity.

It is a lesson, he said, of crucial importance today, when large pockets of very high unemployment belie the notion of full economic recovery, when the extensive use of anti-union consultants and employer tilt of the National Labor Relations Board undermine the concept of collective bargaining, and when many com-

panies unjustifiably seek to take back from workers wage, benefit, and contract language gains hard-won over the years.

Workers must stand together as never before, if they are not to be battered by such trends, said Lynch. Unionism is not a luxury for the best of times, but a necessity when they are hard. So teaches history, said the USWA vice president. He pointed out:

"Even with the end of slavery in the United States, unscrupulous employers did not hesitate to use racial antagonisms and the disparate position of jobless blacks to discourage the legitimate wage aspirations of all workers.

"We are all one family See HERITAGE, Page

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Editorial

The 1985 session of the Nevada Legislature is now in full swing and bills have been introduced very rapidly in both houses.

We have been very interested in following the work of our Black representatives in the State Legislature.

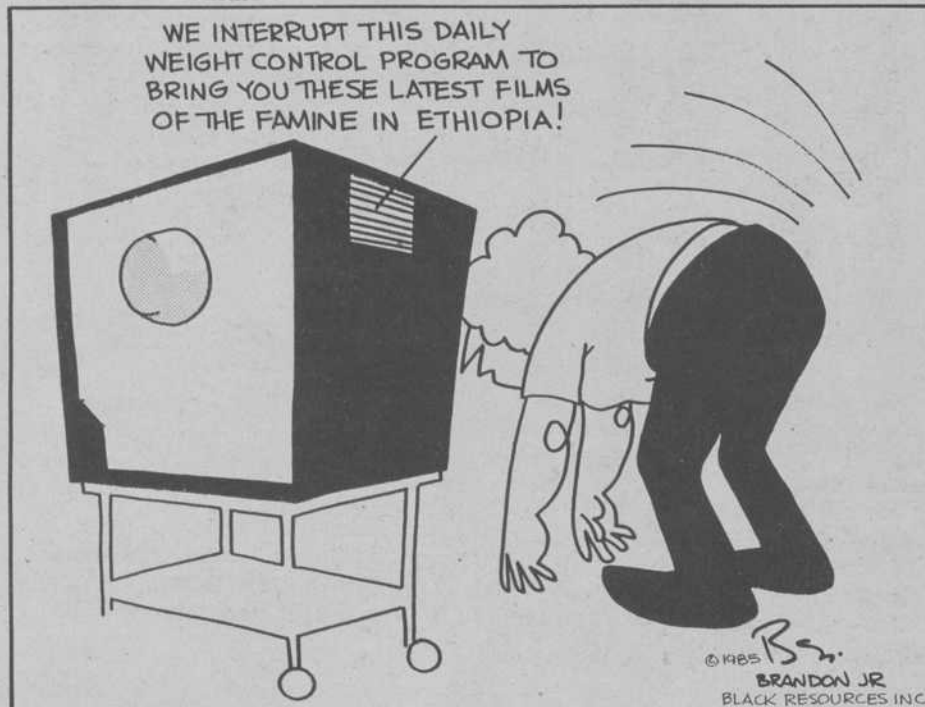
Our one State Senator, the Honorable Joe Neal, has moved from the middle aisle of the Senate to the front row. A move to the front row indicates longevity, clout, power, and committee chairmanship.

It is our hope that Senator Neal will use his position to assist in legislation helpful to the Black communities around the state. More street lighting, better streets, more police protection, greater educational opportunities, more cultural activities, and more employment opportunities, to name a few, are among the things sorely needed in our community.

The members of the Assembly, the Honorables Gene Collins and Morse Arberry, are relatively new to the legislature. However, we would appreciate a joint effort with Senator Neal in seeing that the needs of our community are made known.

We realize the ultra-conservativeness of this Legislature and appreciate the fact that, when all is said and done, these politicians will have attempted to do what their party thinks is best for Nevada. However, they must not lose sight of the fact that there are many people in the state who are not able to find jobs, who must depend on the State for a livelihood, and who are completely at the mercy of the powerful politicians.

We hope humanity will rule over politics in this legislative session.



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