

U.S. stuck in jobless recovery, can't get up

By Marc H. Morial
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It was just days ago, wasn't it, that the air seemed thick with celebration over the expected good news about the job market.

The stock market had been on an upward course for several weeks. Consumer confidence was beginning to rebound. Economists far and wide predicted the jobs picture would be the next cause for confetti throwing.

It seems like a cruel joke now.

In a stunning deflation of expectation, the federal monthly employment report released recently determined that, instead of the 150,000 new jobs that were widely expected, just 1,000 new ones could be counted.

We've been thrown back to an unprecedented grim reality — as one economist said: "this report is telling us we're still stuck in a jobless recovery."

Even the decline in the unemployment rate, to 5.7 percent, down from November's 5.9 percent, is being largely discounted as "specious," in the words of another analyst, because so many jobless chose not to look for work. Meanwhile,

African-Americans continue to form a disproportionate share of the 8.4 million Americans out of work: their double-digit unemployment rate of 10.2 percent continues to be twice that of whites.

Moreover, along with the December employment report, the federal government substantially scaled back its earlier estimates of job gains for October and November, from 143,000 jobs created to 94,000.

That means that in the five months since the economy has begun adding jobs after two years of declines, the pace of new jobs has been far below the 150,000 monthly benchmark that indicates the workforce is providing jobs for everyone who wants to work.

A comparative study of economic recessions by the National Urban League's Institute of Equality and Opportunity shows that while many economic indicators are charting a path to economic recovery, unemployment remains static and those hit hardest are the ones who can least afford it.

A jobless recovery, or one that produces lower earnings, and therefore lower consumer spending, should be unac-

To Be Equal

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ceptable to workers and businesses alike. Unemployment insurance was never designed to be a long-term or lifelong program. It was intended as a kind of backstop to help displaced workers make the transition into new jobs.

Through much of its history, that is exactly what unemployment has meant to millions of workers. But in this current recovery we are seeing a different, more troubling trend.

According to the IOE report, some 70 percent of workers are dropping off the unemployment rolls because their time has elapsed, not because they are finding other jobs. This is particularly true with minority workers in urban areas.

As both President Bush and the Democrats running for president have indicated, we cannot realistically cat-



egorize the current economic conditions as a "recovery" if there are no new jobs. There is no such thing as a "jobless recovery."

We as a nation must do more.

And we at the National Urban League intend to.

First, we will host a jobs summit this spring and invite

the nation's top business and labor leaders. Our purpose is not partisan debate, but a realistic search for solutions to the jobs gap facing millions of American workers.

That search can't wait for the election cycle of this year to end, nor can it depend solely on ideas being advanced by one party or the other.

Second, we are forming a jobs commission to be a potent force in pushing the effort to put people back to work.

Finally, our Institute of Opportunity and Equality will issue quarterly reports on the status of the economic recovery to monitor our progress.

It is our challenge as lead-

ers to make sure that as America celebrates the encouraging economic numbers, it does not forget the most important number for real economic recovery: the number of people working.

Republican President Ronald Reagan was fond of quoting Democratic President John F. Kennedy when describing the concept of economic recovery reaching every American: "A rising tide lifts all boats."

It is in that spirit that we must begin looking for answers and challenging our leaders to put aside partisan differences and begin working together for those who are the backbone of America: American workers.

Walters

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former U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young to go into the state and campaign for him.

John Kerry is a question mark and from all accounts, is not furiously trying to rebuild his base in South Carolina after having pulled out of the state to concentrate his meager resources on winning Iowa and New Hampshire.

Now he is vulnerable and having to rely essentially on Black surrogates in the state who have contacts and to raise money to field an advance operation there, now that he has established that he is electable as the front-runner.

Kerry starts out behind, not only with regard to resources and timing, but as the quintessential "Northern Yankee" that many Southerners love to hate. So, Kerry will have rough going in this more conservative state, even among Democrats.

All of this places Rep. James Clyburn in the catbird seat. He had endorsed Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) for the Democratic nomination for president, but after Gephardt lost, the question was whom would

Clyburn endorse. At the point of his decision, 19 of his colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus had endorsed Howard Dean, but with Dean's flame-out in Iowa, which effected his showing in New Hampshire, Clyburn has the field to review and the telephone calls were coming hot and heavy. At this writing, he has not endorsed anyone, but whomever he chooses will benefit from Clyburn's lofty reputation in the state and the fact that he has four field offices as well.

So, there is much ado being made over South Carolina and Blacks appear, because of their impact on the outcome to be in the driver's seat, a point which begs the question what are the stakes Black South Carolinians and others situated like them and how have they been organized to make the various candidates aware of them? This is a bargaining moment if I ever saw one, but will leadership come through to get the most out of it?

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Mergers

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that there were "dangers [in] allowing the merger."

Recalling John Brown's interest in the Providence Bank, Farmer-Paellmann noted, "Just prior to John Brown's death, he prepared an estate inventory that indicated that Fleet's early bank lent him substantial sums of money at a time that he was engaged in the illegal practice of slave trading."

She continued: "Through its earlier bank, FleetBoston also collected customs fees due from ships transporting slaves and earned profits maintaining bank accounts of people who acquired their wealth in the slave trade. Well over 41,369 Africans were enslaved during the time that FleetBoston's early bank collected customs duties and fees on ships engaged in the illegal slave trade."

Farmer-Paellmann said in an interview that she wanted the Fed to realize what activists were warning: that before such large banks are created, it would be best for banks like Fleet to take care of its debts.

"We're talking about two of the largest

banking institutions in this nation becoming defendants," she said.

In recent public statements, Fleet has denied any connection to John "the Enslaver" Brown. But in a May 1992 brochure called "Fleet's History" issued by the bank (when it was known simply as Fleet before merging on October 1, 1999, with BankBoston), FleetBoston's legacy to John Brown is lauded: "As early as 1784, John Brown, one of Rhode Island's most respected merchants, tried convincing a group of Providence businessmen of the viability of a bank of deposit. ... Brown and a small group of investors saw endless opportunities on the new frontier. ... In 1791, the Providence Bank was chartered.

"The Providence Bank weathered panics and instability to prosper in the volatile 19th century economy, financing the growth of some of America's leading manufacturers." The name "Fleet," the press release states, was a name chosen to convey "the image of ships sailing to the same destination."

Karen Juanita Carrillo writes for the Amsterdam News.

Overstreet

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diculous situation of spending over a quarter of a billion dollars for a college campus in Henderson is still triumphing when there is an obvious lack of need for another four-year college within a few miles of UNLV.

There is no demand for another four-year campus in a state that has the lowest percentage of its students going on to college.

In fact, the only reason some of these students graduated last year was due to the fact the legislature gave them a one-time pass on the math portion of the proficiency test.

If this were not bad enough, the Clark County School District Board of Trustees gave the superintendent a half-million dollars, two-year extension on his existing contract based on, you guessed it, increasing the graduation rate of students. On this board, "dumb and dumber" would be considered gifted scholars.

Even in the face of these examples, I have absolutely no doubt that things are going to change.

The day when the ridiculous will fail to triumph over the obvious is a day I will not live to see and neither will those of you who are blessed with only 20/20 hindsight.

Fletcher

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when we try to ignore the fact that a neighbor is dying, not because she or he picked up some weird tropical disease in Borneo, but rather because they are in the final stages of AIDS. We undermine our children's future when we fail to prepare them to address the various arguments that they will hear from potential sexual partners as to why they should submit and have unprotected sexual relations.

When will we also awaken, stop playing games, and face the fact that simply because we fail to discuss sex with our children, does not mean that they themselves will not discuss sex, let alone participate.

If we are going to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic we have to change our entire mindsets. Obviously we must demand that

the Bush administration step away from its grandiose, yet hollow, rhetoric about HIV/AIDS and instead commit the same level of resources to fighting this catastrophe that it was prepared to commit to fighting a war of aggression against Iraq.

Yet, this is not enough. As problematic as is Bush, if we, regular people in the communities across the USA, don't change and demand change in the way that we think about the problem of HIV/AIDS, the pandemic will spread.

Until we are prepared to speak candidly and unashamedly about sex, we will simply get nowhere. Well, that's not exactly right. We will get somewhere; closer to the loss of even more millions of people.

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