

March job growth not indicative of rebound

By Marc H. Morial
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The federal department of labor's monthly jobs report for March, released earlier this month, delivered the best employment news the country has had in three years — news so longed for it appears to have gone to some analysts' heads.

"Interest rates rose sharply," one newspaper report of early April began, because, it vigorously declared, the Bureau of Labor Statistics tabulations "suggested that all facets of an economic recovery were finally in place."

That sanguine outlook was seconded by one money manager who confidently proclaimed that "The jobless-recovery theories are now unquestionably baseless."

What spurred such optimism was the federal agency's finding that the American economy had created 308,000 new jobs in March and that the overall unemployment rate had held at 5.7 percent.

That number, which marked the highest monthly job-growth total since an eight-month-long recession beset the economy in March

2001, was more than twice the amount most economists in and out of government had predicted for March.

The stock market, which had come to dread the monthly federal employment reports for the drag they produced on economic gains, and thus, corporate earnings and stocks, greeted the news with gusto, as did other sectors.

But, albeit March's good numbers, the question looms: Does one good month a jobless recovery make?

Unfortunately, the answer is no.

There are other numbers that should not be forgotten in any assessment of the status of the nation's economic recovery and jobs situation, numbers which lead to a significantly more complicated perspective.

For one thing, it's sobering to remember that, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), a Washington-based think tank, today's economy contains more than two million fewer jobs than when employment last peaked in February 2001. The number of Americans out of work was the same in March as it had been in February: 8.4 mil-

To Be Equal

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lion.

Further, columnist Paul Krugman recently noted that during the boom years of the 1990s, the economy added an average of 236,000 jobs per month — but there were 23 months during that span when monthly job-growth exceeded 300,000.

Krugman said it would take about four years of reports as good as the one for March 2004 before jobs would be as easy to find as in January 2001.

Another alarming set of numbers can be found in the predicament of the long-term unemployed: those jobless workers who've exhausted both their regular unemployment benefits and those from the temporary federal unemployment benefits program. Since December, when Congress let that program lapse,

about 1.1 million unemployed have fallen through what once was — and what still needs to be — an essential safety net.

CBPP estimates that this number is increasing now by 80,000 Americans a week, in part because the average length of unemployment now is at its highest level in two decades, and the percentage of the long-term unemployed — those jobless for a least 27 weeks — has risen significantly since last year.

Last March nearly 22 percent of the jobless were out of work for 27 weeks or more. Now, that figure is almost 24 percent.

Finally, even amidst last month's job growth, which kept the overall unemployment rate flat at 5.7 percent,

the Black unemployment rate jumped substantially to 10.2 percent, from February's 9.8 percent (the Latino unemployment rate remained flat at 7.4 percent).

Compared to the March job-growth increases, this broader set of job statistics confirms the caution voiced by Roger Ferguson, vice chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, who said that while March figures are "an encouraging sign... the question of whether this improvement is fundamental and durable will take some time to answer."

These broader set of statistics also underscores the sobering economic reality confronting Black America that the National Urban League has presented in two recent publications.

A study by the League's Institute for Opportunity and Equality examined the dramatic ways the racial and ethnic disparity of jobless — such as the widening of the Black-White unemployment rate — is showing itself.

And in our scholarly journal, *The State of Black America 2004*, we released

last month, we unveiled the status of Black Americans and that of White Americans.

What our Equality Index, tabulated from examining the status of Black Americans in the five areas of education, economics, health, social justice and civic engagement, showed is that Black Americans stand at less than three-quarters — 73 percent, to be exact — of where White America stands.

The remaining gap is the process that has to be made before one can declare that Black Americans and White Americans live in a society in which race produces no negative accounting.

Significantly, the largest gap of the five components of the Equality Index is in the Economic Index — where the economic status of Blacks is but 56 percent that of Whites.

We should always remember to keep in mind the tales told — and the challenges presented — by these broader statistics of the American economy and the American workforce if we want to gain a truer perspective on just how deep the nation's "economic recovery" really is.

Douglas

(Continued from Page 1)

cede nothing without a struggle," Fowler said. "Make no mistake about it, we are still in the middle of a struggle."

Early in his career, Douglas was a legal service attorney.

"I represented folks that no one else wanted to represent," Douglas said. "That was really practicing law. I worked in the District Attorney's office."

Douglas, formerly Chief Clark County District Judge, was appointed by Gov. Kenny Guinn on March 26 to fill the unexpired term of the late Myron E. Leavitt, who died in January.

Douglas, a 22-year resident of Las Vegas, is the first African-American justice in the 140-year history of the Supreme Court. Douglas will serve on the Supreme Court until January 2005, when Nevada voters will elect a justice for Seat F. Douglas will run in November to retain the seat.

"Judge Douglas can't make significant change for African-Americans in Nevada without our help and participation," Fowler said.

"We need to get out and vote. That's an

important concern. We need to register to vote and get past the embarrassment of the past. If you can't do it for yourself, do it for your children and grandchildren.

"We need to encourage and inspire others to vote, help fill out the application, drive them drive to the polls, be a friend, be informed about the issues. Don't speak out of ignorance and talk with a lot of passion. Access information and speak in an informed way.

"We need to communicate in the vernacular of the organization we are trying to influence," Fowler said. "Participation is both offensive and defensive. On offense, we need to be aggressive to insure intelligent communication that brings parity. Politicians need to know our voice and hear what our passion is. They need to know we are not just another African-American face, but we are the hope of every African-American in Nevada."

Douglas plans to stay connected.

"My door is always open and it will be open," he said. "If it's closed, let me know. If I lose touch with you, I lose touch with myself."

Park

(Continued from Page 5)

family insists they will continue to search for answers and seek help from local and state organizations that will openly support them in their mission.

Spokeswoman for the Wilmington Police Department, Linda Rawley, stated Detective Wyman Hyman is working hard to solve the case, and further commented, "At present it is not being investigated as a hate crime. They're close to an arrest."

This is the second murder in the Dogwood trailer park in the last year and a half. On Friday, October 4, 2002 a 62-year old woman was stabbed to death and robbed around 5:45 p.m. Paul Dwayne Cummings was arrested the following evening and charged with murder and armed robbery.

The prosecution is seeking the death penalty.

Johanna Thatch-Briggs writes for the Wilmington Journal.

Fletcher

(Continued from Page 11)

disagree. The major source of the destabilization is the presence of the U.S. occupation force in Iraq.

What we, the people of the USA, must accept is that when one engages in criminal activity—such as invading another country based on lies, half-truths and misinformation—one cannot be trusted to turn the situation around. At best the Bush administration must pay reparations for the destruction that it has wrought. But this must be accompanied by an immediate withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Iraq.

Some have said that such a withdrawal will result in ever more chaos. Unfortunately, that is quite possible due directly to

the U.S. invasion. Yet, I would suggest that movement toward a U.S. withdrawal would probably encourage other countries, largely from the Arab world, to offer assistance to the people of Iraq in their transition. No country, nor any institution with an ounce of integrity, wishes to be viewed as mercenaries of the Bush administration or patsies for their international manipulations.

Too many people have died for what amounts to the gross pillage of another country. Enough!

Bill Fletcher Jr. is president of TransAfrica Forum, a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit educational and organizing center.

Waters

(Continued from Page 11)

has just suggested that \$50 billion more will be needed for operations between this year and next. Tom Delay is trying to save his hide, so that is the figure included in the House version of the budget that recently passed.

The poor didn't come out too good in the budget bills, since in the Senate, Democrats were trying to raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 per hour to \$7 as an attachment to the reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Act, which was killed by the Republicans. Democrats were also proposing a substantial increase in Child Care funding, but that didn't go anywhere.

The media has made much of the dissension among Republicans over the budget, but it is instructive that the "deficit hawks" and "blue dogs" and those who were mad at one thing or another will not seriously challenge a sitting president of their own party in an

election year. So, the role of Republican leaders in House and Senate is to slip in things that he wants, to give him a stage to posture on - but above all - not to do anything that would endanger his re-election bid. How could it be otherwise with his people in charge in both the House and Senate?

The White House, then, must take extraordinary responsibility for what happens in the Congress, since it is his party's Congress. And whether the public likes the budget will affect his falling poll numbers; Bush had a favorable rating of 63 percent when Saddam Hussein was found, but it has fallen to 49 percent. Bush's cover is that people don't read the budget numbers, even though they are affected by them. But read the numbers this time. I guarantee that you will have something to take into the political process.

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