

# Wal-Mart woos media as it works on image

ROGERS, Ark. (AP) — Wal-Mart is “good for America” and the barrage of criticism against the company is an effort to protect the status quo in retailing, President and CEO Lee Scott said Tuesday in a sharp attack on organized labor and retail rivals.

Addressing about 50 journalists gathered at the company’s media conference — its first ever media event — Scott defended its wages and health care plans, criticized by labor groups as inadequate, and said that the company is able to save customers big money as it drives costs out of its system.

“Innovation and competition tends to change the status quo,” said Scott, speaking at a hotel in Rogers, a few miles from Wal-Mart Stores Inc.’s Bentonville headquarter



Jay Allen, left center, senior vice-president of corporate affairs for Wal-Mart Stores Inc., and Bob McAdam, right center, vice-president for community affairs for Wal-Mart talk with representatives from the Coalition for a Better Inglewood, foreground from left, Jerome Horton, Rev. Altagracia Perez, Elliott Petty, and Daniel Tabor in Rogers, Ark., on Tuesday.

ters. With slow sales and a stock price that has languished, company officials used the two-day event to offer their perspective on Wal-Mart’s financial picture and said they will expand sales by making the company “an even better place to work,” as it improves its efforts in such areas as diversity.

Wal-Mart officials also plan to improve the shopping experience by offering more fashionable apparel and trendier storage containers. It also vowed to be more offensive in its public relations tactics and to be more aggressive in price cuts.

The conference comes as controversy surrounding the world’s largest retailer seems to have reached a crescendo. Wal-Mart has long been criticized by community leaders,

religious groups, and environmental activists for taking advantage of its workers and hampering competition, but recently it has had to face very public legal problems.

Wal-Mart recently announced it was paying a fine to settle federal charges that underage workers operated dangerous machinery, and agreeing to pay \$11 million to settle charges that its cleaning contractors used illegal immigrants.

Meanwhile, the company is appealing a judge’s decision to certify class action status for up to 1.6 million female employees who claim Wal-Mart discriminated against them because of their gender.

And it also faces very vocal opposition to some new store openings in areas such as Los Angeles and Chicago.

# Urban League: Black socio-economic progress slow

By Hazel Trice Edney  
Special to Sentinel-Voice  
WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Despite civil rights gains since the 1960s, socio-economic progress in Black America appears to be on a “Blackslide,” National Urban League President and CEO Marc Morial said in remarks delivered Thursday to coincide with the annual release of the organization’s annual State of Black America report this week.

“We see that when it comes to the unemployment rate between Black America and White America, the gap grows wider. When it comes to the number of long-term unemployed African-Americans, the gap grows wider. And when it comes to African-American families building wealth and savings, the gap grows wider still. And as this gap grows wider and the road grows longer, we see that 40 years later we are in danger of erasing all the gains we have made thus far,” says Morial. “I’ve come to think of this danger as the Great Blackslide.”

The annual Black progress report, first issued in 1976 under then Executive Secretary Vernon Jordan, paints a grim picture:

“In 2005, America commemorates the 40th anniversary of the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 as the height of the civil rights movement, and yet, this year’s State of Black America Report’s Equality Index reveals [that] despite

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National Urban League  
President and CEO



societal gains, the overall status of Blacks is just 73 percent of their White counterpart’s, marginally unchanged from the 2004 report,” the report said.

“More significantly, the widest disparity for Blacks remains in economics, revealing an economic status for African-Americans of 57 percent compared to their White counterparts. Although slight improvements are noted, the equality gap is getting worse in unemployment, building wealth and savings, reversing many of the employment and income gains made in the 1990s. The median net worth for Blacks is 10 [times] less than it is for Whites.”

The State of Black America’s Equality Index, a statistical measurement comparing the conditions between Blacks and Whites in economics, health, education, social justice and civic engagement, states the following:

**Economics:** The biggest divide between Blacks and Whites is economic status, nearly 20 percent worse than

any other category. In 2005, Black unemployment remains stagnant at 10.8 percent while White unemployment has decreased to 4.7 percent, making Black unemployment more than 2.3 times more than Whites. More than 1 in 10 African-Americans are now unemployed. This is now more than twice the number of unemployed Whites. In cities like New York and Chicago, some estimates put the number of unemployed Black males at 50 percent.

The median net worth of an African-American family is \$6,100 compared to \$67,000 for a White family. Viewed another way, the average African-American family owns \$60,900 less in wealth than the average White family.

**Home Ownership:** The homeownership rate for Blacks is nearly 50 percent versus more than 70 percent for Whites. African-American mortgage denial and home improvement loan rates have improved. But, African-Americans are still denied these types of loans

twice more often than Whites.

**Health:** The health index shows slight declines compared to last year because of a faster increase in obesity

rates for African-Americans than for Whites. On average, Blacks are twice more likely to die from disease, accident, behavior and homicide at every stage of life than

Whites. Life expectancy is 72 years for Blacks and 78 years for Whites.

**Education:** Teachers with less than three years of ex- (See Urban League, Pg. 13)

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