

Economy offers chance to build new workforce

By Harry C. Alford
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Our economy is in dire straits. The employment levels are hitting new lows and no end is in sight.

The one thing we have going for us is a visionary who will become president of the United States on January 20, 2009. This provides us with hope and motivation for positive change.

One of his biggest challenges will be putting people back to work. The only way this is going to happen is for us to innovate and spring new opportunities, because business as usual will no longer work.

We must first recognize the fact that the U.S. Auto Industry will no longer be the same. Chrysler will probably go under and Ford and GM will shrink to small entities. Toyota will be king and Nissan, Honda, Hyundai, etc. will not be far behind. A layman may say that the jobs will simply shift over to the Asian companies.

The fact is they won't. Asian automakers do not hold a permanent workforce. Most of their hourly workers are managed by staffing agencies. That's right; they work for independent contractors and are, thus, tenuous. The Asian firms don't even have to account for payroll, social security taxes and reports to the IRS. Thus, there are no retirement benefits for these workers as opposed to the good UAW agreements for U.S. auto workers. My

cousin worked over 16 years for Toyota as a construction manager.

All the while, she was an independent contractor. When she left, all she had was what she alone saved, as there was no company participation. While U.S. auto companies shrink, the Asian counterparts are having "their cake and eating it too."

Another big factor that is shrinking the American workforce is outsourcing to foreign shores. Corporate America is turning its back on the American worker. Even if the work is not outsourced, many of the jobs go to illegal immigrants or H-1B visa holders.

This accounts for millions of jobs. The nation of Mexico receives over \$29 billion annually from its citizens who are working in the United States — legally or illegally. That's a lot of money that is being pulled away from American households.

What we need is a big fix or alternatives to the above. One huge opportunity is right before our eyes. American communities are in need of updating and repair. Our infrastructure is outdated and unsafe. The bridge that fell in Minneapolis was a superb wake-up call.

House Majority Whip James Clyburn stated a couple of weeks ago, "In South Caro-



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lina alone we have over 6,000 bridges in need of repair. That's South Carolina alone." Bridges, roads, government buildings, schools, hospitals, etc. must be repaired, and that is going to demand millions of new jobs in construction, design and engineering.

We are going to have to train a lot of citizens and we must start doing this now. In

addition, utility companies, such as electricity, gas, water, telephone, cable, broad band, etc., are in the same state.

These private/public repairs are going to start now and last for the next couple of decades. It is an excellent opportunity to get our workers prepared and assist them in the integration of this new workforce.

A good model for this is what was done after the Katrina debacle. We trained thousands of people who are now in the construction or ship building industry via full time and permanent positions. (www.imgreat.org)

In addition to the infrastructure needs, is the demand for Green Industry innovation. The Obama Administration is going to demand a new focus on alternative energy production and increased independence from oil, gas, coal, etc.

Nuclear energy plants will soon populate our land. An average job at a nuclear energy

plant is \$150,000 per year. This is phenomenal and we must prepare a ready workforce to meet the demand.

Solar energy, windmill energy, alternative fuel, traditional drilling and pumping are going to bring jobs that will support a family very well. African-Americans must ensure that we are there when these doors of opportunity open. Let's go to work!

We must also demand that construction unions finally start to integrate their roles via affirmative action and equal opportunity. Executive Order 11246 is over 46 years old and the Civil Rights Act is more than 43 years old. The time has come for us to confront construction unions and demand a level playing field.

Let's not fall for that old game known as "pre-apprentice programs."

No, every new-hire must become a full time apprentice with all the normal benefits. African-Americans are going to integrate these unions from top to bottom, or any such union defying this responsibility must be decertified. Community activists, organizers, associations, elected officials, now is the time to start preparing for these new opportunities. We can't be traditional and wait and see what happens. We must be at the forefront and advocate for our chances. YES WE CAN!

Harry Alford is the co-founder, president and CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce, Inc.

Shopping neither patriotic nor smart in tough times

By Julianne Malveaux
Special to Sentinel-Voice

When my Thanksgiving Day paper came, it was as thick as a Sunday paper. There were just four sections — a scant 65 pages or so — of news and features combined into sections described as News, Local, Life and Sports.

These sections, excellently rendered, by the way, were dwarfed by the hundreds of pages of advertising from every department store in the universe and in the immediate vicinity. The message was buy, buy, buy.

To be sure, there were sales. Stuff that had been reduced by as much as 75 percent in price. There were opportunities. But there was also a sense of being overwhelmed by the ways that one could save. Is this genuflection to consumerism really a savings?

Here's the deal. We know that people in these United States are stressed up and tapped about. That people can't pay their rent or their mortgages. That people are getting laid off

and disconnected from the labor market. That the sluggish economy is faltering because people aren't spending. But what are they to spend?

It is profoundly irresponsible for retailers to suggest that economic success hinges on the ability of broke people continue their indebtedness. Yet it seems that retailers, in their own self-interest, are barraging people with the message that buying is flying, that spending is mending our fractured economy. Give me a break.

Instead of engaging people in the fine art of spending money, we ought to be engaged in the act of encouraging fiscal responsibility.

Instead of burying people with circulars that suggest that 40 50 or 60 percent off is a good deal, there ought to be a responsible



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retail community that says that the best deal is responsible spending.

Instead, there has been a scary connection between the Thanksgiving holiday and the call to spend. It is almost as if people are being asked to shop their blessings, to connect the act of giving thanks with the act of spending money. This is not a good thing.

And so, on this day that is called "Black Friday," people are standing outside stores at 5 a.m. attempting to get their blessings.

They are looking for the good deals, waiting for the breaks, when their best break might be to stay at home and save their money.

We will get past this "Black Friday" (not racial, just an indication that companies finish the year in the black because of post-

Thanksgiving spending), people will be encouraged to spend, both for their own enhancement and because the economy needs it. What if we all stay home?

There is a special message for the African-American community, a community of overspenders. We can't spend our way into self-esteem, spend our way into equality. We can't spend to make up for pain and hurt. Our spending in the present hurts us in the future. We have to be clear about the consequences of shopping or spending our way into blessing.

But there is a message for all of the spenders who are hostage to the circulars, to the messages that say spend to make it better: There is not enough spending to fix this economy.

We are standing on a foundation of shifting sand, a foundation of broken promises, crippled dreams, and fractured ideals. We really can't spend our way out of this mess. So we need to be clear about the mixed messages that come from our thought leaders, who preach frugality on one hand and ask us to make fools of ourselves on another.

The best gift we may be able to give young people is the gift of frugal thinking. There is no blessing we can shop for, only a blessing we can live.

We can't shop our way into giving thanks, and we can't save our economy by being crazy with our spending. When the newspaper, thick with ads, hits our doorstep, we have to understand that we cannot shop ourselves into freedom, only into a slavery known as debt.

We can't shop up a blessing, just the notion that consumer goods are the measure of our person.

Integrity demands that we reject shopping as economic freedom.

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late in the course of disease, which significantly reduces life expectancy.

Late HIV testing also contributes to the spread of HIV, because people who are unaware of their infection are more than three times more likely to expose others to the virus as people who know they are HIV-positive.

Here, too, our new president will need our help to establish a social norm that every person should know his or her HIV status. We need to urge everyone to get tested, and to explain, again and again, the benefits of getting tested.

—Deliver treatments to those who need them.

In 2006, 15,000 Americans died of HIV-related causes. Yet, while our government's global AIDS efforts enjoyed double-digit increases each year between 2005 and 2008, categorical domestic federal programs for HIV treatment and prevention failed to keep pace with inflation. Especially scandalous is the lack of any funding increase for the Minority AIDS Initiative since 2004, even though nearly 100,000 Black Americans have become newly infected with HIV since that year.

We need to insist that congressional appropriators deliver the funding that is urgently needed to address this national priority.

—Build community capacity on AIDS. Throughout much of the HIV/AIDS epi-

demic, mainstream Black organizations stayed on the sidelines. Thankfully, that has changed. Organizations like the Black AIDS Institute, the Balm in Gilead and the National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS have assisted leading Black organizations and historically Black colleges and universities to develop organizational action plans on AIDS.

The new administration offers enormous promise for a new day in our nation's long struggle against HIV/AIDS. However, President Obama and his team won't be able to reinvigorate the national AIDS response on their own. Let's roll up our sleeves and get to work. Yes, we can!

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