

Economic chaos chance to push equality

By Julianne Malveaux
Special to Sentinel-Voice

With news that the economy is hemorrhaging jobs, President-elect Obama has stepped up to do the right thing. On the heels of the worst unemployment report that we've seen in more than a decade, a report that indicated that unemployment is 6.7 percent, African-American unemployment is 11.2 percent, and more than half a million jobs were lost in the past month, the President-elect has announced that he will implement a massive road-building plan, with more than 5,000 projects being implemented among the 50 states, to the tune of more than \$64 billion. Such a plan was expected, as infrastructure repair was part of the Obama campaign platform.

Still, it is reassuring to have the plan announced at this juncture, after learning how big a hit American workers are taking because of the recession.

It is important to understand the magnitude of the first Friday jobs announcement. We have not lost half a million jobs in just one month in more than 30 years.

While Congress has been battling about a bailout for the financial services and auto industries, workers have been fighting for

their economic lives. The infrastructure rebuilding plan that Barack Obama has announced is one of the few indications that workers are part of the government's response to our economic woes.

Governors and others have applauded the plan to repair decaying buildings and roads. We have not done anything this massive since President Dwight Eisenhower created the federal highway system in the 1950s, and it shows. While some parts of the highway system are in good repair, there are stretches of road that are bumpy and poorly paved. Now, there is the possibility of repair.

There is one challenge with the effort to jump start the economy with infrastructure repair. These buildings trades jobs are most likely to go to men, in general, and to White men in particular. Indeed, the building trades have been notorious for their reluctance to welcome women and people of color to their ranks. And there are entire contracting associations that have sued the federal government so that they did not have to comply with



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affirmative action laws. If contracts go to those who oppose equal employment opportunity, it is likely that those who most need help in this economy will find themselves jobless.

The need for a rapid recovery cannot overshadow the need for equal employment opportunity, and for equal access to infrastructure employment. The workers who are hired must have a demographic profile that looks like American, with African-American and Latino workers represented at close to their representation in the population.

This can't be a Katrina-type repair effort where the quick and dirty approach locks out small minority contractors. With \$64 billion on the table, there ought to be enough to go around for those minority contractors who may need to subcontract with a large contractor.

Even states like California, which passed the anti-affirmative action Proposition 209, must be required by the federal government to ensure equal opportunity in this economic recovery. To do otherwise would be to sug-

gest that we are doing business as usual, and that we accept the higher unemployment rates that African-Americans and Latinos experience.

An administration that has called for hope and change must make sure that our recovery is a fairer one than usual, one that changes the equation of "last hired, first fired."

President-elect Obama has moved expeditiously to appoint his economic team and his national security team. Now, he must appoint a labor secretary with sensitivity to both economic recovery and economic disparities. Alexis Herman served the Clinton Administration well in the second term, as she combined her sensibilities as a trained social worker with her knowledge of job creation programs and possibilities. Ms. Herman should be consulted as the Obama Administration seeks a labor secretary to work through the challenges of the massive public works program proposed.

There must be equal opportunity in this economic recovery. Now is the time for organizations like the National Urban League to come to the table with plans to involve workers of color in the recovery.

Julianne Malveaux is president of Bennett College for Women.

Americans felt recession's effects long time ago

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Thanks, Henry Paulson and Ben Bernanke, for letting us know. Whew! If it weren't for you, we probably never would have found out about this.

Thanks, guys! We almost missed this one; we never even saw it coming. It sure is a good thing to have the two of you in Washington watching our backs.

With your combined Wall Street experience, your financial acumen, your Ph.D.'s from MIT, and all of your knowledge of economics, you have guided us along this treacherous economic path, protecting us and calling out the pitfalls every day, and we certainly thank you for your assistance. What would we do without leaders like you?

How are things going for you and your families? We trust everything is fine. We know you have tucked a little something away for the dark days ahead. We are sure your mortgages will be paid, you will have plenty of food to eat, and your children and grandchildren will be all right as they

"struggle" through this economic crisis. Don't worry. Things will be tough, but keep your heads up; you'll get by.

And what about your friends and associates? How are they faring?

We know they may miss out on their bonuses this year and will not be able to purchase all those cars, jewelry, condos and summer homes they were planning to obtain. But, not to worry. With the two of you still at the helm, even though the ship is going down, they can be confident that you have at least a couple more tricks up your sleeves.

How did Ben put it? "We have a few more cards to play," or "We have not used all the tools in our toolbox yet." Man, are we happy to hear that good news.

While we don't understand all those nouveau finance terms like "collateralized debt obligations" and "credit default swaps," we are confident that with all of your knowl-



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edge of banking, credit and the stock market, you will continue to protect us from the horrors of a Wall Street collapse. After all, aren't a lot of your friends working there?

Even though we are struggling to pay our bills, rents and mortgages; trying to avoid the increased credit card fees levied by the banks; and hoping to give our children a gift or two for Christmas — even though we are working hard to put food on our tables and hold on to our jobs. And even though many of us have already been laid off, we are comforted just knowing that you have our best interests at heart.

You know, we were well aware of this recession months ago (at least in our households and in our communities); so, pardon our sarcasm at the beginning of this note. But we understand that until it hits the upper echelon of our society, it's not really a true recession.

After all, the economic condition of Black and poor people is not nearly as important as that of the Wall Streeters, the CEO's, the Bankers, the politicians and all the rest who keep this country running so smoothly.

Not trying to take anything away from your expertise or knowledge of financial matters, but sometimes grassroots people just know certain things. Some call it intuition; we call it "mother wit." As we began to see gas exceed \$4 per gallon, and our food costs rise to a point where we had to return to the good old days of pinto beans and cornbread for an entire week, we knew we were in for a rough ride.

But now, just when we thought we had reached the bottom, the worst has happened; there can now be no doubt about our terrible situation. With all due respect to your prognostications and recent announcement on the recession, Mickey D's has raised the price of a double cheeseburger from \$1 to \$1.19!

They even took one slice of cheese, which cost them 6 cents, off our favorite sandwich, and now call it the McDougle. That's it; ball game over. Time to start looking for a window to jump out of; now we really know how bad things are.

Sorry for boring you with our problems; you have more important things to consider. We just wanted to say how much we appreciate you, Ben and "Hank," for all you have done to us — er, I meant to say, "for us." And let us not forget about your predecessors, John Snow and Alan Greenspan.

We owe a debt of gratitude to all you guys for the work you have done.

As we look across this country and see millions of people sinking further into debt they cannot handle, we can thank the politicians who passed the bankruptcy bill that makes it even more difficult for individuals to file, despite being forced to because of medical catastrophes and the like.

We can thank the greedy CEO's with their cavalier attitudes toward our plight, as they continue to take home their millions in salaries and bonuses.

We can thank the bankers and financiers who have already received billions of dollars, some of which went to parties, vacations, and to purchase other banks.

We thank you, Ben, for your ability to create money "out of thin air," as they say. And we thank you, "Hank," for getting Congress to give you sole control of \$700 billion to dole out to whomever you choose. You guys are so smart!

Reflecting on all that has happened in the past few months, we know that with all your credentials and all of your compassion for us, just as you have given the corporations their welfare checks, we know you will get around to us soon.

Keep up the good work, guys.

James Clingman is an educator and author of a Black economic empowerment book series.

Alford

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duce an Inaugural event. We are hosting an elaborate gala at the French Embassy on January 19, between the hours of 8 p.m. and midnight.

The French Embassy is the most beautiful venue in Washington, D.C., and we found that it had been overlooked by the other events. Noticing this (and filled with enthusiasm from the Obama victory) we jumped on it.

Net proceeds will go to our long-term project: the building of an NNPA Media Wing to the John H. Johnson School of Communications on the campus of Howard University.

For more information about this event, please go to www.nationalbcc.org and click on Events. We are inviting all of the supreme dignitaries, so come and join the participants.

To learn more about all the balls and events surrounding this historical inauguration, please go to the PIC website at www.presidential-inauguration.com.

Follow it daily, as it changes as things are formulating. Hotels will be challenging. Don't rely on the Internet for availability. Many times, as cancellations occur, it may take days before the info is updated on the Web.

For example, I ran into the sales manager of the Westin-National Harbor and stated that I see her hotel is sold out for the event. She replied, "No, actually we have 18 rooms available right now."

It's going to be hit or miss.

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