

OUR VIEW NY Resolution

Everyone's got bailout fever. Can you blame them? Ever since Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson and Federal Chairman Ben Bernanke handed \$700 billion to the financial industry, ostensibly to save the U.S. economy from financial ruin, everyone's got their hands out, waiting for a piece of this financial pie.

And why shouldn't we get a slice? American banks were given half of the money, \$350 billion, with no strings attached. That's right, they weren't legally required to do anything with it. We were told that banks would use the money to give loans to struggling consumers who, in turn, would use the money to pay mortgages and buy goods and services from struggling businesses who, in turn, would be able to purchase supplies and keep their workers employed. Instead, according to published reports, at least 21 banks that have received \$1 billion apiece haven't done anything with their handouts. Nothing. They're sitting on the money. Some have no plans on using it, except as a way to cut losses.

While spendthrift banks have generally got a free pass from the majority of lawmakers and the mainstream press, the Big 3 automakers were endlessly pilloried for requesting less than \$20 billion to keep them solvent for the next three months. The political grandstanding, particularly by Southern lawmakers whose states have large plants run by foreign manufacturers, was sickening. Even if you think American vehicles are inferior and Ford, Chrysler and GM are mismanaged, how could you surmise that the loss of millions of jobs is a good thing? It's a horribly misguided and wrongheaded way to tell companies to streamline and get competitive.

Some have even called for Blacks to receive a portion of the bailout money as recompense for hundreds of years of slavery and ensuing centuries filled with discriminatory laws. The serious among us know that the chances of getting any cash from the federal government are zero and none. We are and will remain the only race of people in America not compensated for being subjugated to such inhumanity (slavery). The naive among us know that giving Black America \$700 billion is akin to giving non-Black retailers \$700 billion. In other words, we'll spend it before we even get it.

But the sober among us should use the occasion of dishing out federal largesse as an opportunity to lay the foundation for a better future. Little was made about principled stands taken by the Congressional Black Caucus and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus during bailout talks. The CBC rejected the initial bailout plan by a vote of 21 to 18. CHC members voted 12 to 8 against it. Lawmakers in each group said it was more important to protect their struggling constituents than banks who got fat off risky lending, only to see their balance sheets collapse when the housing market imploded. Though members of both groups would support a plan loaded with financial sweeteners, we can take a cue from their initial opposition.

Black lawmakers across the country represent communities hardest hit by the economic crisis. And many of those communities have been in sad shape for decades, so the current problems are exacerbated. Unemployment and underemployment are higher than normal. Crime is up. Property values are down. Foreclosures have skyrocketed. Investment has dried up. Commerce is staying away. The people in these neighborhoods don't travel on corporate jets, don't have multimillion-dollar severance packages with enormous balloon payments. They're upside-down on their mortgages, lack health insurance and send their children to schools that struggle to compete.

Why can't they get a bailout?

Well, in 2009, they can. And it starts not with money—at least not initially—but with work. Teamwork, that is. From residents like those in West Las Vegas who are fighting city and state government over the closure of "F" Street. It starts with Black lawmakers. Yes, President-elect Barack Obama is part of the team, but he's on the periphery. Nevada's Black lawmakers have a golden opportunity to begin bailing out their communities. They have unprecedented power at the local and state levels. Next year, 2009, should be our year. How much of a bailout we're able to engineer depends on how hard we're willing to work.



News N' Notes vital part of NPR

By Bill Fletcher Jr.

Special to Sentinel-Voice

I opened the *Washington Post* the other day and saw an article detailing that National Public Radio (NPR), hit by the global economic crisis, was preparing to lay off in March 2009 more than 60 staff and eliminating two major programs, one being "News & Notes."

"News & Notes," a program particularly targeted at people of color, is hosted by Ms. Farai Chideya. In the interests of full disclosure I must mention that I am regularly on the program, generally speaking about Africa.

Yet this was not what affected me in reading about this tragedy. It was that N&N was a program designed to reach audiences that NPR had previously either ignored or been otherwise unable to connect with. Precisely because NPR is National Public Radio it tends to cover issues that are overlooked by or given short shrift by the mainstream media. Nevertheless, NPR often has been criticized for giving insufficient attention to the issues facing younger listeners and listeners of color. It also has demonstrated little awareness of the fact that the perspectives of people of color on issues of the day should be incorporated into the programming of NPR.

The questions that need to be asked are two-fold:

(1) What are we to make of the end of N&N, and (2) What are the implications of



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the proposed termination of the program.

NPR states that the termination of this program is the result of the downturn in the economy and the drying up of funds. I do not doubt that this is the case. Virtually every non-profit institution is suffering as a result of the battering that we are taking with the financial crisis on Wall Street as well as overall tightening of everyone's belt.

Yet the story should not stop there, and this relates to the implications. In the world of work, there is a very long experience of "last hired, first fired" when it comes to Black workers.

We are very familiar with this. In fact, in so many cases, the only reason that we have been hired in many industries in the first place was/is because of mass pressure, sometimes also involving litigation. This all starts to unravel in bad economic times when, again and again, we lose ground in the precious steps that we have made in the fight for equity.

The proposed end of N&N makes me think about "last hired, first fired." A bold

and important initiative to reach audiences that are either ignored or taken for granted, "News & Notes" has been a very high-quality program. Yet, when times got tight, N&N is proposed to be thrown overboard.

No, this is not conscious racism. It is, however, a micro-aggression against us. It is saying, once again, that efforts to be inclusive can be considered optional, whereas reaching the traditional, aging and mainly White audience should be considered the core mission of the organization. I would suggest that this is or at least should be, unacceptable.

It is time that we speak loudly to NPR and insist that they keep "News & Notes." Yes, NPR has journalists of color and that is great, yet it is not enough, because these journalists do not necessarily pick their stories. These journalists do not necessarily shape the direction of investigations.

"News & Notes" exposes the listener not only to stories that range from the liberation struggle in the Western Sahara to the implications of the foreclosure crisis on people of color, but it also engages the voices of experts and activists of color, who are all too often marginalized by the mainstream media.

How can we afford to lose this?

So, if you want to do something and are as concerned and angry as I am, then contact NPR's Interim President and CEO Dennis Haarsager at NPR (635 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20001).

You can mail them or go to their website at www.npr.com and send in an email. There is no room for silence. I am a bit tired of being marginalized.

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