

# Christmas prayer to end poverty in our time

By Marian Wright Edelman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

As 2.1 billion Christians in our world prepare to celebrate the birth of the most famous poor baby in history, I hope they and all peoples will commit to helping all the poor babies in our rich nation and world find a place in our hearts and at our tables of plenty.

At a time when the gap between rich and poor in our nation and the world is at its widest ever, an economic downturn driven by the greed of a few has jeopardized the lives and economic security of all of us. I hope we will all raise a mighty voice to reset our nation's moral and economic compass.

God help us to end poverty in our time:

The poverty of having a child with too little to eat and no place to sleep, no air, sunlight and space to breathe, bask and grow;

The poverty of watching your child suffer and get sicker and sicker and not knowing what to do or how to get help because you don't have a car or health insurance;

The poverty of working your fingers to the bone every day taking care of someone else's children and neglecting your own, and still not being able to pay your bills;

The poverty of having a job that does not let you afford a stable place to live and being terrified you'll become homeless and lose your children to foster care;

The poverty of losing your job because you cannot find reliable child care or transportation to work; The poverty of working all your life caring for others and having to start all over again caring for the grandchildren you love;

The poverty of earning a college degree, having children, opening a child care center, and taking home \$300 a week or month if you're lucky;



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The poverty of loneliness and isolation and alienation — having no one to call or visit, tell you where to get help, assist you in getting it, or care if you're living or dead;

The poverty of having too much and sharing too little and having the burden of nothing to carry. The poverty of convenient blindness and deafness and indifference to others, of emptiness and enslavement to things, drugs, power, violence and fleeting fame;

The poverty of low aim and paltry purpose, weak will and tiny vision, big meetings and small action, loud talk and sullen grudging service. The poverty of believing in nothing, standing for nothing, sharing nothing, sacrificing nothing, struggling for nothing;

The poverty of pride and ingratitude for

God's gifts of life and children and family and freedom and country and not wanting for others what you want for yourself;

The poverty of greed for more and more and more, ignoring, blaming and exploiting the needy, and taking from the weak to please the strong;

The poverty of addiction to drugs, to drink, to work, to self, to the status quo and to injustice;

The poverty of fear that keeps you from doing the thing you think is right; The poverty of despair and cynicism.

God help us end poverty in our time in all its faces and places, young and old, rural, urban, suburban and small town too, and in every color of humans You have made ever.

God help us to end poverty in our time in all its guises — inside and out — physical and spiritual, so that all (our and) your children may live the lives that you intend.

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.

# Cleaning up SBA will be taxing task for Obama

By Harry C. Alford  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

On January 20, 2009, President Obama will receive management of a federal agency that is in complete shambles. The Small Business Administration has been on a downgrade since the mid 1990s.

It is at a state of life support and our new administration must address it immediately as the status of small and minority business has been greatly suffering.

When the National Black Chamber of Commerce was incorporated in May, 1993, there were over 5,000 SBA employees and its budget was about \$1 billion annually.

Erskine Bowles was the administrator and the management of the agency was extremely motivated. President Clinton and Congress sponsored the White House Conference on Small Business and the whole nation was pumped up about new procurement opportunities.

Then something happened along the way. Vice President Gore introduced his "Re-inventing Government" program and big business started eating up the opportunities that small business was used to. Giants like Boeing, Lockheed, Northrop Grumman, Halliburton, etc. started getting into the janitorial business, landscaping, trash removal, housing construction, IT, etc.

The new event called "bundling" came in and predatory practices to the detriment of small business began to happen.

At the start of the second Clinton Administration, the SBA was on its third administrator, Aida Alvarez.

Deputies started realizing that if they would not fill employee attrition, their budgets would shrink and they would be rewarded with annual bonuses. Personal greed led to the start of starving the field offices of vital personnel.

The SBA was shrinking and the managers in D.C. were mysteriously happy. The district and regional offices could no longer adequately serve their constituency; 8a, minority business, volume started dropping at a rate of over \$1 billion per year. The party was indeed over.

When the Bush — Gore campaign got started we found a one sided advocacy. Bush

was talking about revitalizing the SBA and putting more attention toward small business development. Gore would not even give it lip service.

It was obvious which side small business associations would support. The new Bush Administration put Angela Styles at the Office of Management and Budget, OMB, and there she would craft a great strategy for improving the small business outreach and procurement activity. But, oh the "wolves" were of another mind. She would be dismissed for her aggressive effort and replaced with a crook (he is in prison today). Halliburton, sole sourcing big businesses, and other friends of Vice President Cheney took over Department of Defense procurements and then the other agencies. Minority and other small business were for the most part on the outside looking in.

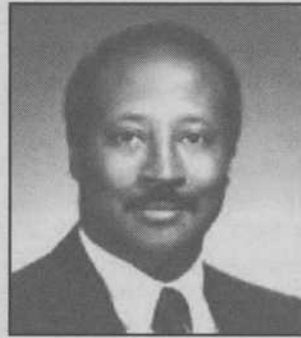
It really showed when Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. Prior to the hurricane the SBA district office in New Orleans had 39 personnel and the Jackson, Miss. office had approximately 24. When the disaster occurred we discovered that there were only 9 staffers in New Orleans and 6 in Jackson. They were helpless in the recovery and still are.

Today, the SBA has less than 2,300 employees and its budget is about \$400 million. That makes it inoperable from an efficiency perspective.

The budget needs to be immediately increased to \$1 billion. That isn't asking for much in the atmosphere of \$700 billion bailouts and saving our bungling auto industry.

We need to return the staffing to over 5,000 once again and begin servicing our small businesses throughout the land. The federal government needs to return to offering small business a chance to compete for its procurement opportunities and that alone will decrease the costs and increase the competition and jobs.

The more that small business is in the mix, the greater the economy will be as 70 percent of all new jobs come from small business. That will also mean a big increase in



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Black-owned businesses.

President-elect Obama has already nominated his administrator for SBA, Karen Mills, a venture capitalist from Maine with an impressive resume. That is a big improvement from President George W. Bush who took over six months to fill the position.

The focus must be to give her Cabinet like authority and pump the funding into the SBA as soon as possible. As we gear up for the Economic Stimulus, the SBA should be a major player in this.

We must all get involved in this effort.

## Bailout

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kids had stayed in school over their lifetime, it would have been \$16 billion to the Georgia economy over their lifetime. So there is a direct co-relation to those kinds of issues. So, naturally, we as state legislators, we're going to still be vigilant as it relates to gang violence, as it relates to the recidivism rate in our prison system and making sure that folks get a second chance."

Still, he says legislators are well aware that the blame for the economy can't be laid at the feet of the new administration. But, the socioeconomic impact is worsening, therefore, there must be some pressure.

For example: The states of Michigan, Rhode Island and California have the worst jobless rates in the nation at 9.6 percent, 9.3 percent and 8.4 percent respectively.

The states with the worst annual murder rate in the nation are California, where Compton has 67.1 murders per 100,000 people; Indiana, where Gary has 58 per 100,000 and Alabama, where Birmingham has 44.3 per 100,000.

Social statistics across the board, including drop out rates, infant mortality rates and incarceration rates — all often associated with economic injustice — are skyrocketing in cities and states across the nation.

The Caucus released a 47-page document outlining proposed resolutions to some of the

Send resumes for empty desks at your local district level. Let's recruit good talent to fill the high-level positions and may our Congress give the SBA strong support like it used to.

Big business is not going to be the salvation for the economic development of our communities; it is going to be the growth of small business. And we need an SBA that can do the job it once did — provide capital access, technical assistance and procurement opportunities for ready and willing small businesses throughout the land. May President Obama lead us on to better days.

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

problems faced by states, including requiring states to report impacts on racial minorities when changing criminal laws and laws pertaining to state procurement. The Ratified Resolutions also calls on Congress to "take all action necessary to ensure that states are able to meet needs of our citizens during these difficult financial times; and... that NBCSL calls on Congress to provide an excess of capital to the states so they are not only able to fill their budget shortfalls, but able to provide additional stabilization to their economies."

Smyre says these are the resolutions that will be passed on to President Obama and to the members of the House and Senate.

He doesn't anticipate a fight, but knows that none of the resolutions will be easy.

"Regardless of how you put it, it's not going to be on automatic pilot. In just a little time, the budget is going to change, it's going to require funding and that's always going to require a very difficult proposition," he said.

"There's a lot of anticipation with the legislators and this is just a start. Nobody has made a first down yet. Nor has anyone scored. But, we as African-Americans, we don't want to suffer from the illusion of inclusion. We want to be involved in the process. And from every indication that we've been given, we are going to be involved."