



President Obama's Agenda and the African American Community

Summary of Report Released November 2011

Overview

“When President Obama took office, the economy was shedding nearly 800,000 jobs each month and millions of families were unable to make ends meet. African Americans were hit especially hard by the recession, struggling with significant economic losses, including near-record high levels of unemployment and low average earnings.”

The impacts of the nation’s economic crisis on African American families are both disproportionate and unacceptable. There is no way to sugarcoat it—communities of color have suffered the most in this recession.

Despite historic contributions that have strengthened the middle class and our economy, African American workers are shouldering the burdens of attacks on workers’ rights, growing income inequality, increasing poverty, and cuts to Medicaid and Medicare that limit access to quality, affordable healthcare. There’s also a 15.1 percent unemployment rate, nearly twice the national average and 1.25 million African Americans have been unemployed for more than six months.

Fixing the America’s economy by creating good jobs and making corporations pay their fair share is critical for African Americans.

For SEIU, it’s clear that President Obama and his administration are working diligently to protect the American Dream and restore hope for African Americans and all families. Below is an executive summary of “The President’s Agenda and the African American Community,” a recently released report that highlights how the White House is pushing policies that are critical for African Americans in this devastated economy.

The agenda outlines programs that:

- Create good jobs and promote economic security;
- Invest in African American communities through revitalization programs for economic growth in hard-hit cities and regions;
- Expand access to healthcare for working families; and
- Reform education programs and increase access and affordability to college.

The biggest highlight is President Obama’s proposed American Jobs Act which reflects a strong commitment to put people back to work, create new opportunities for African Americans across the country, and rebuild an economy that works for everyone, not just big banks and unscrupulous corporations.

The President's Vision for the Future: The American Jobs Act

“With unemployment among African Americans at an unacceptably high rate of 15.1 percent—and 1.25 million African Americans out of work for more than six months—the president believes that inaction is not an option.”

Communities of color are suffering the most in this recession. Despite historic contributions to the middle class and the economic well-being of our country, African American and Latino workers are shouldering the burden of the recession while big corporations avoid paying their fair share. Recent unemployment rates for African Americans (15.9 percent) and Latinos (11.3) percent are devastating compared to a 9.1 percent national unemployment rate.

Communities of color and the 99 percent cannot wait while some members of Congress play partisan politics with President Obama's American Jobs Act and work to protect the interests of big business and the 1 percent.

How the American Jobs Act Will Impact Communities of Color:

- **Putting Construction Workers Back on the Job by Modernizing Infrastructure—With a Focus on Expanding Access to These Jobs.** As part of a \$50 billion plan for immediate investments for highway, highway safety, transit, passenger rail and aviation activities, President Obama would invest \$50 million in 2012 to improve employment and job training opportunities for minorities, women, and socially and economically disadvantaged individuals.
- **Preventing Layoffs of Teachers, Police and Firefighters.** The president proposed a \$35 billion investment to prevent the layoffs of up to 280,000 teachers, supporting the hiring of tens of thousands more educators and keeping police and firefighters on the job. These funds would help states and localities avoid and reverse layoffs now, requiring funds be drawn down quickly. Under the president's proposal, \$30 billion would be directed to educators and \$5 billion would go to the police and firefighters who keep our communities safe.
- **Prohibiting Employers from Discriminating Against Unemployed Workers.** The president's bill calls for legislation that makes discrimination against unemployed workers seeking jobs illegal. No longer would businesses be able to use lapses in employment history as a reason for withholding a job.
- **Project Rebuild—Putting People Back to Work Rehabilitating Homes, Business and Communities.** The president's proposal calls for \$15 billion in critical investments in infrastructure, including community revitalization initiatives that will help stabilize neighborhoods devastated by the housing crisis. This will help African American and Latino families whose communities were devastated by the foreclosure crisis.
- **Cutting the Payroll Tax Next Year—Benefitting Nearly 20 Million African American Workers.** An estimated 25 million Latinos and 20 million African American workers benefit from an extension of the payroll tax cut, providing them with more money to support their families and spend in their communities.
- **Providing Tax Cuts That Will Help More Than 100,000 African American-Owned Small Businesses.** Proposed tax cuts will go to every small business nationwide—including 250,000 Hispanic-owned small businesses and more than 100,000 African American-owned small businesses.

- Targeted Investments to Modernize Schools Serving Low-Income Students —From Science Labs and Internet-Ready Classrooms to Renovated Facilities. The proposal calls for a \$25 billion investment in school infrastructure to modernize 35,000 struggling public schools in the lowest-income districts around the country. \$10 billion, 40 percent, will be directed toward the largest high need public school districts.



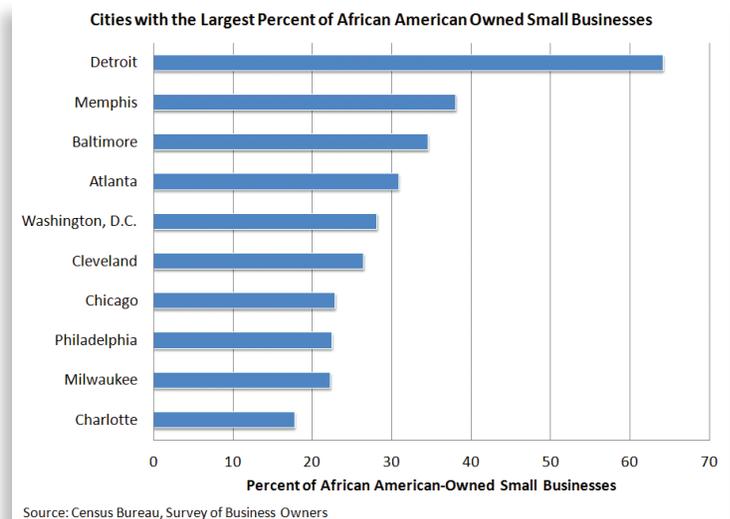
Delivering on Campaign Promises

“For centuries, African American men and women have persevered to enrich our national life and bend the arc of history toward justice. From resolute Revolutionary War soldiers fighting for liberty to the hardworking students of today reaching for horizons their ancestors could have only imagined, African Americans have strengthened our Nation by leading reforms, overcoming obstacles and breaking down barriers.” —President Obama, Feb. 1, 2011

President Obama understands the devastating socio-economic crisis that has plagued African American communities and has already started to put America back on the right path.

- Tax Relief for Virtually All Working Americans. The president secured the Making Work Pay tax credit in 2009 and 2010 and a payroll tax cut in 2011 that amounted to a 2 percent raise for working Americans through 2011. In addition, the president secured historic expansions in refundable tax credits Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit for low-income families. The American Jobs Act will extend and expand tax relief for every American family next year. The American Jobs Act will extend and expand tax relief for virtually every American family next year, including nearly 20 million African American workers.
- Subsidized Jobs for Low-Income Adults and Youth. Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, 367,000 low-income youth received summer employment and more than 260,000 adults and youth were placed in subsidized jobs. The American Jobs Act builds on the success of these programs by supporting summer jobs and pathways to work for unemployed Americans and youths.

- Support for African American-Owned Small Businesses. The president has enacted 17 tax cuts for small businesses, including billions of dollars in tax credits, write-offs, and deductions for Americans who start new businesses, hire the unemployed and provide health insurance for their employees. In addition, through the Small Business Jobs Act and other measures, the president has taken steps to expand American American-owned small businesses' access to credit through programs such as the Community Development Financial Institutions and the New Markets Tax Credit, which provided more than \$4 billion in capital to predominantly African



American communities. The American Jobs Act would cut payroll taxes in half for every American small business, including more than 100,000 African American-owned firms.

- Reforming K-12 and Early Education, and Increase College Access and Affordability. President Obama created Race to the Top with a historic \$4.35 billion investment. Now, more than 40 states have raised standards, improved assessments and invested in teachers to ensure that all of our children receive a high quality education. The American Jobs Act provides \$30 billion for states to hire new teachers, rehire those laid off and prevent as many as 280,000 teachers whose jobs are at risk next year from being laid off. The president has also dramatically increased Pell Grant funding to support an additional 200,000 African American students and created the American Opportunity Tax Credit to ease college costs. These represent the largest investment in higher education since the GI Bill. The president also secured \$850 million in additional funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities and \$150 million for Predominantly Black Institutions.
- Keep Americans in Their Homes During a Housing and Economic Crisis. The administration's programs, both through their direct and indirect impact on the market, have helped more than 4 million families permanently modify their mortgages so they can stay in their homes. Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the president provided \$1.5 billion for the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program to prevent homelessness for 1 million Americans. The American Jobs Act builds on the success of these programs with the new Project Rebuild, which will invest in the communities hardest hit by the housing downturn.
- Create Economically Sustainable Neighborhoods. The administration has secured \$40 million for Promise Neighborhoods and \$126 million to Choice Neighborhoods that provide a continuum of services to combat the challenges facing communities most in need. The new Strong Cities, Strong Communities program is helping strengthen cities and regions by increasing the capacity of local governments to execute their economic growth plans, while also delivering federal assistance tailored to the local government's needs.
- Expand Healthcare Access for Families and Workers. Within a month of taking office, the president signed the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act into law, expanding health coverage to more than 4 million children who would otherwise go uninsured. And the historic Affordable Care Act, when fully implemented, will expand health coverage to about 34 million Americans, including as many as 7 million African Americans.

- Protect Civil Rights and Promote Criminal Justice. The president has signed major legislation such as the Fair Sentencing Act and the Claims Resolution Act, and worked to expand and enforce hate crimes prosecutions, reduce unfairness in sentencing and counter employment discrimination.
- Economic Security and Jobs
- African Americans were hit especially hard by the recession, struggling with significant economic losses, including near-record high levels of unemployment and low average earnings.
- The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 kept 1.3 million African Americans above the poverty line last year alone, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. This year, the continued expansion of just two tax credits—the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit—has benefited an estimated 2.2 million African American families and almost half of all African American children.
- Additional tax expansions and benefit extensions include:
 - Employee-Side Payroll Tax Cut. President Obama fought for and secured a 2 percent employee-side payroll tax cut (from 6.2 percent to 4.2 percent) in December 2010. The cut provided \$112 billion of vital relief that impacted nearly all American workers and their families, including 18.5 million African Americans. With this tax cut, a working family making \$40,000 annually received a tax cut of \$800.
 - Making Work Pay Credit. Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the Obama administration created the refundable Making Work Pay Tax Credit of up to \$400 for working Americans and up to \$800 for working couples earning under \$190,000. This temporary tax credit provided crucial assistance to millions of families during the worst periods of the recession—lifting nearly 1.5 million Americans (including 237,000 African Americans) above the poverty line in 2010 alone. More than 95 percent of all working Americans benefited from larger paychecks as a result of this tax credit in 2009 and 2010.
 - Unemployment Insurance. Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the president expanded and extended unemployment insurance to provide assistance for long-term unemployed Americans and lift nearly 3.4 million people above the poverty line in 2010, including 495,000 African Americans. Through the December Tax Deal in 2010, the president renewed and extended unemployment insurance benefits—which had been slated to expire—for an additional 13 months, providing assistance to 1.1 million African Americans. The president has called for a further extension to prevent 1.4 million African Americans from losing their benefits in 2012.
 - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Emergency Contingency Fund (TANF ECF). The TANF program provides states with funds to assist low-income families with services, including monthly monetary aid and child care assistance. For the 1.7 million Americans that rely on TANF funds, 33 percent of whom are African American, these funds made a substantial difference in the depths of the recent crisis. Additionally, the Emergency Contingency Fund placed more than 260,000 low-income youth and adults in paid jobs.
- Strengthening African American Communities for Economic Growth
- About 67 million Americans, or nearly one in four, live in neighborhoods with poverty rates of 20 percent or higher. African Americans, however, are more likely than other groups to live in neighborhoods with poverty rates of 40 percent or more, roughly one in nine.
- President Obama has been taking critical steps to ensure African Americans, and hard hit communities, get needed support through the devastation of the housing crisis.

- Supporting Homeowners. While only 45 percent of African Americans own homes, as compared to 48 percent of Hispanics and 71 percent of whites, African Americans have experienced significantly higher rates of foreclosure. As part of the Making Home Affordable Act, the Home Affordable Modification Program (HAMP), more than half a million Americans, 18 percent of whom are African American, have received permanent mortgage modifications allowing them to save their homes from foreclosure.
- Providing Relief for Renters. Between 2007 and 2009, the number of households which spent more than half their monthly income on rent or lived in severely substandard housing grew by nearly 1.2 million, or 20 percent. Renters relief plays a critical role for African Americans who are more likely to rent than own their own homes. In 2009, the president led the way to allocate \$1.5 billion to state and local agencies for the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing program designed to provide temporary financial assistance or relocation services to families who lose their residences. This provision has helped more than a million people with rental costs, moving costs, utility bills and security deposits.
- Revitalizing Neighborhoods. Through the Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative, the Obama administration has developed a range of neighborhood revitalization programs that work with community partners to turn around cities in need. One example is the Promise Neighborhoods program, which is modeled after the successful Harlem (N.Y.) Children's Zone, which transformed a small section of Harlem into one of our nation's great education success stories. In Washington, D.C., Promise Neighborhood funds are helping turn around the Ward 7 community of Parkside-Kenilworth. This neighborhood of 7,000 residents and 2,000 children, 97 percent of whom are African American, suffers from high levels of poverty and unemployment.
- President Obama has also implemented other programs to strengthen urban communities. The Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) purchases and redevelops residential properties that suffer from foreclosure and abandonment. In addition, the Strong Cities, Strong Communities program deploys teams of federal experts to six high-need communities to help structure and rebuild opportunities that grow the middle class by aligning job training programs with employer needs and improving the cradle-to-career educational opportunities.



Health Security for African American Families

“We know that even as spiraling healthcare costs crush families of all races, African Americans are more likely to suffer from a host of diseases but less likely to own health insurance than just about anyone else.” —President Obama, July 2009

African Americans in particular have benefited from the passage of the Affordable Care Act and reauthorization of the Children’s Health Insurance Program as they currently represent a disproportionate share of those without health insurance. As unemployment increased during the recession, Medicaid coverage served as a critical safety net for millions of Americans who lost healthcare coverage along with their jobs.

- The Affordable Care Act. The Affordable Care Act is already protecting consumers from rescissions and lifetime limits imposed by healthcare plans and increasing coverage for almost a million young adults. In 2014, when fully implemented, the new law will expand health coverage for 34 million Americans who are currently uninsured by expanding coverage, ending health disparities, and increasing access to preventive services.
- Expanding Coverage. More than 20 percent of African Americans went without health insurance in 2010. The Affordable Care Act immediately ended the ability of insurance companies to deny insurance to children with pre-existing conditions, and will end the practice for adults in 2014. It also requires health plans to allow children without employer-sponsored coverage to remain on their parent’s health coverage until age 26. Even Americans who could afford coverage were often denied under the old system and this provision will extend coverage to those who previously had no access to it. The Affordable Care Act will provide premium tax credits and cost sharing assistance to individuals and families that lack coverage.

- Medicare and Medicaid. For African American families, the Affordable Care Act represents the most significant step toward ending health disparities since the passage of Medicare and Medicaid in 1965. Investments of \$100 million in state Medicaid programs through the recovery act enabled states to maintain—and even expand—coverage through Medicaid, a critical source of coverage for African American families and especially African American children. Between 2007 and 2009, Medicaid enrollment among nonelderly African Americans increased 4 percentage points, covering an additional 1.4 million people. The act also expands and simplifies Medicaid eligibility which will extend coverage to almost 4 million more African Americans.
- Ending Health Disparities. While the overall health of the nation has improved over time, striking health disparities continue to exist between African Americans and other racial and ethnic groups. African Americans have the highest age-adjusted all-causes death rate of all races/ethnicities, as well as the highest age-adjusted death rate for heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and HIV/AIDS.
- The Affordable Care Act puts a renewed focus on efforts to eliminate disparities that African Americans currently face in health and healthcare, including investments in data collection and research about health disparities. The Affordable Care Act also codifies the Office of Minority Health within the Department of Health and Human Services and elevates the National Center for Minority Health and Health Disparities at the National Institutes of Health from a center to an institute.
- Access to Preventive Services. Americans use preventive services at about half the rate recommended by medical experts. Yet, chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes—which are responsible for seven of 10 deaths among Americans each year and account for 75 percent of the nation's health spending—often are preventable. The new regulations ensure new health plans offer coverage for important cancer prevention tools, such as measures to screen for and prevent breast, colon and cervical cancer.

And for pregnant women, infants and children, the regulations also ensure more mothers have access to the healthcare services they need to ensure a healthy pregnancy, such as screening for conditions that can harm pregnant women or their babies, including iron deficiency, hepatitis B and Rh incompatibility.

The Affordable Care Act also called for the creation of a new Prevention and Public Health Fund to assist state and local efforts to prevent illness and promote health. The fund's activities will include a special focus on the causes of chronic disease. In 2011, \$300 million was distributed to states and communities to boost prevention and public health efforts, improve health and enhance healthcare quality.

- Environmental Justice. In too many American communities, minority families shoulder a disproportionate burden of pollution in the places where they live, work and learn. These disparities result in health challenges such as asthma and heart disease and end up turning away job creators looking for attractive, healthy places to set up their businesses. In 2009, almost 2.4 million African Americans reported they currently have asthma and African American women were 30 percent more likely to have asthma than white women.

The president is committed to addressing those disparities and ensuring all communities have the opportunity to enjoy the health and economic benefits of a clean environment and has begun to lay the ground work for achieving environmental justice for all Americans in a number of ways, including:

- Reconvening the Federal Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice, to ensure that federal agencies are working together to tackle this persistent challenge and provide all Americans with strong federal protection from environmental and health hazards.

- Conducting meetings between the White House Environmental Justice Forum, Cabinet secretaries and other senior administration officials and more than 100 environmental justice leaders from across the country to engage advocates on issues affecting their communities, including reducing air pollution, addressing health disparities and capitalizing on emerging clean energy job opportunities.

Conclusion

Change does not come easily in the face of hateful and divisive anti-Obama and anti-worker opposition. President Obama, however, is working hard to make strides toward justice for all Americans through legislation that helps African Americans and others achieve the American Dream.

In addition to the topics highlighted above, the president's agenda for African American families includes:

- Civil Rights. Expanding and protecting civil rights for African Americans to protect against hate crimes, end discrimination in pay and federal compensation, and reduce disparities in sentencing.
- Supporting Families and Responsible Fatherhood. Advocating for responsible policies to create stable families and support the capacity of fathers to raise their children and provide leadership in their communities.
- Preparing African American Youth for College and 21st Century Career. Fighting against Republican budget cuts to critical programs such as Head Start and fighting for innovative education reform and increased access to higher education.

We stood with President Obama before to fight for a better future for all Americans. We can do it again. We can improve our education system, combat intolerance and hate and create good jobs that help secure better futures for our families.



