

OPINION

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Sharing Corporate Success with Workers

Opportunity should extend past the boardroom

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

American corporations have grown their profits at impressive rates. American workers should have something to celebrate, right? Wrong. At a time when most of this country's workers are struggling to make basic ends meet, wondering how they'll manage to save enough for a comfortable retirement, many of the country's leading corporations are implementing cost-saving measures that only serve to make the rich filthy rich. It's time for that to change.

For nearly 10 years, American workers have become more efficient and

effective. The companies they work for have benefited tremendously. The labor force hasn't been so lucky. Though corporate CEOs are stuffing

While simultaneously denying their laborers a salary increase and needed benefits, corporate CEOs see no harm in boosting their personal bottom lines.

global outsourcing. Already, the U.S. has lost thousands of customer service, data entry and engineering jobs to larger and cheaper labor markets in India. Economists say accounting and other "white-collar" jobs are soon to follow.

To protect its workforce, corporate America must ensure worker's salaries grow at rates that keep pace with the cost of living. Corporations must also re-invest in employer-sponsored benefits - such as healthcare and pensions. It is these types of incentives that keep employees motivated and loyal and over the long term, strengthen the company.

Large corporations must also set realistic, performance based pay models for their chief executives. It is unacceptable for a company to lay off thousands of workers and then turn around and pay an executive a

multi-million dollar bonus for "a job well done." If a company doesn't turn a profit, a CEO shouldn't profit, either.

America prides itself on being the land of opportunity. That opportunity should extend past the boardrooms and executive offices and reach into the factories, the cubicles and the warehouses.

We often look to the government, and rightly so, to address the needs of the American workforce. But our nation's corporations have a part to play as well. If this country is to fulfill her promise, the businesses that feed our economy must share their wealth with their workers.

Judge Greg Mathis is national vice president of Rainbow PUSH and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.



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their wallets with larger than life bonuses - one head of a large global investment banking firm is eligible for an \$87 million bonus this year - worker's salaries have failed to keep pace with inflation, healthcare benefits have been reduced and corporate-sponsored pension plans have been reduced or terminated altogether.

Last year, executive salaries grew 25 percent. According to the Economic Policy Institute, the average American CEO earns more in a half day of work than a minimum wage worker will take home all year.

To add insult to injury, many workers have to deal with the reality of

Letter to the Editor Insanity and Bush

Webster's dictionary gives the definition of insanity as doing the same thing over again expecting different results. During the president's long anticipated speech it struck me that I was hearing him saying the same thing expecting a different result. Is this president insane?

Well he may not be but his strategy in Iraq certainly is. We know that Bush doesn't make foreign policy on his own. He has his advisors. Who are these people? "Tricky" Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, and I emphasize the "Con" and formerly Donald Rumsfeld. Rumsfeld, need I say more. A sad group to say the least. Sadistic, opportunistic and incompetent are these so-called advisors.

Who is to blame for this failure that is Iraq? Sure the president and his advisors must be accountable. But what about the Congress which voted to give him the authority and abandoned its Constitutional obligation to oversee an out-of-control administration?

The majority of blame must be put upon the American people. Where have we gone? Are we now impotent? What happened to the Americans of yesteryear? Have they all died along with Bobby Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr. and the other great justice seekers of the 60s? If such leaders were here today they would be astounded by the passive electorate that has become the American people.

If only 17 percent of the population has confidence in Bush's new old strategy then shouldn't the other 83 percent be marching on Washington demanding the resignation of this Administration? Must the world implode before we act? What are we waiting for?

Silence has become betrayal. Inaction has become unpatriotic. The countries of the world now look at us with disdain. America used to be a nation envied by the rest of the world. Now we are despised by them. Even our allies shutter at this new America.

It's time that we awaken and take action. It's time for George W. Bush to know that we are America. This is not a theocracy or dictatorship. We must act now before it is too late.

Andre Randall
Portland

Engage Generation Next

Civil Rights Movement must evolve to keep its power

BY MARC H. MORIAL

In light of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday celebration, USA Today recently asked me about the future of the civil rights movement. I told the paper the role of the National Urban League and other civil rights groups was evolving to cater to the younger generation, which possesses no memories of a struggle born well before they were.

Today's youth are looking for something different than their parents and grandparents. This is evident in the giving patterns of young minorities, who are more likely to believe that the key to greater equality is greater access to financial power than political power.

Instead of fighting for basic rights guaranteed to Americans, we are now fighting for our economic future. There is no doubt that African Americans have made great progress in surmounting past challenges and thriving in the 21st century: Our quality of life has improved as has our future.

In the State of Black America 2006, the National Urban League found the overall status of blacks to be at 73 percent of whites. In terms of health, education and



social justice, blacks were from 74 to 78 percent of whites and even surpassed whites in civic engagement. However, economically, they lagged substantially behind at just 56 percent.

Now, the civil right struggle is more a fight of not only being able to afford lunch but being able to purchase the lunch counter.

As I said in my keynote address at our annual conference last July, the idea of expanding the American dream and table to everyone is still relevant now as it was in the 1960s. The fight to sit at the lunch counter was an important one. But what's the use of winning the right to eat at the lunch counter if you cannot afford the meal? Now, the civil right struggle is more a fight of not only being able to afford lunch but being able to purchase the lunch counter.

There was a time when African Americans were denied the right to own property. In 2004,

home ownership among blacks hit an all-time high of nearly 50 percent.

For the African American community to achieve economic equality with whites and be competitive in the global marketplace, it is not enough just to own property - though it's a very good start. We must also be able to maintain and secure that ownership for generations to come. And it is not enough for our children to just graduate high

school. To obtain the jobs of the future, they will need to go to college at the very least to acquire the skills of the future and gain the financial freedom we desire for them.

In 1967, at the 11th Convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. pondered the question, "Where do we go from here?"

He also realized that the movement he helped create was an evolving entity. To grow and flourish, it couldn't just concentrate on securing basic liberties for minorities. It had to expand into something bigger - not only for the sake of the future generations but for the legacy of those who gave their lives to the cause.

Dr. King realized that to keep the movement alive he needed to begin to expand its scope to issues standing in the way of greater equality such as poverty and the Vietnam War. After all, it wasn't just about guaranteeing basic inalienable rights to African Americans in

the South even back in the 1960s. The inner-city ghettos in northern cities emerged out of poor economic conditions - not necessarily out of political circumstance.

Dr. King realized that economic as well as political empowerment would put the African American community on the track to full equality and prosperity. He foresaw a "host of positive psychological effects" that would result from widespread economic security among blacks.

At a National Urban League forum in Harlem last June discussing the impact of the "n-word," one panelist said part of the reason why the younger generation invokes the word more freely than their elders is that they are not as aware of the racial epithet's history. They don't feel the pain of the word because their elders would rather repress bitter memories of the past than relieve them. But that's the last thing we should do in our efforts to move forward to be stronger and better than ever.

When our youth is unaware of what came before, we are undermining their ability to build upon the movement's progress and create a brighter future for future generations. Without those memories, we have no context in which to put our aspirations. While the movement has taken on a new form and will serve new constituents as the United States evolves demographically, we must not forget the reason why we embraced this struggle in the first place.

We must concede that the challenges now faced by the black community are somewhat different from the 1960s. Our youth have our legacy in their hands. We can either engage them and emerge stronger or ignore them and relinquish our power.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

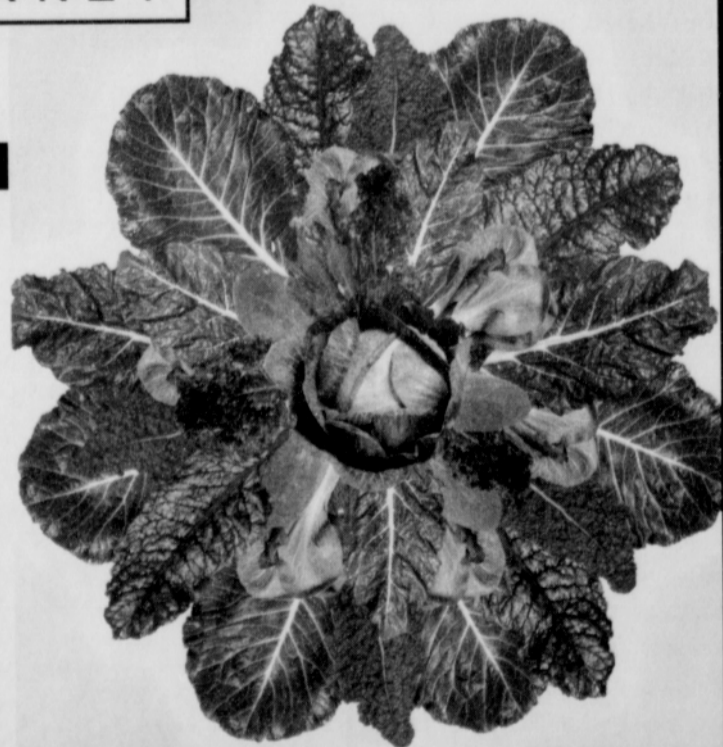
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