

OPINION

Effort Not Enough

Where are the jobs, solutions?

BY MARC H. MORIAL

In 2007, 1.3 million U.S. households faced some stage of foreclosure, up 79 percent from the previous year. This startling statistic coupled with declines in housing starts and sales explains to some extent why our nation's leaders want to stem the tide of economic decline.

It should come as no surprise that in light of topsy-turvy markets and skittish investors that the powers that be would spring to action in the midst of a competitive election year.

Remember the 1992 presidential election when economics emerged as a major issue, thanks in part to Independent candidate H. Ross Perot's crusade for a balanced federal budget? The billionaire's campaign helped give Bill Clinton an electoral edge over Bush's father, then-incumbent President George

to give an unemployed American the kind of boost that an extra six months to find a new job is. Similarly, an extra \$300 per child is not likely to improve a household's bottom line as much as a summer job. To effect long-term positive change, our leaders need to invest in long-term strategies that teach its citizens how to fish - not to throw them a minnow, usually in an election year.

The Urban League movement, however, would prefer a more comprehensive effort that incorporates an extension of unemployment benefits, increased food stamps and greater investment in summer jobs for at-risk youth.

With long-term unemployment up by 200,000 in 2007, an extension of unemployment insurance coupled with increased food stamps should be the first things put on the table. Even in prosperous times, blacks experience twice the rate of unemployment of whites. Just imagine how bad it is when the economy tanks. Increased food stamps not only help the unemployed, they help



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Herbert Walker Bush.

Together, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi with Bush and Minority Leader John Boehner arrived at a \$150-billion compromise that provides tax rebates of \$300 and up to moderate- and low-income households, among other things.

Much to the National Urban League's approval, they also included a provision raising limits on Federal Housing Administration-backed home loans designed to help ease the credit crunch and to give homeowners a greater opportunity to refinance debilitating adjustable-rate mortgages.

There's no doubt that every little bit helps, especially in lean times, when a few hundred dollars can ease the strain of living paycheck to paycheck like so many African Americans do. But, in crafting their stimulus package, our nation's leaders ignored tried-and-true strategies used in past recessions with much bigger bang for the buck than what the House passed in January. A few hundred dollars isn't likely

the underemployed as well as part-timers.

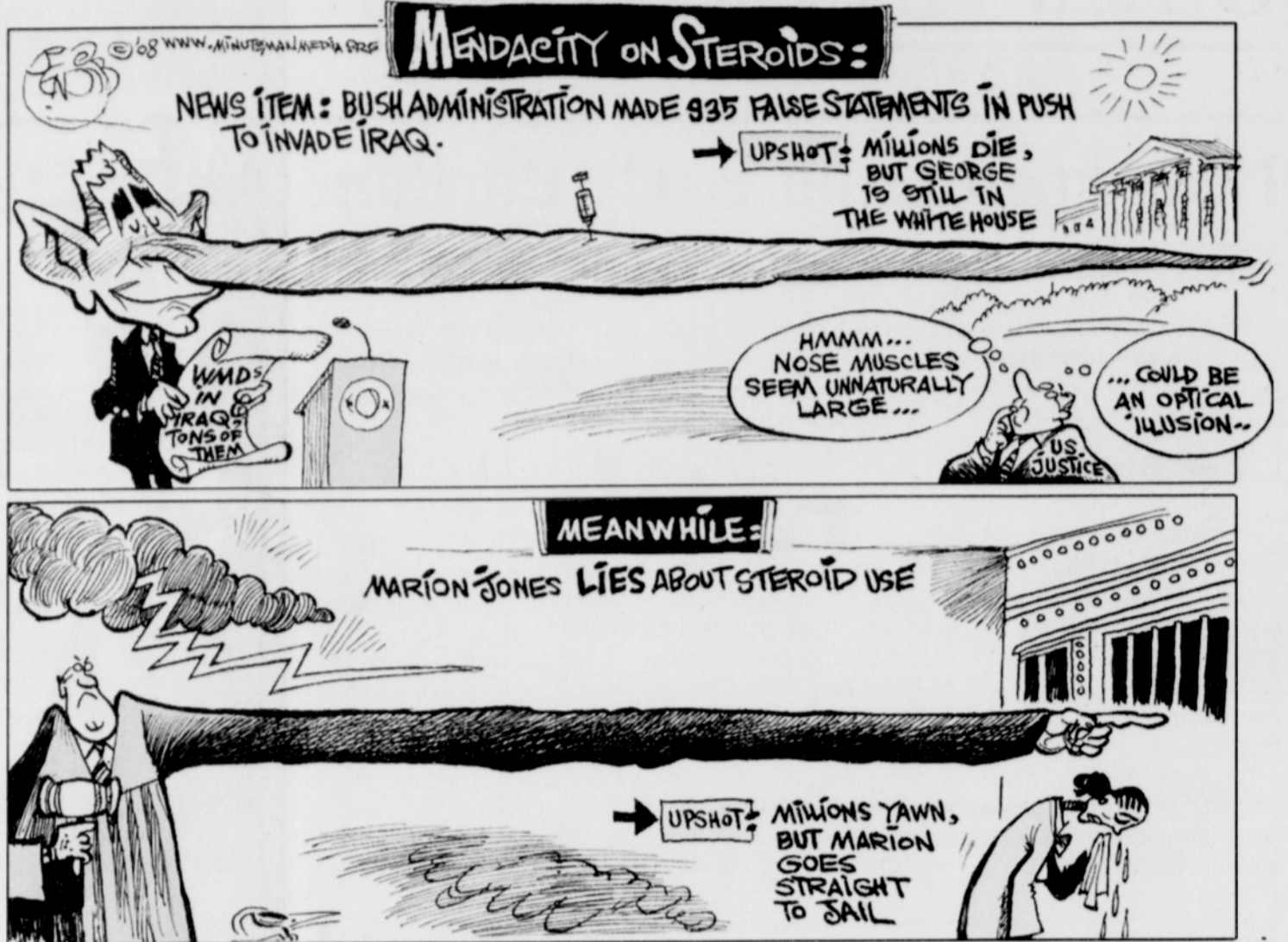
For black teens, more than one third of them unemployed in December 2007, more than twice the rate of white teens, summer jobs help connect them to the working world, giving them desperately-needed skills and putting them on the road to economic self-sufficiency.

It's wonderful that our nation's leaders want to show their love to their constituents in an election year. But will they still love us after Election Day? That is the real question here. Is it worth digging our nation further into debt for a short-term feel-good gain? Is it worth putting our future in jeopardy by investing in initiatives that fail to achieve the best result?

Our leaders should also use their stimulus package as a springboard for future efforts to level the economic playing field for all Americans of all tax brackets.

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

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Let's Prevent the Spread of HIV

We can't count on the government

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

It's been two decades since the acronyms HIV and AIDS became part of the public consciousness. Since then, AIDS has swept the globe, killing millions with no thought to sexual preference, race or age.

The death and despair left in the disease's wake has devastated families, countries and entire continents. Currently, there are 33 million people worldwide living with the HIV virus, and the AIDS crisis is considered one of the biggest tragedies in modern history.

Billions of dollars have been raised at home and abroad to both treat the disease and prevent infection. But not enough has been done in the United States to slow the spread of the disease in the African-American community.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, African Ameri-

cans account for only 12 percent of the U.S. population, but make up 72 percent of newly reported HIV infections and over 50 percent of AIDS diagnoses.

Why is the infection rate so high among our people? There are a several reasons.

When AIDS first hit, it was seen as a gay white man's disease; African Americans failed to make HIV awareness and prevention a priority in our communities. Secondly, few financial resources are dedicated to specifically fighting HIV/AIDS in the African-American community.

It is time for that to change. Awareness is the first step.

Thursday, Feb. 7 is National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day. Organizations across the country are taking part, encouraging testing and educating blacks about prevention.

The Let's Talk, Let's Test Foundation, a Chicago-based group, wants 10,000 ministers from across the country to commit to delivering an HIV prevention and awareness sermon on March 30. Understand-

ing the power of the black church, the organization believes black pastors need to lead the fight against HIV/AIDS in the black community.

They are right. We cannot count on the government to advocate for us. While some funds have been directed toward the country's black AIDS crisis, they are small in comparison to the billions that have been spent in Africa.

Get tested. Knowing your status is a key step in stopping the spread of the virus.

Despite his many missteps as president, George W. Bush will leave office in 2009 with a legacy as being a president who put a significant amount of American money towards fighting AIDS in Africa. The reality is that Bush thought Africa should solve its own problems. Colin Powell, who was then the Secretary of State, had to evoke the image of terrorists, convincing Bush the African AIDS crisis was a threat to

national security. Until some clever advisor can convince the powers that be that the African-American AIDS crisis is a threat to the country's economy and social stability, black Americans are going to, as Bush once said, have to work harder to address the issue ourselves.

We can start by honoring National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness day. Get tested. Knowing your status is a key step in stopping the

spread of the virus. Ministers, commit to "I Need You to Survive" Sunday. Use your voice to educate your church and the community around you.

For more information, visit blackaidsday.org and 1111foundation.org.

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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Moving in a New Direction

President stands in our way

BY REP. CAROLYN C. KILPATRICK

The President's seventh and final address to Congress and America was laced with pessimistic optimism. The President lauded an economic stimulus package that will

not help millions of Americans. None of the proposed provisions include the extension of unemployment benefits or investing in a summer jobs program; both of which would support the sustainability of our compromised economy and relieve the awesome burden being shouldered by American families.

Americans are facing fiscal and social crises at home and military and moral casualties abroad. They are looking to our nation's leaders for actual remedies to remove them from financial ruin and chaos.

The rebuilding of Louisiana and Mississippi cannot occur without providing adequate housing, jobs, education and healthcare to the thousands of residents that once called the region home. The decision to allow New Orleans to serve as the backdrop for the North American Summit of Canada, Mexico and the United States we hope will help rebuild New Orleans.

Throughout this Democratic-led session of Congress, Members of both Houses have sidelined their political affiliations to create bicameral legislation aimed at moving

America in a new direction only to have the President derail our efforts.

The President supported spending \$10 billion per month in Iraq and vetoed health insurance for 10 million children which cost less than \$3.50 a day, crippling the mental and physical well-being of our most vulnerable citizens.

The President opposed expanding federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, disabling our potential to eradicate life threatening and chronic diseases and to restore health and hope to many of America's families.

In the remaining 337 days of his presidency, we call on President Bush to help American families by providing employment opportunities, quality education, and comprehensive healthcare for all Americans.

The Congressional Black Caucus, 42 Members representing 40 million Americans from 20 states, is determined to build stronger families, healthier communities and a better America. We hope the President will work with us as we honor our commitment to America's families.

Congresswoman Carolyn C. Kilpatrick, D-Mich., is chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus.

