

OPINION

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Our Lost Jobs and Wealth

Staying marketable in the workplace

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

The current recession has certainly taken its toll on everyone. From large corporations to small businesses to families, most of us can fairly say that, in some way, we have suffered a financial loss. But African-Americans, more than any other group, are disproportionately affected by the economic downturn. We are losing jobs at faster rates and, as a result, our net wealth is decreasing.

Amid reports of an improving economy, many are still worried about their financial futures. America must continue to support its citizens so that they may withstand this downturn and not come out worse for the wear.

The national unemployment rate is currently hovering around 10 percent. For African-Americans, that number is just over 15 percent and, in some states, Illinois for example, its over 18 percent. For black teens, the number is astronomically high: nearly 41 percent.

To be fair, unemployment rates have always been higher in the African-American community than they are in the general population. But the recession has increased the unemployment — and wealth — gap between blacks and non-blacks because key industries, such as automotive and manufacturing, have scaled back considerably. It used to be that a black worker could secure a stable job in one of these blue-collar industries and work their way into the middle class. That day is long gone.

To compound matters, predatory lending practices that locked many homeowners into high interest rate loans with ballooning payments were prevalent in African-American communities. When the housing crisis reached its dramatic peak, blacks stood out among

the millions who lost their homes. Homeownership is the quickest way to build personal wealth. Now, with so many African-Americans having foreclosed on their homes, the financial health of our community is in jeopardy.

We are being told the economy is getting better but that the economic growth of America will be irrevocably changed. Businesses will be more conservative when expanding so that they don't overextend themselves. New jobs will be created at slower rates than in recent years. Knowing this, it is imperative that the American government makes a commitment to re-train those workers whose industries have been dramatically reduced.

High-paying jobs in manufacturing are few and far between; this is the information age and our citizens need to be ready to work in it. For our economy to stay vibrant, government sponsored training programs for downsized employees must be implemented.

Additionally, we must work to keep technology jobs here in America. Any company receiving government support or contracts must be required to hire American workers. If there are not enough skilled workers to fill the jobs, we must ensure that people are trained. Lastly, special monitored home loan programs for individuals who foreclosed on their homes during the recession should be created.

Taking these steps would ensure that all Americans are able to transition into this new and different workforce and begin to rebuild their lives. As an added benefit, African-American workers would be able to get the skills they need to stay marketable in the workplace while being allowed a fresh start on the road to personal wealth.

Greg Mathis is a retired Michigan District Court judge and syndicated television show judge.



Television Ruins Kids Content is secondary

BY DONALD KAUL

The war in Afghanistan isn't going well. The economic recovery isn't producing many new jobs. The banks that pushed the nation to the brink of a 1930s-style Depression with their reckless ways—having sucked up billions of taxpayer dollars in rescue money—are resuming those reckless ways. There isn't enough swine flu vaccine to go around.

And now for some bad news: Nielsen, the company that clocks television viewing in this country, has found that children between the ages of two and five are watching an average of 25 hours of television each week.

That's three-and-a-half hours a day, Sundays included.

If you don't find that disturbing, please go back to your Twittering Facebook or whatever it is that you use to keep track of the latest Hollywood marital crisis. Sorry to have bothered you.

From its very inception—and I was there, so I know—television has been hailed as a great edu-

cational medium, an unparalleled teacher. And so it is.

It teaches you to watch television.

That's it, the whole thing. Content is secondary.

It turns viewers, and particularly young viewers, into bovine creatures who sit slack-jawed before a TV set, waiting to be entertained, amused or sold

to their profession that borders on the heroic.

Because the TV-watching doesn't stop after the kids get to school. If anything it increases and is augmented by video games, computers, magic telephones etc. It's not a flood of distractions, it's a tsunami.

I know what you're going to say: I've heard it before. I'm ex-

ing the way of your short-term memory, is it? Content, with one exception, is virtually irrelevant to television's impact—and that exception is advertising. Television, after it gets kids hooked, teaches them that life is all about having things, buying things. It trains children to be consumers and a good job it does.

Thus we live in a society where the needs of workers always take second place to the desires of consumers, which is the way corporate America likes it. We buy, therefore we are.

So ingrained is this attitude in our society that commercials, once thought to be an irritating necessity we put up with to get "free" content, have achieved parity with programming in our viewing habits.

The New York Times asked a senior executive at a media-buying firm in New York why this was the case. He expressed no surprise. "Television has always been like that," he said.

"It's still a passive activity." So is death. Donald Kaul writes for *Minuteman Media*, a liberal advocacy group.

Television, after it gets kids hooked, teaches them that life is all about having things, buying things.

something. Mainly sold something.

I don't envy the task of primary school teachers. By the time they get the kids in kindergarten, the little urchins have watched almost 4,000 hours of television. Into these damaged brains the teachers are expected to implant a love of reading, science, and math.

The fact that they succeed as often as they do is a testament to their skill and a commitment

aggravating the toxic nature of television. After all, much of what those two-to-five-year-olds are watching is "educational television." It teaches kids the alphabet and things like that.

Right. I forgot about "educational television," the biggest oxymoron this side of "military intelligence." It doesn't take 4,000 hours to teach kids the alphabet.

Were you paying attention when I told you that content is secondary? Attention span go-

Pray Out Loud Others need to hear the message

BY M. LINDA JARAMILLO

Praying out loud was not what we did as family. We prayed quietly, assured that God would hear us because our noise was not needed to activate God's listening. However, as time has gone on, I've learned that prayer is not just for God's hearing; it is for our ears as well.

So I write to appeal for prayers—prayers in whatever way you do that. We must

pray from the Quran, the Torah, the Bible, or use our own spiritual practice that includes none of these, but we must pray out loud so others can hear.

We pray for our brothers and sisters in Fort Hood, Texas. We pray for those who lost their lives and their loved ones and those who are recovering from injuries. In addition, I ask for prayers for Muslim brothers and sisters


across the country, because their world was turned upside down as well.

Major Nidal Malik Hasan is a military psychiatrist accused of killing 13 people and wounding 42 others; it is a tragedy beyond imagination. We do not know what was going on in his mind—what kind of trauma lingers deep in his own psyche. Since 2001, Hasan had been telling his family that he wanted to get out of the military because he could not bear to fight and kill others of his faith, but he was unsuccessful in achieving that goal. We do know that his family had been taunted and harassed after the terrorist attacks of September 11, simply because of their Muslim faith.

We do know that Fort Hood is the largest military deployment center for personnel heading into war zones. We do know that they are highly trained in the use of weapons to engage in warfare. We do know that a person must de-humanize the "enemy" is in order to carry out the task. We do teach our military personnel to kill people. Then we wonder why we are seeing the enormous impact on their emotional health.

We must pray out loud to demand that our military systems provide emotional support for those returning; our nation should provide emotional support at the same level that we provide training for warfare.

M. Linda Jaramillo is executive minister of Justice Ministries for the United Church of Christ.



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