

OPINION

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Job Losses Pose Danger for Obama

Wave of discontent sweeps nation

BY RON DANIELS



There is a rebellion against Washington brewing across the land, and that's bad news for President Obama and the Democrats. Unemployment is 10.2% and climbing. According to a recent poll, some 30 percent of American families are feeling the pain of the dramatic downturn in the economy, which has produced the highest level of joblessness in decades. Never mind that the devastating economic collapse was inherited by President Obama; what people care about is whether they see the government addressing their pain, whether any visible actions are being taken that give them hope that their job opportunities will improve in the near future.

While growing joblessness is the issue uppermost in the minds of millions of Americans, what they are witnessing in Washington is a protracted and divisive struggle over health care reform. And, on Wall Street, people are flabbergasted to see the stock market rising, bank and investment company profits soaring and monstrous bonuses for employees of the very companies whose reckless behavior precipitated the economic crisis. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of people continue to lose their homes as the depression in the mortgage

industry continues. It is not that health care reform is irrelevant. In a nation where nearly 50 million people do not have health care and the prices of premiums continue to skyrocket, health care reform unquestionably must be a major national priority. Indeed, President Obama is correct to argue that the long term well being of the economy depends on bending the cost curve for health care downward. The problem is that people are less concerned about health care reform when their families and communities are being ravaged by joblessness. In this regard, there appears to be a dangerous disconnect between the Obama administration and Main Street.

Unfortunately, the brewing rebellion is yet another consequence of the timidity of President Obama in dealing with the huge crisis he inherited from the Bush-Cheney administration. Some argue that he has his priorities backward because the economy does not appear to be at the top of the agenda. For those who hold that view, it may be useful to remember that health care reform was not the first issue President Obama targeted for action/resolution; it was the economy. The first months of his administration were devoted to rolling out a new economic stimulus package and bail out packages designed to rescue the ailing financial, auto and mortgage sectors of the economy. But as Paul Krugman has repeatedly pointed out, President Obama's stimulus package was too small

to achieve the kind of job generation required to ameliorate the pain around the country.

Now President Obama is in a terrible bind. An inadequate stimulus package is "stimulat-

failure to produce something, no matter how modest, would be disastrous. The Republicans, who are determined to see him fail, are getting traction by howling about the lack of re-

over the issue of jobs. The question is how will President Obama and the Democrats respond.

Rather than cower and be timid, President Obama and the Democrats should seize the moment to deliver a desperately needed jobs initiative and educate the American public on the importance of government as an employer of last resort in times of crisis.

President Obama now faces a critical moment of truth in his young presidency. With a rebellion brewing across the country because of massive joblessness, he must act boldly or the Republicans will ride the wave of discontent to an aston-

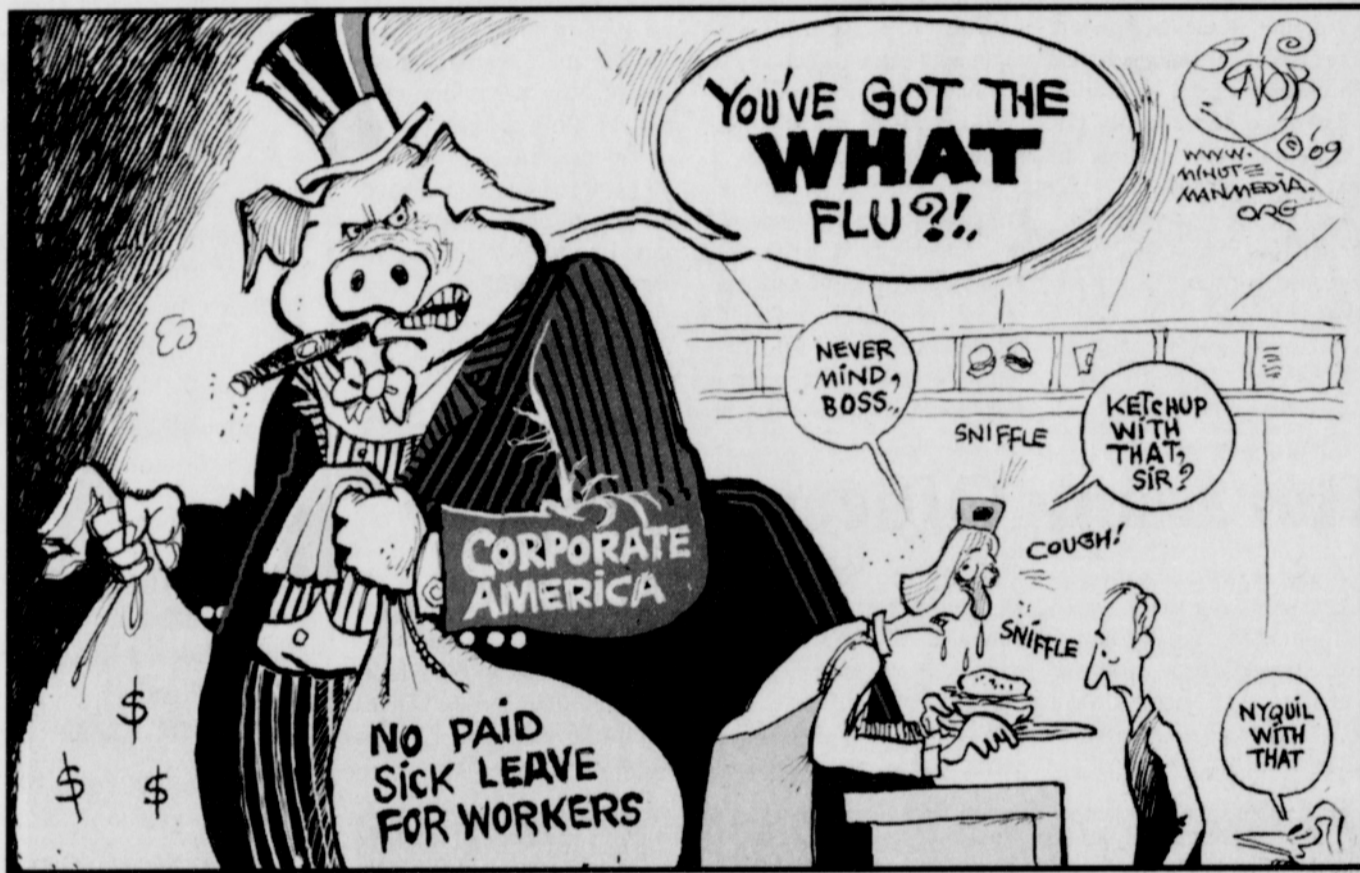
ishing victory in the 2010 elections. A party whose philosophy and policies provoked the greatest economic catastrophe since the Great Depression and was repudiated by the voters in 2008 will likely regain control of the House and Senate, rendering the duration of President Obama's tenure miserable. It is an ironic circumstance which can and must be prevented with bold leadership by President Obama and the Democrats.

Dr. Ron Daniels is president of the Institute of the Black World 21st Century and Distinguished Lecturer at York College City University of New York.

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"far too slowly to reverse the tide of joblessness spreading across the country at a time when he is compelled to push through some form of health care reform legislation. After months of investing major political capital in this effort, the

results of the stimulus package, the growing deficit and expansion of government. Sensing a political opening with the 2010 mid-term elections approaching, they are opportunistically tapping into and fueling the rage boiling across the country



Loose Gun Laws Kill More Kids Destructive impacts affect all of us

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN



I'm deeply disturbed that after a decade of decline, the number of firearm deaths among children and youths has increased for the second year in a row. A recent report reveals that almost nine children and teens die from gunfire every day—one child death every two hours and 45 minutes.

When people from other industrialized democracies learn of America's child gunshot death rates, they're equally troubled.

Based on the most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the report states that 3,184 children and teens died from gunfire in 2006, a six-

percent increase over 2005. Another 17,451 were victims of non-fatal firearms injuries, a seven percent increase from the previous year.

A major reason for these tragic young deaths is the proliferation of guns. Americans own more than 270 million private firearms—the equivalent of nine guns for every 10 men, women and children. The

United States is one of the few industrialized countries without common sense controls on gun sales. We regulate toy guns, but not the real ones that snuff out tens of thousands of human lives every year.

Among the young people killed by firearms, 2,225 were homicide victims, 763 committed suicide and 196 died in accidental or undetermined circumstances. The overwhelming majority, nearly 90 percent, were boys. More preschoolers—63—were killed by firearms than law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty—48. The death toll among black children is growing at an alarming rate. Black males between the ages of 15 and 19 are almost five times as likely as their white peers and more than twice as likely as their Latino peers to be killed by a firearm.

The destructive impact of firearms affects all of us by increasing health care costs, over-

taxing social services and decreasing national productivity. Gun violence is so pervasive in some black communities that it constitutes a serious health risk.

It's come to the point where many of the cases of post-traumatic stress disorder in black neighborhoods are not only of veterans returning from war zones, but of children walking up to the corner store. Too many of them speak of the future in terms of "If I grow up" instead of "When I grow up."

Regrettably, in many of the states and at the national level it's an uphill fight to control firearm trafficking. Thirty-two states have no laws requiring firearms sellers at gun shows to first conduct background checks on all buyers. This gun-show loophole has been used to evade laws designed to make it harder for guns to get into the hands of children, criminals, and the mentally unbalanced.

Gun shows are a huge market for vendors with or without federal firearms licenses.

Ten years ago, the two teen-aged shooters who killed 12 fellow students and a teacher at Columbine High School near Littleton, Colorado got part of their arsenal illegally through a gun show.

Congress must pass legislation to close the gun show loophole and strengthen provisions of the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act requiring a national instant criminal background check system.

There's strong evidence that background checks can be effective. Between 1994 and 2007, background checks performed by federal firearms licensees resulted in more than 1.6 million illegal buyers being denied guns. It is also imperative that the federal assault weapons ban be reinstated. According to the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, the ban reduced the use of assault weapons in crimes by 66 percent between 1995 and 2001.

But the responsibility to keep our children safe cannot rest solely with our political leaders. There are things individuals and families can do: remove guns from homes, mobilize community support to protect children from gun violence, stress nonviolent values and conflict resolution, refuse to buy or use products for children and teens that glamorize violence, and provide children and teens positive alternatives to the streets.

We must hold our legislators accountable to implement these common-sense gun safety measures. The safety of our children and communities is at stake.

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund and a working committee member of the Black Community Crusade for Children.

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