

OPINION

Opinion articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Portland Observer. We welcome reader essays, photos and story ideas. Submit to news@portlandobserver.com.

Jobs and Putting People Back to Work

We cannot wait for the market to solve this crisis

BY EDIE RASELL

The stock market has rebounded to near its pre-recession peak. Corporate profits are at record highs. But for millions of American workers who have lost jobs, health insurance, homes and financial security, the crisis continues. Congress must make job creation its highest priority.

Many families are caught in a quagmire of financial and emotional pain.



Three years into the "Great Recession," the national unemployment rate is nine percent. But this measure includes only people who are actively searching for work, some 13.9 million. It omits those who have given up looking, decided to be stay-at-home moms since they have no other options or claim to be "retired" to conceal their fears of never working again.

A broader measure that counts everyone who wants a job plus people who want full-time work when they can find only a part-time job is over twice as large: 30 million people or nearly one in five potential workers.

There are roughly four job seekers for every job opening and nearly half the unemployed have been without a job for over six months. Among

people of color, young adults, and teenagers, the jobless rate is much higher. Workers and their families are in crisis.

To keep pace with growth in the labor force, the number of jobs must rise by 114,000 each month. But over the past year the U.S. averaged just 82,000 a month. This is too few to keep joblessness from rising, no matter what the official counts tell us, and does not begin to shrink the backlog of unemployment.

Going forward, even if job creation were double the rate of last year, it would take 19 years for unemployment to fall to its pre-recession level. We cannot wait for corporate decision makers and "the market" to solve this crisis.

Congress and the Obama Administration must intervene to cre-

ate jobs. Options include a tax credit to encourage firms to boost hiring, funds for state and local governments to ease their budget woes and reduce the need for layoffs, grants to send workers back to school, and a public jobs program where the government directly hires workers.

There is much work that needs to be done, from cleaning up brown fields in our cities to weatherizing homes and making repairs in our national parks. Let's put people to work doing the things that need to be done.

Creating jobs costs money and critics argue we cannot afford this when the federal deficit is already high. But we cannot afford not to. Most of the deficit is caused by the economic downturn. Unemployed

people earn little money and pay few taxes, reducing government revenues.

At the same time, government expenses rise as millions of people are forced to rely on safety net programs. Once people are working again, much of the deficit will disappear. In the longer term, the deficit will return and will need to be addressed.

The time to reduce the deficit is when the emergency is over, when the economy on Main Street, as well as the economy on Wall Street, is sound. Right now, Congress and the Obama Administration must create jobs and put people back to work.

Edie Rasell is the Minister for Economic Justice in the United Church of Christ.

No Time to Cut Ex Offender Programs

Look at the impacts down the road

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

One of the first places state and federal governments look to make cutbacks in an attempt to balance their ballooning budgets is in the penal system. As a result, ex-offender re-entry programs that help rehabilitate those who are at risk for returning to prison are on the chopping block.

Sure, cutting funding to these programs may help balance budgets in the short term. But, as ex-offenders become repeat offenders and return to jail or prison, we end

up shelling out more money in the long run to incarcerate them.

Additionally, communities and individuals will continue to be victimized by crime and trapped in seemingly never ending cycle.

Recently, USA Today reported on these cutbacks and the impact they could have on states across the country. Florida, for example, saw a small decrease in the number of ex-offenders who committed a new felony while on probation.

Instead of looking at the bigger picture and continuing to invest in programs designed to reduce recidivism, Florida, in an attempt to get its fiscal house in order, plans to cut such programs. Other states are also weighing significant budget

cuts to all parts of their criminal justice systems.

This is just bad business. In many states, the number of ex-offenders committing new crimes has in-

creased, partly because of cuts to programs that help them transform their lives and stay out of prison. Any state considering such cuts should look to Michigan for guidance. Budget gaps and increasingly high unemployment rates have lead-

lawmakers there to address both problems with a novel plan: help ex-offenders find and keep jobs that will keep them out of prison.

According to a report by the In-

stitute for Research on Poverty, Michigan has used job placement programs to cut the prison population by about 15 percent over the last four years and saved more than \$200 million each year.

stitue for Research on Poverty, Michigan has used job placement programs to cut the prison population by about 15 percent over the last four years and saved more than \$200 million each year.

Here's hoping other locales will

follow Michigan's lead. With your help, maybe they can. Call or write your county, state and federal legislators and demand they not be so short sighted; ask that they avoid making budget cuts to prison reentry programs at all costs.

In these difficult economic times, it is only reasonable that lawmakers conserve resources where they can. The criminal justice system, particularly ex-offender reentry programs, is not the place to make these cuts. Our lawmakers must think about the effect these budget reductions will have on our overall safety and the economic impact they will have on taxpayers down the road.

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



The Portland Observer Established 1970
USPS 959-680
4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., Portland, OR 97211
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, PUBLISHER: Charles H. Washington
EDITOR: Michael Leighton
DISTRIBUTION MANAGER: Mark Washington
CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Paul Neufeldt

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Portland Observer,
PO Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208

CALL 503-288-0033 FAX 503-288-0015
news@portlandobserver.com ads@portlandobserver.com
subscription@portlandobserver.com

The Portland Observer welcomes freelance submissions. Manuscripts and photographs should be clearly labeled and will be returned if accompanied by a self addressed envelope. All created design display ads become the sole property of the newspaper and cannot be used in other publications or personal usage without the written consent of the general manager, unless the client has purchased the composition of such ad. © 2008 THE PORTLAND OBSERVER. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED. The Portland Observer—Oregon's Oldest Multicultural Publication—is a member of the National Newspaper Association—Founded in 1885, and The National Advertising Representative Amalgamated Publishers, Inc., New York, NY, and The West Coast Black Publishers Association

Advertise
with diversity
in

The Portland
Observer

Call 503-288-0033

ads@portlandobserver.com

Letter to the Editor

Read this Book

I just read the article by Lee A. Daniels, "What is Truly 'Exceptional' About America: When words ring hollow," (Portland Observer, Feb. 9 issue).

A few years ago I was listening to Cecile and Celeste on KBOO-FM 90.7 and they referenced, "The Northern Refugees" by Benjamin Drew written in 1856. In their own words, those who successfully defected to freedom tell the true story of slavery. The one constant theme over and over, never enough food, never enough of the right clothes or shelter and never any medical care.

I urge people to get and read this book. Thanks.

Respectfully,
Ed Martiszus, RN