

OPINION

Helping Americans Navigate Hard Times

Urban League services grow with need

BY MARC H. MORIAL

As depression-era unemployment rates and a shrinking social safety net continue to plague urban America, the annual National Urban League census reveals that the organization's 98 community-based affiliates served a record 2.6 million Americans in 2010—a 25 percent increase over 2009.

Last year the American economy was supposedly transitioning from the great recession to sustained recovery. Instead, 14 million Americans remained jobless, 8 million more were underemployed and unemployment among African Americans reached 16 percent—



nearly double the national rate. While more urban families faced job losses, smaller pay checks, diminished health services and the threat of foreclosure, many Urban League affiliates filled the gap as lifelines of opportunity.

The following is a summary of affiliate activities targeted to our four empowerment goals:

Health Care: Every American should have access to quality and affordable health care solutions.

The great recession has caused some families to choose food over health care, thereby exposing children and adults to the potential of seriously escalating illnesses.

With 31 states cutting funds for health care services and providers, Urban League affiliates managed to help more 1.4 million Americans purchase medi-

cines, get necessary evaluations and screenings and obtain other critical health care services -- up from 792,000 in 2009.

Education: Every American child should be ready for college, work and life.

Education is always cited as the cornerstone of America's future. But last year, 34 states sought to balance their budgets by enacting cuts in K-12 programs. This resulted in fewer participants receiving education services from our affiliates in 2010. However, 172,000 clients still benefited from Urban League affiliate education services, with 50,000 receiving professional development and skills enhancement training.

Economic Empowerment: Every American should have access to jobs with a living wage and good benefits.

Since 2009, unemployment among African Americans has

increased from 14 percent to 16 percent. Last year, the affiliates of the Urban League placed more than 18,000 people in jobs through the operation of 548 economic, entrepreneurship and housing programs. Those programs served an astounding 608,852 clients -- an increase of 232,000 from 2009.

Housing: Every American should live in safe, decent, affordable and energy efficient housing on fair terms.

Urban League affiliates provided housing assistance to 441,493 clients in 2010, more than double the clients receiving assistance in 2009. This included 1,188 homes purchased, and 15,524 clients benefiting from foreclosure assistance.

Finally, in 2010, the National Urban League generated an economic impact of \$1 billion, including \$471.8 million in federal, state and local government

support for Urban League programs across the country. The secondary economic impact of \$641.6 million is a measure of the success of these efforts, with 18,000 participants placed in jobs, 1,188 new homeowners, 357 new business start-ups, \$3.3 million in business sales and \$114 million in new investments in economically distressed communities.

Clearly, the National Urban League and its affiliates are helping millions of Americans navigate their way through these economic hard times. The services we provide help strengthen family budgets and communities. And, just as importantly, they allow people to maintain their dignity and a sense of humanity.

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

Hope for Two Nations to Form Lasting Peace

On the birth of South Sudan

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

For decades, the nation of Sudan has engaged in what has been called Africa's longest civil war. The result: 2 million lives lost and millions of displaced people.

Sudan is located in northeast Africa and is bordered by Egypt, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo; it was, until recently, the largest country on the continent.

In January of this year, the people of southern Sudan voted overwhelming for their inde-

pendence and seceded from the north, forming a new African nation.

This month, the results of that vote were made real. The world is now watching both North and South Sudan, praying

the two nations can keep the peace and grow into strong countries.

The North of Sudan, which is largely Arab and Muslim, and the largely Christian South of the country, where the majority of the citizens are black, spent 40 plus years at war.

The North has been accused of war crimes and of raiding the South for oil. A 2005 agree-

ment, brokered by the Bush administration, brought a tense peace to the country. As part of that deal, the South was able to decide its own future.

Now that the South has gotten its wish, its government must work strategically to provide for its people.

Currently, South Sudan, a nation with a population of 8 million people, has a little more than 120 medical doctors and just over 100 registered nurses; only 16-percent of the country has access to healthcare. 90-percent of the population lives on less than one dollar a day, drinking water is limited and diseases like meningitis, measles and whooping cough

plague much of the nation.

The South Sudanese government has plans to attack these and other issues but acknowledges it will take the nation about 20 years to meet its goals. Though the South Sudanese must, as any nation, carry much of that load alone, other nations should support their efforts.

Already, the U.S. has pledged \$300 million to be used for development and infrastructure, along with \$150 million in food aid.

There is no way of knowing how much aid South Sudan will need over the long term, but this initial support shows the U.S. government supports

the nation's independent.

It is a relief to see the nearly half a century war between North and South Sudan come to an end. Like many oppressed people, the Southern Sudanese desired their independence so they could control their own fate. Let's hope that Southern Sudan, now that it is no longer being victimized by the North, will grow into a strong nation, one much better off than it is now.

We must also hope that these two nations work proactively to maintain the peace.

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

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