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OPINION

A Year of Triumphs and Tragedies

Our struggles for justice will continue

BY MARC MORIAL

As we come to the close of 2012, I want to take a moment to reflect on some of the major triumphs and tragedies of the past year.



First, as many of you know, the National Urban League's number one priority this year was our "Occupy the Vote" campaign, devoted to defeating the onslaught of voter ID laws and other tactics designed to suppress voter turnout among African Americans and other progressive voters.

By all indications, our effort, in concert with many others across the country, was successful.

On Nov. 6, President Obama was re-elected with overwhelming support from the very communities that were targets of the voter suppression crowd. In fact, according to a new Pew Research Center analysis, "Blacks voted at a higher rate this year than other minority groups and for the first time in history may also have voted at a higher rate than whites."

Our thanks to everyone who helped us Occupy the Vote in 2012.

We also want to again extend our gratitude to all those who came to the aid of the victims of Superstorm Sandy which struck New York and the Mid-Atlantic region in October.

The relief effort is progressing, but as the cold weather sets in, many remain homeless and jobless. We were pleased that on Dec. 28, the United States Senate approved President Obama's \$60.4 billion aid package. Unfortunately, the House of Representatives did not follow their lead.

Sandy was a natural disaster that claimed more than 100 lives. But 2012 also saw one of the most horrific man-made disasters in American history, the shooting deaths of 20 elementary school students and six others at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Conn.

While the nation is still mourning this tragedy, the National Urban League has called for a reinstatement of the assault weapons ban, along with a comprehensive review of all gun laws to close loopholes

and strengthen enforcement.

We must take action now to end the scourge of gun violence in America.

Finally, in 2012 we saw the passing of a number of notable Americans. They include:

Whitney Houston – The incomparable musical prodigy whose amazing voice and songs brought joy to the world.

Dick Clark – The long-time host of "American Bandstand," who reigned as "America's oldest teenager" for 82 years and gave first-time national exposure to many African-American musical artists.

Neil Armstrong – The NASA astronaut who in 1969 became the first human to walk on the moon.

Sally Ride – Another NASA astronaut, who in 1983 became the first woman to fly into space.

Russell Means – The Oglala Sioux Indian who became the iconic leader of the American Indian Movement and fought tirelessly for the rights of Native Americans.

Sherman Helmsley – The spirited actor whose TV roles as George Jefferson in "All in the Family" and "The Jeffersons" kept us laughing through the 70s and 80s.

Ana Grace Marquez Greene and her 19 classmates at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

We pray that 2013 will be a prosperous and peaceful one for you and your family. We pledge to continue standing with you in the struggle for economic, political and social justice for all.

Happy New Year!

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

No Celebration for a Dropped Ball

Tax deal was a loser for majority of Americans

BY SCOTT KLINGER

Millions of Americans watched the ball drop on New Year's Eve. The glitzy one in Times Square symbolized joy and hope for the New Year. Just



a few hundred miles to the south, Congress dropped another ball — one that no doubt sent champagne glasses clinking among the richest 1 percent. But the rest of us shouldn't celebrate.

While the White House and much of the media spun the hurried late-night move as a victory for the middle class, it was a win paid for with hundreds of billions of dollars in new tax cuts for America's wealthiest families.

At midnight on Dec. 31, all of the Bush era tax cuts expired. So when the Senate voted a couple of hours after midnight, and the House voted

at almost at the same late hour on Jan. 1, they technically voted on new tax cuts for everybody. The bill that the Senate passed raises \$1 trillion less than President Barack Obama's original budget proposal. And much of it flowed directly into the pockets of America's richest 1 percent.

Obama not only failed in his promise to raise taxes on the top 2 percent of taxpayers, he couldn't even raise taxes on all of the richest 1 percent.

Only those with individual incomes above \$400,000 (\$450,000 for couples) will face higher tax rates. The threshold for the top 1 percent starts at \$369,691. The tax cuts for the richest Americans are permanent, while the child tax credit, college tax credit, and earned income tax credits that benefit Americans of more modest means expire once again in five years.

President Obama's original bud-

get proposal would have increased the annual tax bills of the richest 1 percent by nearly \$10,000; the bill that Congress just enacted instead cuts the income taxes of the average top 1 percent family by \$17,840, according to Citizens for Tax Justice.

The very rich got an even greater belated Christmas gift: the budget deal raised the estate tax exemption to \$10 million per couple. That level's so high that only the richest 0.3 percent will pay it — just 3 of every 1,000 estates or about 7,000 estates each year.

When the clock struck midnight on Jan. 1, the estate tax rate was 55 percent. When Congress was finished just before the wee morning hours of Jan. 2, it dropped to just 40 percent.

Taking into account the new health care tax on unearned income, the wealthiest 1 percent also saw taxes on their dividends nearly

halved from what would have become a 43 percent rate to 24 percent.

With this fiscal deal, Congress continues to honor the perverse American tradition of rewarding income from wealth more than income from work.

And lest corporations feel left out of the New Year's Eve party for the rich — Congress snuck 31 corporate tax breaks into the bill, including two pernicious provisions called the Active Financing Exception and the Controlled Foreign Corporation Look-Through, which helps companies like General Electric and Apple avoid billions of dollars in U.S. corporate income taxes.

While eight senators opposed the deal, only one — Democrat Tom Harkin of Iowa — did so because he felt it threatened America's middle class.

"Every dollar that wealthy taxpayers do not pay under this deal, we will eventually ask Americans of modest means to forgo in Social

Security, Medicare, and Medicaid benefits," Harkin explained. "It is shortsighted to look at these issues in isolation from one another, especially when congressional Republicans have been crystal clear that they intend to seek spending cuts to programs like Social Security just two months from now, using the debt limit as leverage."

Because the deal the White House brokered with Congress does little to reduce the debt, deficit hawks will soon be back at it, seeking to cut more from Social Security, Medicare, food stamps, and other programs that benefit millions of families.

If that happens, middle class and low-income Americans will have less money to spend, which will mean fewer customers for Main Street businesses, and ultimately fewer jobs for all.

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