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OPINION

Integrated Inequality in America

A tale of two countries

BY MARC MORIAL

During the National Urban League's 10th annual Legislative Policy Conference last week in Washington, D.C., we released the 37th edition of the State of Black America, Redeem the Dream: Jobs Rebuild America.

This year's report commemorates the racial milestones that have occurred in the 50 years since the height of the civil rights movement and shines a sobering light on the unfinished business of achieving full equality and empowerment for



every citizen.

One of the most encouraging signs in the report is the progress African Americans have made in fulfilling Whitney Young's vision of preparing ourselves for real and hoped for opportunities through education.

Since 1963, the high school completion gap has closed by 57 percentage points. There are more than triple the number of blacks enrolled in college. And for every college graduate in 1963, there are now five.

Anti-poverty measures have also improved our living standard since 1963. The percentage of blacks living in poverty has declined by 23 points. And the percentage of blacks who own their homes has grown by 14 points.

But these numbers don't tell the full story. While black America has achieved double-digit gains in educational attainment, employment, and wealth over the past 50 years, we still have made only single-digit gains against whites.

With an equality index of 71.7 percent, African Americans enjoy less than three-fourths of the well-being and economic status of white Americans. Similarly, Hispanic Americans, with an index of 75.4 percent are experiencing only three-quarters of the full opportunity America has to offer.

For example, in the past 50 years, the black-white income gap has only closed by 7 points (now at 60 percent). The unemployment rate gap has only closed by 6 points (now at 52 percent). And with March unem-

ployment figures showing African American joblessness now at 13.3 percent and Hispanic unemployment at 9.2 percent, compared to an overall rate of 7.6 percent, we still see a tale of two Americas that continues to break down along the color line.

But rather than bemoan these problems, the National Urban League is using these findings to sharpen our focus on meaningful solutions. Earlier this year, we launched a ground-breaking endeavor Jobs Rebuild America, a \$70 million series of public/private investments to create pathways to jobs and put urban America back to work.

But Washington must also be part of the solution. During our visit to Capitol Hill, we reiterated

our support of the Urban Jobs Act and the Project Ready STEM Act, a bill sponsored by Congressional Black Caucus Chairwoman Marcia Fudge.

We also support the stated goal in the President's 2014 budget: to invest in the things needed to grow our economy and create jobs while reducing the deficit in a way that does not unfairly impact the most vulnerable communities.

Again, while much progress has been made over the past 50 years, The State of Black America remains a tale of two Americas. The National Urban League has put some real solutions on the table. It's time for Washington to put them to work.

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

Consider the Hidden Costs of War

Payouts to Vietnam veterans continue to rise

BY DAVID ELLIOT

April 15 isn't just Tax Day. It's also known as the Global Day of Action on Military Spending. People around the world mark the occasion by protesting the vast resources allocated to militaries, often at the cost of human needs.

According to a new report issued by the National Priorities Project, of every tax dollar the federal government collects, 26.5 cents goes to the Pentagon one way or another. By comparison, a single penny goes to science, 1.4 cents to transportation, 2.1 cents to energy and the environment, and 3.5 cents to education.

That means of every tax dollar, just eight cents gets channeled into those four important categories. Combined, it's less than one third of the total revenue the Pentagon absorbs.

One notable reason the Pentagon soaks up so much of our federal



budget is its exorbitant weapon systems.

Take the F-35 joint strike fighter. A decade after parts manufacturing for this boondoggle first began, it's still not deployed. Experts say that by the time it's been operable for a few decades, the F-35 will have cost us somewhere in the neighborhood of \$1.5 trillion to build, fix, maintain, and fix again.

There are many hidden Pentagon costs as well. Did you know that the government spends \$40 billion each year caring for our veterans and their surviving family members?

A recent Associated Press investigative report revealed just how much we are paying for wars fought generations ago — and foreshadows how much we will still be paying generations from now.

Remarkably, we still pay out benefits to family members of World War I veterans. In a few isolated cases, family members of veterans of the Spanish-American War and

Civil War are still collecting payments too.

The benefits Uncle Sam pays out to Vietnam veterans continue to rise, even though that conflict ended some four decades ago. Today we pay \$22 billion a year to these vets

Remarkably, the Vietnam War's costs, unlike those for World War II, are still rising. The benefits paid to its veterans and their family members stand at \$270 billion since 1970.

and their families. By comparison, we pay a little more than half of that, \$12 billion annually, to veterans and their family members who served in either of the Iraq conflicts or Afghanistan.

The Vietnam War (and World War II, for that matter) serves as a warning when we try to assess not

just the current but the future expenses tied to the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. World War II ended 68 years ago, yet it continues to cost taxpayers \$5 billion a year. The cost of the benefits paid to its veterans didn't peak until 1991, the AP reported.

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costs, unlike those for World War II, are still rising. The benefits paid to its veterans and their family members stand at \$270 billion since 1970. Using World War II and Vietnam as yardsticks, we can probably expect the government-paid health care costs of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq to rise for another four

decades or so before they peak, probably between 2050 and 2060. We've already paid more than \$50 billion since 2003.

No one denies that our veterans and their family members deserve it. We put them in harm's way and they fought and sacrificed their limbs — and all too often their lives. These benefits aren't Pentagon pork. They're a cost of war.

This Tax Day, knowing that a quarter of the money we are paying to the federal government will go to the Pentagon, we should be aware of this cost of war — wars past, wars present, and wars still to be fought.

For many reasons, we should stop waging so many wars. And we should demand that we stop paying for the things we can't afford — such as obsolete and antiquated weapons systems — so that we can afford the things we need. That includes health care and survivors benefits for those who have sacrificed.

David Elliot is communications director of USAction.

The Portland Observer Established 1970

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