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OPINION

Higher Education Fails Poor and Minorities

Our focus on equity and affordability

BY MARC H. MORIAL

Confronting the issues of higher education completion and – most importantly – affordability, acting U.S. Secretary of Education John B. King, Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed and Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam will join dozens of other elected officials, university presidents and education experts this week for an unprecedented national summit presented by the National Urban League and USA Funds.

Even as millions of America's young people are desperate to find work, the nation's employers could be scrambling to find qualified candidates to fill millions of jobs in the next five years.

By every measure, the nation's higher education system is failing the nation's poor and minorities, leaving the most vulnerable communities behind. College completion rates for students of color

are abysmal: Barely 40 percent of black students and barely half of Hispanic students complete four-year degree programs within six years of enrollment, compared with more than 60 percent of white students.



The summit kicks off with the release of Gallup's first-ever survey of minority student outcomes. We look forward to the nation's most in-depth look at the challenges facing minority students, which will illuminate and expand upon last year's National Urban League Report, "From Access to Completion: A Seamless Path to College Graduation for African American Students."

That report found that a major barrier to college completion is financial: A majority of African-American college students, 65 percent, are balancing their studies with full-time work and family responsibilities. As a consequence of these responsibilities, African American students whose incomes qualify are likely to receive less financial aid because they are enrolled less-than-fulltime.

African-American students'

part-time status also leads to reductions in their maximum Pell Grant award and other state and federal financial aid.

Our research found that higher levels of financial support corresponded to higher graduation rates. Coupling financial aid with

data released last month shows the median weekly salary for a college graduate is almost twice that of someone holding only a high school diploma.

But it's not only income that rises along with education. Voting rates, volunteerism, intellectual

among high school dropouts, 9 percent.

Meanwhile, the potential skills gap our nation faces will have employers scrambling to find qualified candidates with postsecondary credentials required for an estimated 5 million jobs by 2020.

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personalized supports for students has already shown promising results in state higher education systems and individual institutions.

The monetary value of a college degree is well-documented. Study after study has shown college graduates can expect to anywhere from a half-million to a million dollars more over a career than those without a degree. Cen-

curiosity and tolerance for other viewpoints also correspond to educational level. More education means better health, and the more educated someone is, the more physically active they are.

The unemployment rate for college graduates at 3.5 percent is well below the nation's median rate of 5 percent. For high school graduates, the rate is 6 percent and

Government leaders must support innovative, results-driven, more affordable ways of delivering postsecondary education and training to at-risk youth so they are prepared for quality employment in jobs that are in-demand in the workforce.

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

Instead of a Pardoning a Turkey, Free this Man

The case for clemency for Leonard Peltier

BY JOHN KIRIAKOU

As Thanksgiving approaches, I've got a suggestion for President Barack Obama.

Instead of following the White House tradition and "pardoning" a turkey destined for a holiday dinner table, Obama should extend that courtesy to some of the thousands of human beings caged up in America's federal prisons.

Leonard Peltier should be one of them.

Peltier was a Native American activist on South Dakota's Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in the 1970s. On June 26, 1975, two FBI agents went to Pine Ridge to look for a young man named Jimmy Eagle, who was wanted for robbery. Soon after they spotted his car, a shootout ensued.

Both agents and one of the occupants of the car were killed. A later shootout at the gunman's home ended in two more deaths.

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It really looks like our government has locked up an innocent man. Isn't it time to fix it?

With his presidency coming to

a close and Thanksgiving around the corner, it's the perfect time for Obama to offer a gesture to help make amends with our nation's original people. Instead of pardoning a turkey, he should pardon Leonard Peltier.

OtherWords columnist John Kiriakou is an associate fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies. He's a former CIA counterterrorism officer and senior investigator for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

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