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OPINION

No Cash Reserves to Get Through Hard Times

You're not alone in trying to stay afloat

BY CHUCK COLLINS

Are you or a loved one having trouble staying afloat? You're truly not alone.



While the media reports low unemployment and a rising stock market, the reality is that almost 20 percent of the country lives in "Underwater Nation," with zero or even negative net worth. And more still have almost no cash reserves to get them through hard times.

This is a source of enormous stress for many low and middle-income families.

Savings and wealth are vital life preservers for people faced with job loss, illness, divorce, or even car trouble. Yet an estimated 15 to 20 percent of families have no savings at all, or owe more than they own.

They're disproportionately rural, female, renters, and people without a college degree. But the underwater ranks

also include a large number of people who appear to be in the stable middle class. Health challenges are a major cause of savings depletion for these people, both in medical bills and lost wages.

Plenty more Americans could be vulnerable.

A financial planner will advise you to put aside three months of living expenses in financial reserves, just in case. So if your living expenses are \$2,000 a month, you should try to have \$6,000 in "liquidity" — money you can easily get to in an emergency.

But 44 percent of households don't have enough funds to tide themselves over for three months, even if they lived at the poverty level, according to the Assets and Opportunity Scorecard.

Even having a positive net worth doesn't mean you can always tap these funds, especially if wealth takes the form of home equity or owning a car.

A Bankrate survey found that 63 percent of U.S. households lack the cash or savings to meet a \$1,000 emergency expense. They'd have to borrow from a friend or family, or put costs on a credit card.

Seven percent of U.S. homeowners are underwater homeowners, with mortgage debt higher than the value of their homes. And more and more people have taken on credit card debt to pay the bills. Meanwhile, student debt is rising rapidly and is projected to become one of the biggest factors in negative wealth.

Conservative scolds will blame individuals for "living beyond their means" and being financially irresponsible. And individual behavior is important. But the financial stresses facing millions of families are more likely the result of four decades of stagnant incomes.

Half the workers in this country haven't shared in the economic gains that have mostly gone to the rich. Their real wages have stayed flat while health care, housing, and other expenses continue to rise.

So not everyone is on the edge at this time of dizzying inequality, after all. The 400 wealthiest billionaires in the U.S. have as much wealth together as the bottom 62 percent of the population.

This is only possible because of the expanding ranks of drowning Ameri-

cans.

Some politicians will scapegoat immigrants or other vulnerable people for this suffering. When this happens, hold on tight to your purse or wallet. They're trying to distract you from the rich and powerful elites who are rigging the rules to get more wealth and power.

They want to deflect your attention away from the reality that your economic pain is the result of deliberate government rules that give more tax cuts to the super-rich and global corporations, keep wages down, push up tuition costs, and let corporations nickel and dime you for all you're worth.

Congress and the Trump administration are proposing to cut health care, pass more tax cuts for the rich, and give global corporations even more power over you. They promise benefits will "trickle down."

Unless we speak up, the only trickle will be the expansion of Underwater Nation.

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Why We Can't Support Supreme Court Nominee

Gorsuch falls short on civil rights

BY MARC H. MORIAL

"Based upon our review of Judge Gorsuch's record, we have concerns that he has a narrow view of rights that are protected by the Constitution, as well as a skeptical view about the importance of protecting those rights in the courtroom. In short, Judge Gorsuch's record does not allow us to support his nomination for the Supreme Court at this time." — *Lawyer's Committee on Civil Rights.*



The importance of a Supreme Court Justice's commitment to protecting civil rights cannot be overstated. Much of the progress this nation has made on issues of equal opportunity are due to Supreme Court rulings such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Loving v. Virginia*, *Obergefell v. Hodges* and *Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs v. The Inclusive Communities Project, Inc.*

The Supreme Court has also regressed on civil rights, as with *Shelby*

County v. Holder, which struck down a key provision of the Voting Rights Act and led to a proliferation of racially-motivated voter suppression laws throughout the nation.

More than most other communities, the future of African Americans' rights and opportunities hang on the confirmation of a Supreme Court justice.

That's why the National Urban League cannot support the nomination of Judge Neill Gorsuch.

Beyond the level of scholarship and judicial experience required of a Justice, which Judge Gorsuch does appear to meet, a Supreme Court Justice must have demonstrated what the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights called "a profound respect for the importance of protecting the civil rights afforded by the Constitution and the nation's

civil rights laws based on a large body of civil rights opinions or comparable information from statements and activities other than service on the bench."

We see no such respect demonstrated by Judge Gorsuch.

As I have maintained since the announcement of his nomination, what I find most troubling in the record of

jected his opinion that a school district complies with the law so long as they provide educational benefits that "must merely be 'more than de minimis.'" In other words, according to Judge Gorsuch, a school district can meet its obligation to disabled students with little more than nothing.

Of course, no serious discussion of

"As I have maintained since the announcement of his nomination, what I find most troubling in the record of Judge Gorsuch is his apparent criticism of those who have sought advancement of individual rights through the courts."

Judge Gorsuch is his apparent criticism of those who have sought advancement of individual rights through the courts.

He consistently has ruled against the rights of workers and consumers who were harmed by employers and corporations, and against disabled students pursuing their right to a meaningful education.

In fact, even as he sat before the Senate Judiciary Committee last week, the Supreme Court overwhelmingly re-

Judge Gorsuch's confirmation can ignore the fact that his nomination was the result of an egregious dereliction of duty by the Senate, who refused to give President Obama's nominee, Merrick Garland, the hearing he was due. The Senate's failure with regard to that nomination does not bode well for its ability to keep partisanship from tainting the process.

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