

Opinion articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Portland Observer. We welcome reader essays, photos and story ideas. Submit to news@portlandobserver.com.

OPINION

State of Black America: Protect our Progress

With Trump there is reason to worry

BY MARC H. MORIAL

As of this writing, for 102 days our nation has watched as the Trump administration has taken shape—and, for many of us, there is reason to worry.



Recovery from the Great Recession has been slow, but it has been real. While high school students of color and low-income students continue to trail their peers in high school completion, the national graduation rate continues to rise. Republicans are working hard to re-introduce a health care bill that will repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, but today, a record number of Americans have health insurance. Now all of that progress, and much more, is under threat.

This year's State of Black America is a call to action, a call to unceasing vigilance, and a call to protect our nation's hard-fought-for progress. And as we do with every edition of the State of Black America, we provide the numbers and the narrative to make our case.

According to National Urban League's exclusive 2017 Equality Index for both blacks and Hispanics, there is progress, but there is much more progress that needs to be made.

Tracking racial equality in economics, employment, education, health, housing, criminal justice and civic participation, we find that African Americans share 72.3 percent equality with white Americans (in 2016 the number stood at 72.2 percent). Hispanics—who stood at 77.9 percent equality in 2016—shared a greater slice of the “equality pie” this year, standing at 78.4

percent equality with their white peers.

The Trump administration's priorities and proposed policies put what social and economic gains we have made in urban communities and communities of color at serious risk.

Guest contributors to the State of Black America remind us of what is at stake. Sen. Cory Booker tackled our broken criminal justice system, lamenting that just as modest, bipartisan agreement on fixing our broken system was being cultivated, the Trump administration and Attorney General Jeff Sessions seemed, “intent on turning back the clock—threatening to increase the use of mandatory minimum sentences, criticizing consent decrees that improve police-community relations, and expanding

tory voting practices,” understanding that we cannot claim to be a democracy while snatching the right to vote away from eligible citizens. Rep. Robin Kelly reminds us that as we, “drive toward the goal of an equitable health future for communities of color, we cannot afford to take our foot off the gas. The Affordable Care Act put us on the right road and we are seeing progress.”

To that end, the National Urban League has also published “The Main Street Marshall Plan: Moving from Poverty to Prosperity.” The plan—which proposes solutions, including increasing federal funding for public schools, enacting a living wage of \$15, and fully funding Medicaid and Medicare—is a bold, strategic investment in America's urban communities that protects our progress by addressing our na-

Legislating discrimination by signing into law a travel ban that targets ethnicities or religions, harms families and our nation founded and enriched by newcomers to its shores. Double-digit cuts or eliminating funding for vital agencies like the Department of Education or the National Endowment of Arts, will carve away at the equality pie for blacks and Latinos—and put all Americans at risk. Slashing the budgets of the Departments of Housing and Labor, will reduce the share of the pie for blacks and Hispanics—and put all Americans at risk.

Make no mistake, the Trump administration's priorities are not a blueprint to make America great again, they are a blueprint for a sick, scared, uneducated, homeless and unemployed America, and reaffirm this truth: When communities of color are strong, America is strong.

I urge you to read, analyze, share—and act on—the findings of the 2017 State of Black America at stateofblackamerica.org. Now in its 41st edition, it remains one of the most highly-anticipated benchmarks and sources for thought leadership around racial equality in America across economics, employment, education, health, housing, criminal justice and civic participation.

The fight for racial equality in our country is a struggle that neither began during the Obama era, nor will it end in the Trump era, but with time and the constant pressure of like-minded people pressing for justice, we have made a steady climb toward improvement—and we are determined to keep moving forward to protect our progress.

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

Make no mistake, the Trump administration's priorities are not a blueprint to make America great again, they are a blueprint for a sick, scared, uneducated, homeless and unemployed America...

federal use of private prisons.”

Rep. Terri Sewell called for the passage of the Voting Rights Advancement Act, “which restores and advances the VRA [Voting Rights Act] by providing a modern-day coverage test that will extend federal oversight to jurisdictions with a history of voter suppression and protects vulnerable communities from discrimina-

tion's persistent social and economic disparities.

Passing a health care plan that no longer protects people with pre-existing conditions, charges the sickest the highest premiums, and would leave an estimated 24 million people without lifesaving coverage, will trim the equality pie for Blacks and Hispanics—and put all Americans at risk.

Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty

Executive order does neither

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) strongly supports religious freedom, free speech and the separation of church and state. However, we oppose President Trump's Executive Order entitled, “Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty.”

This latest executive order neither promotes free speech nor religious liberty. By instructing the Internal Revenue Service to exercise “maximum enforcement discretion” of a law banning electioneering by houses of worship and other tax-exempt organizations, the order threatens to undermine the prophetic voice, moral and financial independence, and much-needed civil discourse in our nation's faith communities.

Last month, EMO joined 98 other religious and denominational organizations from across the country opposing the weakening of protections that prohibit

houses of worship and other tax-exempt organizations from opposing or supporting political candidates. We stated forcefully, “The charitable sector, particularly houses of worship, should not become another cog in a political machine or another loophole in campaign finance laws.”

Places of worship should have the power to critique government actions regarding moral issues. They should be able to engage in advocacy and encourage the democratic right to vote. But, they must not intervene in political campaigns or endorse political candidates. Such activities endanger the integrity of our voices of faith, possibly making some places of worship a tool for the political system.

Current law prohibiting electioneering reinforces the separation of church and state, protecting houses of worship from being used as mouthpieces for political candidates in exchange for partisan-driven donations or promises of future social service contracts. To protect the credibility and mission-driven focus of our houses of

worship, there should be no doubt in the minds of congregants or members of the community in which they reside that faith communities are forbidden from acting as conduits of campaign donations or are beholden to a given candidate.

President Trump's decision to not uphold the prohibition of electioneering by nonprofits makes possible abuses to both the process by which we elect our government leaders and the independence of our houses of worship. We urge our religious leaders and their institutions that, while raising moral issues for public debate, they resist using the pulpit to endorse political candidates. Our prophetic voice must transcend the partisan divide.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon is a statewide association of Christian denominations, congregations, ecumenical organizations and interfaith partners working together to improve the lives of Oregonians through community ministry programs, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, environmental ministry and public policy advocacy.

Letter to the Editor

Stand Up for Women

The Republican administration's proposed health care bill is nothing more than a blatantly political attempt to do whatever it takes to attack women's health and rights and take health care away from the people who need it most.

If Congress cuts funding to Planned Parenthood, millions of people will be left without access to birth control, life-saving cancer screenings, and other basic care. Many of them will have nowhere else to go for the health care they need.

I'm counting on Oregon's Congress members to do the right thing and stand up for the Planned Parenthood patients in our community and across the country who are counting on those health centers.

Alison Dunfee
Southeast Portland