



“Challenging People to Shape
a Better Future Now”

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Black Unemployment Too High

Even though the unemploy-
ment rate in the United
States is finally beginning to
inch downward, the painful truth
is that African American unem-
ployment continues to remain at a
crisis level. While the overall eco-
nomic forecast appears to be
improving each month for the last
year, the official national unem-
ployment for the first time in more
than two years is at 8.9 percent.

There are more than 13.7 million
unemployed persons in the United
States, as of this month. But,
Black American unemployment
persists in double digits above
15.3 percent. For teenagers in our
communities, the unemployment
rate is more than 40 percent. All
labor surveys show that African
Americans have the highest rate of
unemployment of all groups sur-
veyed. These unemployment per-
centages indicate a dire socioeco-
nomic condition for the African
American community in 2011.

President Barack Obama stated,
“Our top priority right now has to
be creating new jobs and opportu-
nities in a fiercely competitive
world. And this week, we
received very good news on that
front. We learned that the unem-
ployment rate has fallen to its low-
est level in nearly two years as our
economy added another 222,000
private sector jobs last month.”
We agree with the stated priorities
of President Obama. The chal-
lenge, however, for the African
American community is to
increase meaningful and produc-
tive job creation for African
Americans and others ahead of the
current pace of increased employ-

EDUCATION SERVICES

Benjamin F.
Chavis Jr.



ment because of the disproportion-
ate high unemployment in our
community.

Understanding the magnitude of
the problem is important. But just
restating the devastating impact of
high unemployment is not going
to produce the solutions that we
need. Improving the quality of

providing more employment
opportunities for African
Americans and others.

There is a direct relationship
between the entrenched Black
American poverty rates and the
persistent Black American unem-
ployment rates. But, these two
social indicators are also directly
related to the issue of education,
particularly to the issue of a high
quality education for Black
American children. Children in
our communities are three times
likely to be poor as White children
according to the 2010 U.S. Census
Report. More than 40 percent of
African American children are
born in poverty. Economically

the years the Children’s Defense
Fund has led the way in identify-
ing programs and projects that
work in the interests of the proper
development of our children, in
addition to articulating the public
policy interests of all children in
America. Today, with the eco-
nomic challenges of the nation and
calls for severe budget cuts, it
appears that a number of programs
that will affect the quality of life
for children in the United States
may be cut. Thus, the issue of
economic resources that need to be
generated and dedicated to help
remedy these issues is of great
concern.

There will be no easy solutions
going forward. But, one thing is
clear: our long struggle for free-
dom, justice, equality, and
empowerment is not over. While
we have to keep our demands and
pressure on the federal and state
governments for responsible polit-
ical and social policies in the areas
of employment and education, as
well as for child and family devel-
opment, it will be increasingly
important for all of us to find new
and innovative means to take a
greater responsibility for the eco-
nomic development of the African
American community specifically
to ensure that we ourselves do
more to create the businesses,
jobs, schools, and other institu-
tions that we need to improve our
quality of life for our children and
for our future.

*Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. is
Senior Advisor to the Black
Alliance for Educational Options
(BAEO)*

Children in our communities are three times likely to be poor as White children

education in the African American
community is an important factor
to help increase employment
opportunities. Increasing the
establishment of African
American owned businesses is
another key factor in creating new
jobs and economic sustainability
for the African American commu-
nity. Private jobs are now show-
ing the greatest increase in the
overall national employment rate.
Simply put, we need more Black
American entrepreneurs and we
need more businesses to be estab-
lished and owned by Black
Americans so that they can con-
tribute directly to the increase in

impoverished children given an
inadequate education is a formula
not only for acute unemployment,
but it is also a recipe for prolonged
social misery, unjust imprison-
ment and intractable poverty.

I salute the continued efforts and
leadership of Marion Wright
Edelman and the Children’s
Defense Fund to call renewed
national attention to the systemic
problems and challenges concern-
ing African American and other
children. Edelman emphasized,
“We need to revive a policy voice
for children. The cradle-to-prison
pipeline - breaking it up is going to
be the overall framework from
which we move forward.” Over

Could Protests Happen in Washington?

The weeks of angry protest
and heated controversy in
Wisconsin have sparked a
national debate over the role of
public sector unions and whether
mandatory collective bargaining
contributes to massive increases in
spending, rising taxes and chronic
budget deficits. With our state
facing its own \$4.5 billion deficit,
the question naturally arises, could
Wisconsin-style collective bar-
gaining protests happen here? It’s
entirely possible – because
Washington already has the same
kind of collective bargaining sys-
tem in place.

In 2002, majority Democrats in
Olympia passed a sweeping col-
lective bargaining bill and sent it
to Governor Locke for his signa-
ture. It was treated like a routine
civil service law, but it actually
represented a radical shift of
power from the legislature to the
governor’s office. With the stroke
of a pen lawmakers lost control of
over \$2 billion in wages per year,
and a further \$608 million annual-
ly in healthcare, step increases,
cost-of-living raises and other
employee benefit costs. In the
four years after collective bargain-
ing went into effect, state spending
increased 33%.

In Olympia, state operating costs
are now decided in a series of
closed-door meetings between
union executives and governor
appointees. The negotiations are
secret. The public is not allowed

POLICY RESEARCH

Paul Guppy

to know the starting and ending
positions of each side, what is dis-
cussed, the amount of public
money involved, or what conces-
sions each side makes.

No legislative oversight or pub-
lic comments are permitted. The
meetings are not covered by TVW,
and are not subject to the Freedom
of Information Act. Lawmakers

Instead the union agreed to a
small increase of just 3% in how
much state workers contribute.

In addition to collective bargain-
ing, public sector unions are heav-
ily involved in politics. In 2010
public unions spent \$2.7 million
dollars to help elect or defeat can-
didates for state legislative office.
Nationally, unions gave \$171 mil-
lion to political candidates in
2010. “We’re spending big – and
we’re damn happy it’s big,” said
AFSCME’s national president
Gerald McEntee during last fall’s

Unions represent the interests of
their members, but the outcome of
elections determines who repre-
sents the public interest at the
negotiating table. By supporting
or opposing candidates for public
office, unions influence who sits
on both sides of the table. This
conflict of interest was best sum-
marized by an AFSCME district
president; “We have the ability, in
a sense, to elect our own boss.”

Collective bargaining severely
hampers the legislature’s ability to
carry out its normal constitutional
functions. In addition, experience
indicates collective bargaining
contributes to higher labor costs to
the state, especially health care
costs, without necessarily improv-
ing the quality of services deliv-
ered to the public. As some critics
put it, under collective bargaining
the governor bargains and the
unions collect.

Ending Washington’s ten-year
experiment with mandatory col-
lective bargaining would serve the
public interest because it would
return control of state operating
costs to the legislature, restore
constitutional balance with the
executive, and reduce the political
influence of union campaign
spending on public policy.

*Paul Guppy is Vice President for
Research at Washington Policy
Center, a non-partisan independ-
ent policy research organization in
Washington state.*

In the four years after collective bargaining went into effect, state spending increased 33%.

cannot attend negotiating sessions,
offer proposals or participate in
the discussions. They may only
vote up or down, with no amend-
ments, on the final binding agree-
ment.

A dramatic example of how col-
lective bargaining restricts law-
makers’ control over the budget
occurred last November when, to
help solve the budget deficit,
Governor Gregoire asked state
employees to contribute 26% of
the cost of their health coverage, a
level typical in the private sector.
Union executives refused, even
though the governor had been
elected with strong union support.

campaign.

In 2010 one political consulting
firm, Moxie Media, used union
funds to create up to 40 political
action committees to obscure the
source of contributions it made to
state legislative candidates. The
firm’s executives were accused of
using contributions from public-
sector unions and other sources to
create a fake Republican cam-
paign against a Democrat incum-
bent. The political strategy led to
a campaign finance investigation
by the Public Disclosure
Commission and the state
Attorney General.