



**“Challenging People to Shape a Better Future Now”**

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## ‘State of Black America’ Town Hall

**“T**o demonstrate that this Congress is both morally and fiscally responsible, the time to act on job creation is now.” – Members of the Congressional Black Caucus

Mark your calendars. Wednesday, March 7 is the date for one of the most important pre-election events of the year – the release of the National Urban League’s 2012 State of Black America Report. We are urging everyone who can to join us at 7 pm EST on March 7 for our State of Black America free town hall at Howard University in Washington, DC. If you can’t be there in person, you can view the LIVE WEBCAST at [www.iamempowered.com](http://www.iamempowered.com). You can also be a part of the national conversation on Facebook and Twitter (#SOBA 12, #OccupyTheVote).

This year’s State of Black America report and town hall will launch a year-long campaign, “Occupy the Vote to Educate, Employ & Empower.” The National Urban League is encouraged by steadily declining unemployment numbers and the passage last week of an extension of the payroll tax cut and jobless benefits. But, the economic recovery is still lagging far behind in urban America. While, overall unemployment has fallen to 8.3

**TO BE EQUAL**

Marc Morial



percent, the January unemployment rate for African Americans is still unacceptably high at 13.6 percent. The rate for Hispanics, also at double-digits, now stands at 10.7 percent. Clearly, more must

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be done to ensure that our economy’s rising tide lifts all boats.

That is why we are issuing a call for immediate national action around the education and job-training steps necessary to bring jobs back to communities most in need. Any serious discussion of job creation and economic opportunity must offer solutions for the obvious shortcomings of our cur-

rent national approach to education, from early childhood education to adulthood and beyond. A broken national system of education and job training will continue to yield a broken economy.

The National Urban League’s 8-point plan to tackle this problem is designed to spark serious discussion, while also serving as a policy playbook ready for action today. Our plan includes:

1. Fair and equitable school funding for all;
2. Robust early childhood educa-

- tion for each child;
3. Strengthen high schools and re-engage students to prevent dropouts;
4. Robust STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) focused curriculum and programs;
5. Qualified, effective and diverse teachers;
6. Strategic workforce develop-

ment: targeting Americans most in need;

7. New job training models coupled with job placement;
8. Improving and integrating current data systems.

In addition to a fuller discussion of our “Occupy the Vote” campaign, this year’s State of Black America report and town hall will include a discussion of the Equality Index — a statistical analysis of the status of Blacks, Hispanics and Whites. The report will also contain essays by a host of political, business, and community leaders including Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, singer John Legend, Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, entrepreneur and author Steve Stouts, and others with prescriptions for the empowerment and education crisis facing the nation. With new voter ID laws and voting rights under attack, this year’s report is also a clarion call for everyone to “Occupy the Vote” in this important election year. We hope to see you in person, 7 pm, March 7th, at Howard University or online at [www.iamempowered.com](http://www.iamempowered.com). The time to act is now!

*Marc H. Morial is the President and CEO of the National Urban League*

## Obama Closes MBDA Regional Offices

**B**lack Americans continue to stand by President Barack Obama, despite how he and his minions treat us. Nine of every 10 African-American voters have “got the president’s back” but there is still discussion as to whether President Obama has got the backs of Black Americans in return. At this stage of the Obama presidency it is quite obvious how the people running things at the White House view Blacks’ economic betterment.

Representatives of the Obama administration recently told members of Congress that they plan to close all five of the Minority Business Development Agency’s (MBDA) regional offices. Unless something happens, MBDA offices in Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, and New York will close by Sept. 30 and the San Francisco office in March of 2013.

Black Americans would be wise to pay attention to these matters and how they are resolved. House Small Business Committee member Rep. Yvette Clark (D-N.Y.) said that the regional closings “might be the beginning of the demise of the agency.” Rep. Bobby Rush (D-Ill.) said the Obama administration’s actions “sends the wrong message to entrepreneurs and businesses in our community at this time when we need to have an expansion.”

Rush is right. Black Americans should find it unbelievable that the Obama administration would allow programs that are vital to the creation of jobs and infrastructures for minorities to fall or fail. Proponents of minority business development need to step to the fore and demand that instead of downsizing

**BUSINESS EXCHANGE**

William Reed

the MBDA, Obama and his people need to be increasing its reign and clout. The political climate among African Americans should be to not let the only federal agency created specifically to foster the establishment and growth of minority-owned businesses to be

put on the path toward death and dismantlement.

Blacks need for President Obama do more on this current

ment spend more than \$500 billion a year in contracts and has facilities in all 50 states that include 2,500 offices that have “authority to buy.” But, Black-owned businesses have historically been marginalized in federal contracting. Under the nation’s first Black president Black-owned businesses have done no better than they did than they did before, having received a paltry 3.5 percent of federal contracts funded between

February 2009 and November 2010 compared to the 81.3 percent White-owned business enjoyed during that period.

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presidential watch to ensure that all U.S. businesses have a proportionate share of the jobs and opportunities created by federal government. Obama heads the world’s largest purchaser of goods and services. The federal govern-

ment spend more than \$500 billion a year in contracts and has facilities in all 50 states that include 2,500 offices that have “authority to buy.” But, Black-owned businesses have historically been marginalized in federal contracting. Under the nation’s first Black president Black-owned businesses have done no better than they did than they did before, having received a paltry 3.5 percent of federal contracts funded between

During Fiscal Year 2010 there were 64,880 Black-owned firms in the federal procurement database, but just 3,990 of those firms received contract activities. What would be wrong with President Obama showing that he’s on our side? The federal government has an ongoing need for an array of goods and services. Millions of federal government contracts are awarded each year, but minority entrepreneurs continue to be stymied in getting public sector contracting opportunities. To remedy this situation, Obama administration officials need to put more impetus on the MBDA to focus on federal procurement and procedures that will offer Minority Business Enterprises fair and proportional opportunities. Instead of disbanding MBDA, Blacks should petition the president to have the agency do more to help entrepreneurs navigate the federal bureaucracy’s purchasing venues.

Black voters need to take a long hard look to gauge the value officials in the Obama Administration place on Blacks and their businesses. Let’s lift our voices to say: “Instead of disbanding it let’s give the MBDA a broader portfolio” to provide more opportunities for minority businesses; to have ongoing dialogue around issues like how to access to contracts; to offer mentor-protégé opportunities with major corporations and help Black and minority firms compete for large contracts.

*William Reed is head of the Business Exchange Network and available for speaking/seminar projects via the BaileyGroup.org*