



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

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## Are the Unions Opening Their Ranks?

It's no secret that trades unions have not always welcomed people of color. Historically, they acted as gatekeepers, striking tough bargains for their members, but blocking access to construction training and jobs for minorities and women.

As a result generations of people were prevented from entering the trades. And minority communities have been consistently denied opportunities to benefit from government construction projects, even those intended to boost local hiring. That's why last year's stimulus package did very little for minority business.

The Carpenters and Operating Engineers union wants to shed that reputation and remake its image as a friend and even a champion for minorities in construction. As part of that effort, the Carpenters have drawn up a Community Benefits Agreement that recognizes the wrongs of the past by making significant concessions to minority contractors.

The agreement, designed to apply to public works projects, states:

Certified minority and women-owned businesses can use their own employees with no requirements to sign collective bargaining agreements or pay union benefits.

Public works projects should spend 20 percent of construction costs on minority- and

**FROM THE PUBLISHER**

Bernie Foster



women-owned businesses and should aim to expand those businesses.

It also requires public projects to set aside a percentage of project costs for a minority

years, he says. So why should we trust them now?

Well, the Carpenters clearly understand that without the participation and support of Blacks, Latinos and other minorities, unions cannot survive in 21st Century America. Other unions may want to take note. Attempts to crush union power once and for all are even now underway across the country. Unions are battling for survival.

For the Carpenters to take this stand – one that by the way is not popular with some other

businesses. Oregon Department of Transportation, however, is a different story. Figures released in January show that participation for African American contractors declined, from 1.3 percent to 0.09 percent between 2007 and 2010. That's at the same time that state administrators were assuring us they were improving these dismal diversity statistics.

TriMet too could do better when it comes to minority businesses. As an agency that receives federal dollars, it takes equity seriously. But because its marketing contracts lack teeth and hard numbers, minority business partners have no comeback when contractors renege on their commitments to them.

Unions do provide protection for workers as well as the raw strength in numbers bargaining power that small contractors lack. That's a benefit that almost everyone in the construction trades could value. So if the Carpenters union can demonstrate that Black Americans and other minorities will benefit from its clout, everyone will get on board. In the meantime, history is holding us back.

Should other unions follow the Carpenters? Tell us what you think!

### The Carpenters have drawn up a Community Benefits Agreement that recognizes the wrongs of the past by making significant concessions to minority contractors

worker training fund, prioritize apprenticeships that reflect diversity and ensure that contractors and sub-contractors recruit and hire minorities and women.

But to minority contractors the promises in the union proposal still ring hollow. Talk to contracting advocate James Posey and he'll tell you that the agreement is a Trojan Horse whose only purpose is to claw back some of the power unions have lost. Unions have ignored minorities for the last 35 to 40

construction unions – signals a major leap in awareness. Union leaders say they sincerely want to diversify their ranks and become a truly inclusive voice for construction workers. We believe them.

Is this agreement needed? Some government projects – the Sellwood Bridge contract, for example – already include similar conditions. Portland Development Commission contracts seek to deliver 20 percent of project costs to minority and women-owned

You can post your comments on [www.theskanner.com](http://www.theskanner.com)

## Romney's Foot-in-Mouth Disease

Mitt Romney may have made have moved closer to wrapping up the Republican nomination for president on Tuesday but he can't seem to move his foot away from his mouth whenever he goes off script. Throughout this campaign, the former Massachusetts governor has been his worst enemy as he struggles to connect with average voters.

Here are some examples:

April 25, 2011 – In an op-ed in the *Manchester Union Leader*, Romney accused President Obama of going on “one of the biggest peacetime spending binges in American history.”

Simultaneously fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan hardly qualifies as “peacetime.”

April 30 – Speaking at an Americans for Prosperity dinner in Manchester, N.H., Romney said: “Reagan came up with this great thing about the ‘misery index’ and he hung that around Jimmy Carter’s neck. Well, we’re going to have to hang the ‘Obama Misery Index’ around his neck.” Romney continued, “...We’re going to hang him...” After stopping mid-sentence, Romney added, “So to speak – metaphorically. You have to be careful these days.”

Yes, Mitt, you do have to be careful these days. And saying even metaphorically that you want to hang a Black man, in this case the president of the United States, shows appalling insensitivity to

**THE CURRY REPORT**

George E. Curry



this country's long and ugly history of lynching.

June 16 – Speaking to unemployed workers in Tampa, Fla., Romney said, “I am also unem-

“one more indication that Romney and the Republicans on the campaign trail and in Washington have misplaced priorities.”

Dec. 10 – During Sioux City GOP debate: “Rick, I’ll tell you what, 10,000 bucks, \$10,000 bet?”

Oct. 18 – In the GOP debate in Las Vegas, recalling a conversation he had with his lawn-care service that had employed illegal immigrants: “We went to the company and we said, look, you can’t have any illegals working on our property. I’m running for office, for Pete’s sake, I can’t have

average household income of \$49,445.

Feb. 1 – CNN interview: “I’m in this race because I care about Americans. I’m not concerned about the very poor. We have a safety net there. If it needs repair, I’ll fix it. I’m not concerned about the very rich; they’re doing just fine. I’m concerned about the very heart of America, the 90 percent, 95 percent of Americans who right now are struggling.”

Romney made it very clear that he is not John F. Kennedy. And although he professed not to be concerned for the very rich, independent analyses of his tax plan show that’s the group that would most benefit under his proposal.

Comedian Jon Stewart said on his *Daily Show*: “It’s like a doctor going, ‘I’m not concerned about the very healthy, because they’re doing fine, or the very sick because, you know, morphine.’”

Feb. 24 – Speaking in Detroit: “I drive a Mustang and a Chevy pickup. Ann drives a couple of Cadillacs, actually.”

Way to go Mitt. Remind the audience that your wife drives two vehicles that sell for \$35,485-\$54,525 each and that you have two homes, each with its own Cadillac. Working-class people can really relate to that.

Despite Romney’s effort to put his best foot forward, he usually sticks it in his mouth.

### Saying even metaphorically that you want to hang a Black man, in this case the president of the United States, shows appalling insensitivity to this country's long and ugly history of lynching

ployed.”

When you are worth between \$190 million and \$250 million and receive more than \$20 million a year from investments, you don’t have to work.

Aug. 11 – At the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines, Romney said: “Corporations are people, my friend.”

Democratic National Committee Chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz said the comment was

illegals.”

Would it be alright if Romney wasn’t running for office?

Jan. 9 – Speaking at a Chamber of Commerce function in Nashua, N.H.: “I like being able to fire people who provide services to me.”

Jan. 17 – In Greenville, S.C., Romney called the \$370,000 he earned in speaking fees in 2011 “not very much money.” According to the Census Bureau, that’s more than seven times the