

The War on Women Harms Children, Too

In President Barack Obama's State of the Union address, he appealed to our nation's employers to raise wages from the current minimum of \$7.25 an hour to \$10.10 an hour. He has already signed an executive order that requires federal contractors to be paid \$10.10 an hour, an only appropriate move since so many workers on federal contracts are living in poverty.

The plight of federal contract workers at the bottom is especially galling, given that CEOs at the top have no limits in what they can be paid. Many earn more than president Obama's \$400,000 salary. They are awarded contracts by coming up with a minimum bid, which too often means paying people the lowest possible wage.

There are many consequences to workers earning so little money that they often work at a level below the poverty line. The federal government through food stamps, subsidized health care, and a number of other well-deserved benefits subsidizes those with families surviving on low wages. They are also stigmatized



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by receiving government help. Why not pay these folks enough to make it on their own, instead of railing about those who "depend" on the government?

When women with children earn a minimum wage, they are challenged to take care of their children. If there is not affordable childcare, or a family support system, many of these women are desperate to figure out a way to work and find someone to take care of their children. In Henrico County, Va., which is part of the Richmond metropolitan area, 23-year-old Brittney R. Downing admitted her role in the deaths of her two children, aged 3 months and 20 months.

Brittney Downing left her children in a parking lot, inside her vehicle, while she went to work at

a Henrico hotel. Both of her children were killed by heat strokes. She is charged with involuntary manslaughter and can spend as many as 25 years in jail.

Brittney's children are collateral damage in the war against women and minimum wage workers. As President Obama noted in the SOU address, women are the majority of minimum wage workers. All of them aren't teens;

to choose ought to consider the consequences of choices, especially when they aren't supported. Why don't we have a work/family policy that makes child care accessible and affordable? Given these provisions, or a living wage, Brittney Downing may not have found the need to bring her children to work with her, and to keep them in the car.

Some employers provide on-site

dren?

There have been spates of cases where mothers have left their children "home alone." Not all of them have been cases similar to Brittney's, when a woman leaves her children because she has no childcare support system. Some of the cases happen to be women who have walked out to buy a soda or get a stamp. That's likely to be a woman, cooped up with her children, with not enough support to take a break. Other women have left their children "home alone" while they engaged in social activities. While their actions are foolish, the lack of a support system is still quite evident.

There are no excuses for putting a child in danger, or are there? When a woman must work and has no child care, what is she to do? When the research on postpartum depression suggests irrational behavior on the part of some mothers, why are they vilified?

Why don't we have a work/family policy that makes child care accessible and affordable?

many are rearing children. Too many of them don't earn enough to sustain themselves. Brittney Downing's children, Jelani and Jade, died partly because their mother didn't earn enough to put them in an affordable child care program.

Some will say that Brittney Downing should have had better sense than to leave her children in a locked car. I would say that those who value life so much that they rail against a woman's right

childcare, allowing employees with the same challenges that Brittney Downing faced to drop their children off and come back for them at the end of their shifts. While many provide this childcare at a small fee, others are willing to subsidize low-wage workers. These employers are more the exception than the rule. Do they understand their productivity losses when they do not institute policies that are friendly to the work of women who have chil-

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Obama Vows to Help Young Black Men Succeed

President Barack Obama served notice in his State of the Union speech that he intends to make 2014 a year of action on his "opportunity agenda" for all the people of the United States. For millions of Black Americans and others who yearn for a better quality of life, it was refreshing and good to hear President Obama affirm that he would act independently of the Congress, when he can, on issues of minimum wage increase for federal contractors, improving the quality and access to education, job preparation, and



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minimum wage for federal contract workers would be raised to \$10.10 an hour, there was another important, but little-noticed part his address that potentially could have a positive impact on the Black American community. President Obama emphasized, "And I'm reaching out to some of America's leading foundations and corporations on a new initiative to help more young men of color facing especially tough odds stay on track and reach their full potential."

Young Black men in the U.S. are the most disproportionately incarcerated, the victims of homicides, the largest percentage of the unemployed, and represent the highest percentage of high school drop outs. But with the responsive leadership and commitments, allocation of resources, and outreach, encouragement, nurture and care, the negative socioeconomic situation of young Black men can be turned around. President Obama also said, "The bottom line is, Michelle and I want every child to have the same chance this country gave us. But we know our opportunity agenda won't be complete, and too many young people entering the workforce today will see the American Dream as an empty promise, unless we also do more to make sure our economy honors the dignity of work, and hard work pays off for every single American."

In the past, President Obama has been roundly criticized when he spoke candidly about the plight of the Black family. Much was the criticism was because the president seemed to focus Black imperfections while failing to hold up the same mirror to Whites. In that respect, the criticism is understandable.

But even so, the truth is we all must take a greater responsibility for the uplift of all women, men and children in all our com-

munities. It is not just up to the president, governor, mayor or members of congress alone to fix the problems that confront our communities. We must also assume greater and more consistent responsibility for the empowerment of our people.

We are, therefore, pleased that our Historically Black Colleges and Universities

(HBCUs) have stepped up to the plate of self-responsibility on the issue of helping young Black males and have endorsed a remarkably successful pilot effort led by Ronald Mason, President of the Southern University System in Louisiana entitled "Five Fifths Agenda for America."

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innovations in economic development.

After watching suffering disrespect and an all-out attack on him by conservative Republicans, it was way past due time for President Obama to finally stand up to his political opponents. He stated, "After five years of grit and determined effort, the United States is better-positioned for the 21st century than any other nation on Earth. The question for everyone in this chamber, running through every decision we make this year, is whether we are going to help or hinder this progress."

While the national and international media focused on the President Obama's announcement that by executive order, the

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