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Opinion

Throw the Doors of Opportunity Wide Open for Our Youth

"Today's American Dream Act" Offers Path to Good Jobs, Education and Homeownership

These are dark times in Washington. It's no secret that President Trump and his team are working overtime to turn back the clock on our rights and divest from our communities.

If you want to know where the President stands on the welfare of the African American community, look no further than his immoral budget. It eliminates programs that feed hungry kids, support veterans and help families buy their own home.

Republicans are slamming the doors of opportunity for our youth. For people of color, those doors appear to be barricaded, chained and padlocked.

We must resist. We must reverse their damage and prevent them from doing it again.

President Barack Obama led our recovery from the worst economic recession since the Great Depression. Together, we saved our economy and created more than 14 million jobs, more than ten times the number created under the previous President George W. Bush.

But today, we are seeing that jobs are being lost; wages aren't keeping up and bills are piling up. Tragically, my Republican colleagues' solution

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Columnist

is more tax credits for the super-rich.

My solution is different. It's called the "Today's American Dream Act" and will empower families with the security of a good job, a good education, home ownership and access to healthcare.

“For people of color, those doors appear to be barricaded, chained and padlocked

Business leaders, especially in the technology and advanced manufacturing sectors, regularly tell me that they have thousands of open jobs, but don't have the qualified candidates.

For example, Manufacturing Renaissance Chicago reports that there are 15,000 unfilled advanced manufacturing jobs in Chicagoland; these jobs pay an average annual salary of \$70,000.

My bill would help people get the training they need for good-paying jobs by investing

in apprenticeships, training and re-training programs and expanded student aid for career and technical education.

Additionally, my "Community College to Career Fund Act" would partner businesses with community colleges to develop curriculums that turn students into career-ready graduates.

If we used these programs to fill just 10 percent of Chicago's open manufacturing jobs, we'd add \$105 million to our communities each year.

We also need to create more jobs by investing in small

neering-mathematic (STEM) fields.

Right now, STEM jobs are driving our economy and continue to grow. According to the Level Playing Field Institute, there will be 1.4 million new tech jobs by 2020 but 70 percent will be unfilled.

Despite the massive need for qualified computer science professionals, just a quarter of all high schools offer Advanced Placement (AP) computer science classes. Many of these schools aren't in African American communities. In fact, just 13 percent of students who took the AP computer science test were African American or Latino.

It's time to invest in STEM teachers so our young people—Black, White, Latino, Asian American or Native American—can innovate the future! The "Today's American Dream Act" would provide aid to STEM teachers who are dedicated to educating the next generation of Mark Zuckerbergs.

Taken together, the "Today's American Dream Act" will train our young people for the opportunities of today and prepare them for the possibilities of tomorrow. It's time to pass the "Today's American Dream Act" and throw wide the doors of opportunity.

Trump's Proposed Budget Cuts Threaten Civil Rights

Decades of vigilant struggles, sacrifices and civil rights legislation enacted in the 1960s won federal promises to ensure that discrimination is illegal and would not be tolerated. Unfettered access to housing, voting rights, fair credit, public accommodations and more were celebrated as hard-fought victories for Black Americans and people of color. In later years, additional protections were added as amendments to safeguard the rights of the elderly, disabled, and the LGBT community.

Now in 2017, a growing number of interests are openly questioning whether the Trump Administration intends to uphold these laws. More specifically, a series of federal agencies with offices dedicated to civil rights are at risk. Through budget cuts and staff reductions, these agencies will either outright deny or severely limit the ability to challenge discrimination that continues today.

Case in point: the Department of Education's scaling back of civil rights enforcement. Proposed Trump Administration departmental budget cuts will result in the loss of the equivalent of 46, full-time positions. For remaining staff, caseload levels

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will rise.

Commenting on the severity of cuts, Laura Dunn, the executive director of SurvJustice, a DC-based nonprofit that supports legal justice re-

“Proposed budget cuts could hinder civil rights enforcement at the Education Department

cently told Inside Higher Ed, "They know that they can't complete these investigations with such a lean budget and inadequate staffing."

On June 8, Candice Jackson, the Acting Assistant Secretary for the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) issued an internal memo directing all 12 regional Office of Civil Rights (OCR) staff of immediately begin new practices. Per Jackson, the Education Department goal is to swiftly address compliance issues, reach reasonable resolution agreements and encourage voluntary settlements wherever possible. Staff members, who

handle investigations, were advised to clear case backlogs and resolve complaints in a "reasonable time frame."

Education's OCR is charged to prevent, identify, end and remedy discrimination against students. OCR investigates education complaints involving admissions, recruitment, financial aid, academic programs, student treatment and services, vocational education, housing, employment and more. Com-

plaints may be filed by an affected consumer or on behalf of another person or group.

Under the Obama Administration, additional OCR staffing in the Education Department was added to better meet the goal of closing cases within 180 days. In some instances, clearing case backlogs took years, instead of days, to thoroughly investigate and resolve complaints. On June 16, the nonpartisan U.S. Commission on Civil Rights weighed in on proposed cuts and issued a lengthy statement detailing a new two-year, comprehensive assessment of federal

civil rights enforcement. In part the statement read, "The review will examine the degree to which current budgets and staffing levels allow civil rights offices to perform their statutory and regulatory functions."

"The Commission has grave concerns about continuing signals from the current Administration, including the President's proposed budget and statements of Cabinet and senior Administration officials, that the protection and fulfillment of civil rights of all persons will not be appropriately prioritized," continued the Commission statement. "These proposed cuts are particularly troubling in light of Education Secretary Betsy DeVos' repeated refusal in Congressional testimony and other public statements to commit that the Department would enforce federal civil rights laws."

Other agencies that will also be reviewed by the Commission include: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Health and Human Services (HHS), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Justice, Labor, and the Legal Services Corporation.

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