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Opinion

FTC Hindering Black Economic Achievement

The Biden Administration has been pushing hard for credit for its significant economic successes. Coining the phrase ‘Bidenomics,’ the term is meant to direct attention towards the administration’s striking successful economic agenda. Under President Biden, the rate of inflation has been more than cut in half, employers have created more than 13 million jobs, wage growth has outpaced inflation, and the unemployment rate of Black workers is at a record-breaking, historic low. Now, the administration wants the public to give them credit.

Yet, the key to widespread public support is not through grandiose statements or flashy catchphrases. Instead, it is through the ongoing prioritization of policy that enhances the everyday, lived experiences of Americans—especially Black Americans. On this front, the FTC can play a crucial role. The Federal Trade Commission is charged with protecting American consumers from everyday threats permeating the domestic marketplace. Appointed by President Biden, Lina Khan now serves as Chair of the Commission, and she has adopted a unique, ultra-progressive approach to the FTC’s mandate. Soon after assuming leadership, Chair Khan de-prioritized the consumer welfare standard, a time-tested prec-



Julianne Malveaux
NNPA Columnist

edent that puts individual wellbeing at the forefront of any and all policy discussion, deeming it “too narrow.” Instead, the Commission has embraced a broad view of con-

“Soon after assuming leadership, Chair Khan de-prioritized the consumer welfare standard

sumer well-being, focusing on antitrust cases that could theoretically have sweeping, long-term impacts on the economy. We have already witnessed the consequences of a loss of focus on fundamental issues at the FTC. As the Commission focused their energy on theoretical risks rather than real threats posed to consumers, consumer fraud cases soared. From 2021 to 2022, fraud losses increased by over 30%. Last year, alone, consumers lost \$8.8 billion to fraudsters—and Black Americans are disproportionately suffering from the consequences of this tragic phenomenon. According to the FTC’s Serving Communities of Color report, “predominantly Black communities filed consumer

reports at a higher rate than predominantly White or Latino communities.” Beyond that, Black and Latino individuals have reported higher instances of fraud via payment methods that do not have refundable protections. Without a solution from the FTC, they remain at a loss—exacerbating income inequality for consumers already working in marginalized communities. Americans are increasingly turning to gig economy

work to make up for losses to increasing fraud, to keep up with rapid inflation, or simply to gain extra spending money. In fact, Black and Hispanic individuals are most likely to take up gig-work, compromising over half of workers in the industry. Nearly one-third of Hispanic adults have earned money through the gig economy, while over a quarter of African American adults have earned money through these platforms. Despite this trend, Lina Khan has now turned her attention to gig economy workers, with the commission vowing to “use its full authority” to investigate gig companies and worker practices. At an FTC Open Meeting, app-based workers warned the Commission against pursu-

ing unnecessary legislation. Advocacy groups like the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and National LGBT Chamber of Commerce called on the FTC to consider that these apps serve as a resource to members looking empower themselves through another income stream. Yet their pleas went unconsidered, and Khan decided to release a policy statement giving the FTC the power to regulate the American labor market in the form of gig-worker regulation—despite the fact that opposing Commissioners claimed the decision “meanders in and out of our jurisdiction into matters of employment law.” Once again, Khan prioritized her own agenda despite what Americans were telling her they needed on the ground. In the name of individual American wellbeing, this trend cannot continue. The Biden administration claims its goal is to “lower costs and help entrepreneurs and small businesses thrive.” To achieve this, the FTC must recommit to its most fundamental pillar: the consumer welfare standard. This commitment will especially benefit Black Americans, who have become innocent bystanders as foolhardy legislation renders them even more vulnerable at the hands of scammers. When Americans feel the impact of thoughtful policy, they will be vocal in support.

The Security Dilemma: A Spiral of Mistrust

You probably couldn’t have asked for a more thoughtful Chair of the Joint Chiefs than Mark Milley, whose term ends on September 30. He was one of the good guys who repeatedly restrained President Trump from veering into dubious schemes—such as a war of choice with Iran.

But there is also no mistaking that Milley is a general, a military person through and through. From a recent interview in the Princeton Alumni Weekly (Milley graduated from Princeton in 1980): “Milley and others believe that new technologies such as precision-guided munitions, global positioning systems, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, robotics, and hypersonic weapons are already transforming how militaries are trained, supported, and operate, and that the pace will only accelerate. ‘All these technologies are coming at us very, very quickly,’ Milley argues. ‘And we, the United States, need to be on the front side of that curve. We don’t have to be perfect, but we have to be better than our enemy.’” In a world of hypersonic



Winslow Myers
PeaceVoice Columnist

missiles tipped with nuclear warheads, what exactly does it mean to be “better than our enemy”? As Stephen Kinzer argues in an op-ed in *Boston Globe*: “In the coming years, China and its partners will work intensely to strengthen their military power—only to counter American threats, of course. So will the United States and its partners—only to counter Chinese threats. Each side insists that it seeks only to defend itself. Neither believes the other, so both prepare for war. That makes war more likely. “Because this spiral of mistrust is so common, it has a name: the security dilemma. It tells us that steps one country takes to increase its security often provoke rivals to take countersteps. That leads to competition that makes all parties less secure.” The security dilemma puts

generals, no matter how cautious and intelligent, in an ever more impossible position. Is there any other way out except for military officials in opposing camps to openly acknowledge the issue and begin to talk with one another about how to resolve their nations’ conflicts in ways other than mutual suicide? Ultimately, the only way to be “better than our enemy” is to think in a new way: to accept that security is interdependent: mine depends on yours and yours depends on mine. And to accept that the way to rethink global security cannot be through technological competition, which will never end except in a general conflagration. And finally, to turn to the cooperative realization of shared goals: survival and the transformation of energy sources in order to mitigate global climate change. Of the hundreds of scientists who worked under Oppenheimer to develop the first atomic bomb, only one ceased his research and left Los Alamos on moral grounds once it became clear that Hitler had been unable to make a

weapon. His name was Joseph Rotblat. He is not mentioned in the popular film. Rotblat went on to be instrumental in developing the Pugwash Conference, where scientists meet yearly to engage in a frank exchange of ideas—exactly as the militaries of the world’s superpowers ought to be doing. Rotblat was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1995, a half-century after the first nuclear bombs were dropped on Japan. There are technologies necessary to confirm that arms control agreements have not been violated. And it remains crucial to further develop technologies that can help stop the illegal transfer of radioactive materials. But ultimately it is not technological advance, it is only people, like Rotblat or Mikhail Gorbachev, who will enable us to move beyond the security dilemma. I wonder if Mark Milley, ideally along with equivalent military leaders in China or elsewhere, as they lie awake pondering the paradoxes of military force in the nuclear age, will see the flashing “No Exit” sign before it is too late. There is still time, brother.