

National Council of Negro Women

Black Women and Families Agenda for Change

**A Framework for Addressing the Needs of Black Women,
Families, and Communities in the New Presidential
Administration**

A Publication of the Research, Public Policy, and
Information Center for African American Women

2008

About This Report

This report was written by Dr. Avis Jones-DeWeever, Director of NCNW's Research, Public Policy, and Information Center for African American Women. The policy areas of focus contained throughout this document reflect the perspectives of African American women from across the nation as derived through a national on-line survey implemented by NiaPulse Online and through discussions held at The First Annual National Black Women's Town Hall Meeting.

About NCNW and RPPI

The National Council of Negro Women, Inc. (NCNW) is a council of national African American women's organizations and community-based sections. Founded in 1935, the NCNW mission is to lead, develop, and advocate for women of African descent as they support their families and communities. NCNW fulfills this purpose through research, advocacy, and national and community-based services and programs on issues of health, education, and economic empowerment in the United States and Africa. With its 36 national affiliates and more than 240 sections, NCNW is a 501(c)3 organization with an outreach to nearly four million women.

The RPPI Center serves as the research/action arm of NCNW. In this capacity, RPPI conducts rigorous research and implements multiple dissemination strategies in order to inform, catalyze and mobilize women of African descent for change in both the policy arena and throughout the broader cultural dynamic

To learn more about RPPI or to become a member of NCNW, log on to

www.ncnw.org

Introduction

We now stand on the cusp of history. On January 20, 2009, the world will witness the inauguration of the first African American to be elected President of the United States of America. This will truly be an amazing moment to behold. Yet, as this nation makes history, it does so at a time of nearly unprecedented turmoil. The new presidential administration will inherit a country embroiled in two wars and facing an economic crisis that is unlike any we have seen in recent history. Yet as the nation struggles, Black women and families are especially pained. What can be done, in the precarious days ahead, to ensure that the needs of these women and families do not fade into the background? What can be done, to ensure that their voices are heard and their needs are acted upon? This document lays out a policy agenda for change that highlights strategies that we believe to be key for meeting the needs of women and families all across this nation, but particularly those challenges most prevalently faced by African Americans.

Background

In the summer of 2008, the National Council of Negro Women partnered with XM Radio Host, Blanche Williams, in order to hold The First Annual National Black Women's Town Hall Meeting. The purpose of this event was to provide a space to hear, document, and eventually pass on the concerns of Black women to the next Presidential administration. In order to include the perspective of a broad spectrum of Black women, we commissioned a survey implemented by Nia Pulse Online. Our survey findings allowed us the opportunity to gauge the perspectives of Black women all across the nation.

When asked for their perspectives, Black women answered. Most telling was the response we received to the question, "What worry keeps you up at night?" Overwhelmingly, our respondents indicated that they were concerned about their economic well-being. Most often cited was a worry about whether or not they would be able to stay in their homes. Also often cited were concerns about their ability to keep up with the rising cost of basic necessities. Our respondents also indicated that they didn't know how they could continue to meet the costs of everyday needs while also living up to their personal responsibility to save for retirement.

Ultimately, we found that both survey respondents and those women who participated in our Town Hall, had a number of concerns. The issues they discussed ranged from educating their children, to having access to health care, to fairness in the workplace, and achieving peace in their homes. Many of the issues they raised are addressed in this document. Their primary worry, though, aligned most closely with that of men and women all across this nation—concerns surrounding our floundering economy.

Addressing the Needs of Black Women and Families

Tackling the Economy

By just about any measure one can imagine, it can be confidently stated that the American economy is in crisis. Whether it be the 1.9 million jobs lost through November of 2008 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008), the millions who have had their American dream foreclosed upon, or the countless citizens who have witnessed their retirement or college savings drop drastically due to the plummeting stock market, the end result is the same—Americans are hurting. Certainly, stabilizing our economy and getting the nation back on track economically should, without question, be the top priority of the next administration.

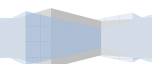
It is important to note, however, that as bad as the economy is overall, for people of color, and for Black women especially, the situation is particularly dire. Black women are critical economic contributors to their families and to this nation as a whole. They exhibit a labor force participation rate that exceeds that of all other women. Yet, Black women's earnings, at every level of education, lags behind that of many of their female counterparts, and behind all men from every racial or ethnic group. A Black woman with a four-year college degree receives earnings only roughly on par with a white man who holds a GED (Williams, 2008). This severe earnings disadvantage makes Black women especially vulnerable to poverty. In spite of their heavy work effort, Black women have the unfortunate distinction of being the demographic group who is most likely to be poor across both race and gender¹. Thus, for Black women particularly, access to not only jobs, but also to fair wages is critical, as is a focus on poverty reduction, if their lives and the lives of their families are to be appreciably better in the days ahead.

In order to address our current economic crisis as well as America's persistent and deepening poverty problem, we put forth the following recommendations:

- **Develop and Pass a Comprehensive Economic Stimulus Package**

It is encouraging to see the President-Elect move swiftly to identify an economic advisory team, and voice support for the passage of an aggressive economic stimulus package as a top priority during his first few days in office. We believe that such bold vision is indeed necessary to meet the level of need this country now faces and will most assuredly face in the days and months ahead. The goals of such a package should be two-fold: (1) to provide a means by which America's suffering families can receive some degree of relief immediately; and (2) to get America working again.

¹ Native American women provide a notable exception in that they are equally as likely as Black women to be poor; however, their labor participation rate is lower than that of Black women.



- **Extend and Expand Unemployment Insurance**

Ideally, the President-Elect's economic stimulus package would include a further extension of unemployment benefits as well as an expansion in the definition of those who qualify for unemployment insurance. Expanding that universe to include part-time workers would be particularly helpful to women, since women are especially likely to work part-time.

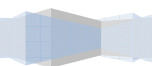
- **Increase Food Stamp Allowances**

Also important is the need to provide an increase in food stamp benefits. We know that such an increase would be prudent not only due to the current increased need, but also because such an action is likely to have a stimulative effect on the economy. Unlike direct cash rebates to upper-income tax-payers, food stamps tend to be utilized immediately in the broader marketplace, and thus could serve as a measured stimulus to the overall American economy.

- **Rebuilding America**

We believe in the President-Elect's stated vision of investing in infrastructural projects throughout the nation and in the development of Green technology in order to promote the growth of a Green economy. We believe that both of these pursuits are vital, and should be targeted in geographic areas that have experienced protracted periods of elevated unemployment rates. We hope too that a special effort will be undertaken immediately to complete the rebuilding of New Orleans as well as other long-devastated areas all along the Gulf Coast. Now, more than three years later, the time is long past due for this nation to live up to its responsibility to make whole those communities that have yet to fully bounce back from the ravages of Katrina.

We understand that investing in infrastructure is not only necessary for getting Americans working again, but also for creating a better nation and a better world for generations to come. Yet, we are concerned that a jobs program which focuses almost exclusively on infrastructure development will be a jobs program that provides employment almost exclusively, in industries that have historically failed to incorporate women in significant numbers. Therefore, we would suggest two things to ensure that women are not, at this critical time, left behind. First, we would suggest that the upcoming stimulus package include funding for job training programs aimed at preparing women for non-traditional work. Training in the trades, the construction industry, and the technology field, particularly as it relates to Green innovation is vital to ensure that women receive their fair share of the opportunities that will be spawned by growth in the areas mentioned above. Secondly, we would strongly urge the administration to include increased funding in the area of child care assistance in the upcoming stimulus. For working mothers especially, job training and job availability together only make up two legs of the three-legged stool that is needed to balance the competing responsibilities associated with motherhood



and employment. Only by having access to affordable, high quality child care will it be possible for mothers to acquire jobs, and then maintain employment consistently over the long-haul. Finally, we would also remind the administration that as movements towards investing in infrastructure projects as well as a Green economy take shape, it is critical to protect advances made through affirmative action so that women and people of color are both fairly represented among those hired as a result of this employment expansion. It is also critical that as we move forward, minority-owned and women-owned firms have the opportunity to effectively compete for those contracts that will be enacted in order to carry out the major initiatives associated with building a better and cleaner America.

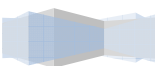
- **Provide Assistance to Struggling States**

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2008), some 43 states now face budget shortfalls. It is imperative that the next administration provide support to struggling states so that their state-level crises don't result in protracted massive cuts to education, Medicaid, and other critical services upon which most citizens rely.

- **Work towards the Goal of Cutting Poverty in Half in Ten Years**

Now more than ever, President-elect Obama must maintain his commitment to work towards the poverty reduction goals he stated while on the campaign trail. Certainly, maintaining this commitment may now be more complicated due to our current economy crisis, but for many Americans, the real crisis is not reflected in declining numbers on 401K statements, but instead, seen in empty pantries, unheated homes, and a wallet that's barren days before the next paycheck arrives.

By all indicators, Americans are suffering. A recent report by the Department of Agriculture found that nearly 700,000 children experienced hunger in the US in 2007. That's up 50% over the previous year, and does not reflect fallout from the current economic downturn. Although collected child-hunger data has not caught up with current reality, it takes no conjuncture to be assured of the fact that families all across America are suffering right now. Food stamp usage is reaching record highs, up in 43 states across the nation; tent cities are popping up across the country, and after a decade of decline, welfare rolls are inching up once again, but this time in the shadow of five-year lifetime limits on cash assistance (Wolfe, 2008; CNN.com, 2008; CBS News.com, 2008). What will become of struggling families who are already at the bottom if in the days ahead, our recession deepens and becomes more protracted? They will need help; now more than ever.



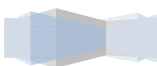
- **Suspend the Lifetime Limit on Cash Assistance**

The next administration should enact an emergency lifting of the lifetime limit on cash assistance for Temporary Assistance to Needy Family (TANF) recipients. When welfare reform was passed in 1996, the nation was in the midst of an economic boom. The move from welfare to work was in large part greased by an economy that was able to absorb additional workers. But now, more than ten years later, and well into our second recession since the passage of TANF, there are countless families who have exhausted their lifetime limit on cash assistance. What have become of those families? Might they make up some of those who took advantage of the Kansas loophole that allowed children of any age to be abandoned? Might they be some of those struggling now in tent cities? While invisible to many, these families do exist. And in an environment of massive job losses, continued instability in the job market, and stretched familial safety-nets due to lost savings, home foreclosures, and other challenges, it is difficult to imagine a situation in which the continuance of a lifetime ban on cash assistance for struggling families could be morally justified.

- **Establish Children’s Savings Accounts for All Newborns**

Perhaps one of the most insidious aspects of poverty is the extent to which it is typically intergenerational in nature. We could break the chain through the establishment of a Trust Fund for Every Child. Based on the U.K. model, we could provide each American child \$500 set aside in a savings account to grow, as that child does, through adulthood. Under this plan, parents would be encouraged to continue saving for their newborn by receiving a partial governmental match for their contributions. Though it would be easy to ignore this proposal given our current economic crunch, to do so would shortchange a generation who so desperately needs an extra boost given the financial crises their parents now face; many of whom, may never fully recover.

According to research by the Aspen Institute (2007), if enacted, a plan such as this would require an initial public investment of \$2.1 billion, and a total of \$26.6 billion over ten years. At modest growth, and with parental contributions of only \$50 per month, along with a governmental match of \$25 per month, by the age of 18, a young adult would have roughly \$16,000 at their disposal that they could use towards a college education, to start a business, or to put towards a down-payment on a first home. The above stated costs assume universality. If such a program were to be means-tested, say limited to households earning less than \$200,000 per year, then the cost would be somewhat reduced. In the end, such a program could both motivate more Americans to save, while also providing the next generation a financial foundation upon which they could start their adult lives.



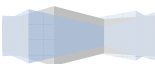
Addressing the Housing Debacle

As we look to turn the corner on America's significant economic downturn, it is imperative that we not only focus on job creation and fully confront and counteract the nation's poverty problem, but we must also swiftly move towards a solution to our ever-deepening foreclosure crisis. Currently, we are on pace in this year alone, to witness three million families lose their homes to foreclosure. And according to Credit Suisse, within the next four years, another eight to ten million families could have their homes foreclosed upon as well (CNBC.com, 2008). We simply cannot continue along this same path and expect the return of stability, and eventual growth, to this nation's economy as well as to other economies around the world. The next administration must aggressively address this crisis if we are to pull out of the dangerous spiral that sent markets tumbling to record depths both domestically and around the world.

Black women and families have been especially damaged by the foreclosure debacle. According to a study by the Consumer Federation of America (2005), Black women were the demographic group most robustly impacted by subprime lenders. In fact, they found stunningly that overall, Black women were some 256% more likely to receive subprime purchase mortgages than white men. Upper income Black women were most likely to befall this fate as they were nearly five times more likely than their white male counterpart to have received a subprime loan. As foreclosures mount, Black women and families have found themselves especially likely to see their primary avenue towards wealth acquisition vanish right before their eyes (Jones-DeWeever, 2008). The cost to them and their future generations have been devastating. Some have suggested that this debacle will cause the greatest loss of Black wealth since Reconstruction, with the total losses being somewhere between \$71 and \$122 billion (Carr, 2008; Rivera, 2008). That's billions of dollars that Black families will not have to pass down to the next generation; billions of dollars that Black families will not be able to tap into to fund college tuitions; billions of dollars that Black parents will not be able to access to help adult children put a down payment on their American dreams. This crisis must be stopped. But further, these families should not be wrongfully blamed for our current state. Instead, they should be provided with the necessary tools to rebuild their lives and grow wealth once again. Below are our recommendations for helping these and other families, find a way back home.

- **Enact Six Month Moratorium on Home Foreclosures, Mandate Loan Modifications**

It is impossible to imagine a scenario that would lead to the stabilization of markets domestically and around the world until we aggressively tackle and reverse America's foreclosure crisis. That means not only enacting a moratorium on home foreclosures but also, mandating the modification of loans, particularly those that carry predatory features. Only by keeping Americans in their homes, and thereby stabilizing neighborhoods and eventually increasing home values, can we even begin to expect to see significant improvements in the areas of housing market stabilization and growth.



- **Change Bankruptcy Law**

We must change unjust bankruptcy law that currently precludes the ability of homeowners to renegotiate the terms of their primary residence. As it stands now, individuals who own multiple homes, yachts, or other major luxuries, have the right to renegotiate the terms of the loans on their excess properties in case of financial distress. However, homeowners who live in their only home do not have the same right that their wealthier counterparts enjoy. Allowing working families to stay in their homes and avoid getting tossed out in the street in case of bankruptcy not only helps the stability and well-being of those individual families, it also helps their entire neighborhood. Each foreclosed upon home significantly deflates the value of surrounding homes. It also serves as a visual blight on the community if the property remains unkempt for a lengthy period of time, and could, in fact, become a draw for illegal or unsafe activity.

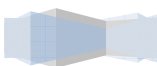
- **Make Housing Affordable and Accessible**

Under the next administration, we should invest significantly in our rental assistance program, thereby expanding access to vouchers in order to help vulnerable families secure stable, affordable housing. In addition, The Bring America Home Act should be reintroduced and passed. This comprehensive legislation focuses on increasing housing security, income security, health security, and civil rights, so as to provide a comprehensive approach towards addressing the housing needs of America's impoverished citizens.

Helping America's Working Families

As a nation, our greatest strength is our families. Yet, probably now more than ever, working parents are struggling with the demands of adequately managing responsibilities at work while also being the best parent they can be at home. Perhaps more than anyone, African American women understand this dilemma. They have the highest labor force participation rate of all women in the United States, and as such, are critical financial contributors to the economic well-being of African American families. Yet, a disproportionate number are clustered in low-wage jobs that often lack the flexibility needed in order to maximize potential, both as parents and as wage-earners.

African American women, though, are not alone in their need for greater flexibility. Some 92 percent of all American workers say they don't have enough workplace flexibility to meet the needs of their children and family (Workplace Flexibility 2010, 2006). This lack of flexibility ultimately results in parents making tough choices between what they know they should do to promote the healthy development of their children, and what they feel they must do in order to maintain the jobs their families rely upon for meeting the expenses associated with the



necessities of life. Put in this position, far too often our children end up paying the price. Roughly three-quarters of all working parents indicate that they can't rely on having the flexibility at work that they need to be able to take time off to meet with their child's teacher or learning specialist (Workplace Flexibility 2010, 2006). And some 86 million workers across the nation go without workplace policies that guarantee short-term time off for the purpose of caring for an ill child (MultiState Working Families Consortium, 2007). American families deserve better. They should not have to sacrifice the health and educational development of their children for a paycheck. And those who make the choice to put their children first should not be penalized by having their jobs put in peril. They deserve better, their children deserve better, this nation deserves better.

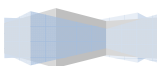
Below we have stated a variety of suggestions to help America's families meet the wide range of critical needs that they face. From ensuring the safe and quality care of infants, to meeting the educational needs of older children, and looking out for the long-term comfort and security of our elders, it is certainly true that America's families struggle. Here's what we believe an Obama Administration could do to help make their daily plight, just a little easier.

- **Make Quality Child Care Affordable for Working Families**

Child care costs are one of the leading expenses for parents of preschool children. Poor families are especially impacted as they spend a higher proportion of their earnings on child care than do more affluent families. As it stands now, only one in seven children eligible for child care assistance actually receive it (NWLC, 2008). To help reduce this substantial cost to working families, we must fully fund child care assistance and provide universal pre-school education so that all of America's children will enter Kindergarten with the grounding necessary to excel in school today and in adult life tomorrow.

- **Provide a Quality Education to All Children**

There are few issues that are more central to the concerns and future of Black families than is the issue of access to quality education. Now more than fifty years after the passage of Brown v. Board of Education, separate and unequal education remains the practical reality in the lives of far too many children. An Obama administration should address this continued disparity by fully funding No Child Left Behind, and by amending the program so as to lessen its sole reliance on high-stakes testing as the one and only measure of progress which schools can demonstrate. It is this sole reliance on testing outcomes that some believe have provided an incentive for schools to push out the very students who may be in need of the most help, while lower-performing schools are left to make do with fewer resources, even when charged with the task of servicing children who have among the greatest needs.



- **Mandate Paid Family and Medical Leave**

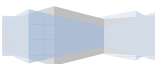
Nearly half of American workers fail to have access to even one day of paid sick leave. Women, and African American women in particular, are more likely than most, to find themselves employed in positions that offer no sick leave for either themselves or to be used to take care of a sick child. Many end up in the unenviable position of making the hard choice between fulfilling the demands of their employers while delaying the needs of their child or living up to their parental responsibilities, but possibly putting their jobs in jeopardy. We believe it's time for such heart-wrenching dilemmas to end. The time has come for each American worker to be guaranteed a minimum of seven paid sick days and for families to have access to paid extended Family and Medical Leave, so that all families will have the means to be home when their families need them most.

- **Preserve and Protect Social Security**

Given the recent downturn in the stock market, the overall importance of protecting Social Security dollars from unnecessary risk becomes incredibly apparent. Preserving and protecting this program is an issue that is particularly important to African American women. Over 60% of Black women 65 or older would live below the poverty line if it were not for social security (Rockey Moore, 2001). Thus, the new administration must take steps to ensure the program's solvency in the years ahead, and to do so in a safe, and low-risk environment that does not put the life-line of our seniors at risk through the auspices of privatization.

Improving the Health of Black Women and Families

This nation faces nothing short of a health care disaster. As costs spiral out of control, millions of Americans routinely go without health insurance or find themselves severely under-insured. As a result, far too many typically go without care, or put off routine examinations—or perhaps even not-so-routine ones—so as to avoid the accompanying sticker-shot that comes along with a visit to a health care provider. The result? Delayed care that ends up being much more expensive and much less successful than would have been the case, if only health care was readily available to all. This nation needs no more deaths like that of 12 year-old Deamonte Driver, a homeless child who died in the nation's capital after an infection from an untreated abscessed tooth eventually spread to his brain (Washington Post, 2007). Instead, we owe it to Deamonte and the countless others like him who received care much too late, to find a way to provide access to quality care to every single American, so that such tragedies will soon become an old, ugly, relic of this nation's past.



- **Provide Health Care to the Millions Who Go Without**

Access to health care is a critical issue faced by every American family. Today, some forty-six million Americans remain uninsured. Many more are under-insured and find themselves like millions of others, only one injury or serious illness away from financial ruin or finding themselves forced to make survival or quality of life decisions based not on what's best, but instead, on issues of affordability and accessibility as defined by insurance company gatekeepers. This must end. We look forward to the President-Elect immediately signing legislation to expand the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), so that more of America's children are assured access to the health care that they need. After which, we look forward to fulfilling the promise of making health care more affordable and accessible to all over the course of President-Elect Obama's first term.

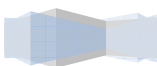
- **Ensure Quality Care for All**

Having access to health insurance is simply not enough for the African American community. Perhaps even more critically needed is access to *quality* care. Research conducted by the Institute of Medicine has found that people of color receive lower quality healthcare across a wide array of diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, mental health, and other chronic and infectious diseases, and clinical services (IOM, 2002). Such disparities are said to account for higher mortality rates among people of color whom do not receive the same clinical services as their white counterparts. Black women specifically, were found to have received the "poorest of the poor" care when compared to all other demographic groups. Such insidious disparities in quality of care must end. Every human life deserves the same respect and level of services, especially within the bounds of a clinical setting.

- **Aggressively Address the HIV/AIDS Crisis Within the Black Community and Among Black Women Specifically**

Although African Americans make up only about 13 percent of the U. S. population, they account for nearly half of all new HIV infections in this nation. Black women and girls especially, have found themselves within the crosshairs of this disease. They account for fully two-thirds of all new cases diagnosed among females aged 13 and older. As a result, among women and girls, Blacks are far and away the group most devastatingly affected by this disease. In fact, their rate of infection is fully 21 times that of their white female counterparts. (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2008).

In recent years, the US has become a world-leader in fighting the HIV/AIDS crisis around the globe. Between 2005 and 2008, America's global fight against AIDS received annual double-digit increases. However, during that same time-period, funding for combating this disease domestically failed to even keep pace with inflation (Black Aids Institute, 2008). Though our



international efforts are admirable and still direly needed, also critical is the need to expand that work to include a more aggressive attack on the disease right here at home with a focus on the Black community and particularly among Black women and girls. We stand with the Black AIDS Institute's call for the development and implementation of a National AIDS Strategy and for more aggressive funding of efforts to fight the disease among African Americans specifically.

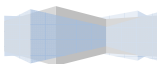
- **Continue the Fight Against Domestic Violence**

Like all other women, far too many Black women endure the burden of domestic violence in their daily lives. We applaud Vice-President-Elect Biden for his leadership in the development and passage of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Moving forward, we would expect that in an Obama-Biden Administration, VAWA will be protected, fully funded, and expanded where appropriate to maximize the safety of all women within the US.

We also urge this administration to push Congress to fund states for costs related to the implementation of the Family Violence Option (FVO) under TANF legislation. As it stands now, states have the option of providing protections for women and children within the welfare system whom experience violence at home. However, states have never received any funding specifically related to the implementation of this option (Spatz, Katz, and Rees, 2005). We understand that at a time of budget shortfalls, states have to make tough funding decisions and we are concerned that this critically important aspect of welfare reform might fall victim to the budget ax. Thus, we urge the Obama administration to push for the full funding of the Family Violence Option. We would also remind the administration that as it stands today, FVO remains only an "option." As such, not all states provide this protection for women and families. We firmly believe that protection against domestic violence should not be an option. Therefore, we urge the Obama administration to push for a fully-funded family violence mandate to ensure the protection of this especially vulnerable population.

Protecting the Rights of Every American

For over two decades now, we have seen significant retrenchment in the area of Civil Rights. As both women and African Americans, we understand, perhaps better than most, the importance of making sure that the rights of every American citizen are protected. As such, we urge the new Administration to boldly protect and advance the ideals of fairness and justice throughout all aspects of life. As such, we would expect aggressive civil rights enforcement, and proactive action to address particularly egregious retrenchments experienced in recent years.



- **Pass the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and the Paycheck Fairness Act**

Within the first 100 days, send the message that workplace discrimination will not be tolerated under an Obama administration. Take the opportunity to sign into law the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and the Paycheck Fairness Act so that government can take more proactive steps to prevent wage discrimination, and so workers whom have suffered unfair treatment will have the opportunity to pursue recourse without being sidelined by a time limit on justice.

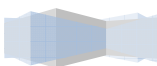
- **Revise Fair Labor Standards Regulations to Include Home Health Care Workers**

In 2007, the Supreme Court found unanimously that home healthcare workers were not entitled to the federal minimum wage or overtime pay. This ruling was said to be in accordance with revisions made to the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1974 which were meant to exclude baby sitters and companions of the elderly and those with illnesses. Having these standards interpreted to include the modern-day home health care industry is just plain wrong. The previous labor standards adjustments were made to take into account the prevalence of friend and family care-giving situations. Clearly home health care aides are professionals working within a traditional employee/employer dynamic. It is critical that the very strenuous and difficult work that they provide be recognized as the profession that it is, and that these workers be paid fairly for their labor.

Black women make up a disproportionate number of home health care workers. Given the predisposition for having Black women's labor severely undervalued in the marketplace, the recent Supreme Court ruling in effect sentences these professionals to a lifetime of being among the working poor. We see this as not only an employment issue, but as an issue of justice. In the new administration, we would expect this injustice to be rectified, so that these women can finally be fairly compensated for the critically important service that they provide—a service that will only become increasingly necessary as more and more baby-boomers reach retirement age and beyond (Smith and Baughman, 2007).

- **Enforce Civil Rights Laws Through a Refocused Justice Department**

Under the Bush administration, Justice Department enforcement of civil rights law declined significantly (TRAC Reports, 2004). This decline took place during a period in which illegal hiring procedures were routinely implemented by the Department. These procedures resulted in the basing of hiring decisions on ideological stance rather than qualifications, knowledge of, or experience in civil rights law (CBS News.com, 2008). As a result, the personnel make-up of the Justice Department was severely altered. Given this situation, the dearth of civil rights cases brought by Justice under the Bush administration should come as no surprise. Yet, the repercussions from these illegal acts remain. Civil rights violations have gone largely unchecked



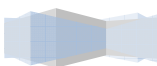
over the course of the past several years. In order to significantly change the course, and thereby protect the rights of all of America's citizens, it is vital that the next administration conduct a review of those hired under what we now know to be a flawed and illegal process, and require those individuals to reapply for their positions. Simultaneously, an aggressive hiring effort should take place resulting in the full staffing of the Justice Department with individuals who have the ability and background necessary to pursue and enforce civil rights cases to the full extent of the law.

- **Protect and Defend Affirmative Action**

Though we have made significant advances in recent years, this is a nation that still very much struggles with issues of race and gender. As the world acknowledges the historic nature of the new administration, it is important that we all remember that the success of a truly groundbreaking campaign is not tantamount to the end of racial discrimination in America. For far too many, barriers still remain. Yet, in recent years, affirmative action has been under attack through ballot initiatives across the nation. Some voters have been confused by ballot initiative language that sounds as if it protects civil rights, when the end-result actually entails its retrenchment, particularly with regards to the gains made through affirmative action in creating more diverse working and educational environments. We would urge the incoming administration to be unequivocal in its support of affirmative action. Work to maintain the policy and where appropriate, strengthen it, so that this nation can continue the progress that it only embarked upon in earnest within the past forty years.

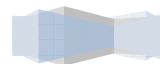
Conclusion

The African American community is filled with pride at the prospect of witnessing the first African American sworn in as President of the United States. Though countless men and women have worked diligently, sacrificed for, fought for, and even died for the changes in this nation that we now see evidenced in this historic election, we know that the work is not done. The needs are great, and the circumstances are challenging; but we can all pull together in conjunction with the new administration to ensure that we continue along the path of making this nation the beacon of hope and opportunity it was envisioned to be. We, at the National Council of Negro Women, look forward to doing our part to make sure that this vision, will one day, become a reality.



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