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Jobs Now!

By John Wojcik

Responding to growing demands to address the unemployment crisis, Congressional Democrats have indicated legislation for a new jobs bill is currently under consideration, possibly by year's end. A jobs conference was recently held in New York City and on Nov. 17, civil rights and labor leaders at a Washington press conference, streamed live over the Internet, called for urgent measures to address the crisis.

Leaders of the AFL-CIO, NAACP, La Raza, Leadership Council on Civil Rights and Center for Community Change projected a 5-point agenda to address the jobless crisis, demanding:

- an extension of the unemployment benefits lifeline for millions;
- the commitment of hundreds of millions in federal dollars to rebuild America's schools, roads and infrastructure, including "green" jobs in alternative energy and energy conservation fields;
- massive aid to state and local governments to maintain vital services;
- the direct creation of federally funded jobs in the "hardest hit communities," both in minority and other communities that have been devastated;
- the use of remaining TARP (bank bailout) funds to get credit flowing to small and medium



businesses that would be a direct help to Main Street, rather than Wall Street.

Before the press conference, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka spoke before a House caucus. Politico.com writes "Many rank-and-file Democrats are eager for action, as evidenced by the emotions Monday night, when Trumka and liberal economist and writer Robert Kuttner ap-

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peared before the caucus."

The Democratic Steering and Policy committee discussed job creation options. House Speaker Pelosi indicated she hopes to see legislation by the end of the year. Democrats are reluctant to call possible jobs legislation a "second stimulus."

"I wouldn't characterize it as a second stimu-

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lus,” House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer told the media. “I don’t want to be as broad as that, I want it to be very targeted on jobs.”

Press reports indicate the legislation will have several dimensions.

The White House is holding a jobs summit in December. Benjamin Jealous criticized a recent New York Times article suggesting the civil rights group was pressuring the White House. Jealous objected “the president gets it.” The problem, he said, lies with some in Congress.

“People don’t want to hear that they have to wait for a rejuvenated finance industry or for something else to create jobs somewhere down the line. They need action now, and it has to get from Wall Street, not just down to Main Street, but all the way to Back Street,” he said, calling the long-term jobs crisis in the African American community a “canary in the great American coal mine.”

Trumka said the president’s stimulus plan “saved or created 1 million jobs.” But, he said,

“The depth of the crisis demands that we do more before more people lose their homes, their health care and their hope.” He also called for the passage of the Employee Free Choice Act as a way to make sure good jobs are created through collective bargaining.

Joblessness is an American problem, he said, urging unity on the economic fight.

Janet Murguia, president of the National Council of La Raza, focused like a laser beam on why, in the interests of all workers, there must be a special effort at targeting job creation in the hardest hit minority communities.

“Bold federal action is needed in the hardest hit communities to relieve the pain and suffering there but also to keep the pain and suffering from spreading everywhere else, which it is doing now and which it will continue to do if we don’t get targeted relief to the hardest hit,” she said.



John Wojcik is labor editor of the PW.

Children go hungry in America

By PW Editorial Board

Children go hungry throughout the United States, the richest country in the world.

What is it about capitalism - or the so-called “free enterprise” system - that it does not fulfill such a basic need: adequate food?

The Department of Agriculture has reported that close to 50 million people in the U.S. are going hungry, the highest number since the agency began tracking what it calls “food insecurity” in 1995. “Food insecurity” is government-speak for empty bellies. The term comes out of the Reagan administration’s denial of the existence of hunger in America.

The report is based on 2008 data when unemployment hovered at 7 percent. Today’s 10.2 percent joblessness points to an increasing hunger crisis.

Although, the USDA report did not use the term hunger, President Obama did, calling hunger “particularly troubling” as it relates to children. He called for ending child hunger by 2015, and rightly stressed the need for jobs.

We might add that a union job is known as

the best anti-poverty measure, and that one more day of hunger is one day too many.

Predictably, Blacks and Latinos suffer the highest percentages, with 26 and 27 percent, respectively, going to bed with empty stomachs. Single mothers and their children are the greatest victims of the crisis.

Rising food prices are another big factor. As with oil prices, food price increases are being spurred by Wall Street commodity speculators seeking quick and high profits. That has helped send supermarket prices soaring. And guess what? Family-run farms never see those profits. They get divvied up among speculators, investment firms and food conglomerates.

This Thanksgiving we can be thankful for a president, who for the first time in 30 years, has called it hunger and is committed to stop it. We can also be thankful for the union, civil rights and community leaders and organizations who are increasingly calling on the White House and Congress for action to create good, green jobs, including public works programs.



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Rome food summit is a flop

By W. T. Whitney Jr.

There was little good news for the world's billion hungry people at the UN World Food Organization (FAO) Summit held November 16 - 18 in Rome. FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf told reporters afterwards that, "There are declarations, promises, and indications for action, but no action."

Opening the summit in the midst of a hunger strike, Diouf knew that among leaders of wealthy G-8 nations, only Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi would be attending. His office was only blocks away.

The Summit turned down a UN recommendation that rich northern nations set aside \$44 billion annually for agricultural aid, directed primarily at small farmers. Nor did the Summit agree to a goal of removing world hunger by 2025. Observers now see UN Millennium Development Goal of halving the world's hungry by 2015 as a distant dream.

Diouf drew attention to the \$365 billion rich nations annually award their own industrialized farmers, the worldwide total of \$1,340 billion in annual military expenditures, and trillions of dollars allocated for economic stimulation.

The summit produced a bland declaration calling for coordination, improved distribution of resources, direct aid for vulnerable populations, and "rural sustainability," all suggestive of a "Baroque [and] bureaucratic" mindset," according to the Mexican daily La Jornada.

Addressing the summit, Pope Benedict XVI condemned egotism and food speculation.

Among the representatives of 93 nations and multiple NGOs on hand were Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and President Fernando Lugo of Paraguay.

Speaking to reporters, Lula noted that "For some countries, hunger is invisible." Lugo drew



attention to the paradox of multinational agricultural corporations increasing production and profits, while hunger rises. He castigated the United States and European Union "where amassers of money have profited, distorting markets and affecting thousands of family businesses in the South, now collapsed."

Heading Cuba's delegation, Agricultural Minister Ulises Rosales del Toro, blamed developed nations for food shortages despite ample world food production, because "they imposed trade liberalization among clearly unequal actors."

Heading the U.S. delegation, acting USAID Administrator Alonzo Fulgham reiterated U.S. intentions to double international aid for sustainable agriculture. That pledge was instrumental in persuading the G-8 nations recently to deliver \$22 billion over three years for food aid. Washington, however, requires that funding be channeled through the World Bank with donor nations designating the recipients.

Hunger in the United States apparently was not on the Rome agenda. As the summit opened, the U.S. Department of Agriculture said 14.6 percent of U. S. households in 2008 "had difficulty putting enough food on the table at times."

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LOCAL NEWS

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Texans say health care can't wait

By Jim Lane

The Texas AFL-CIO initiated a statewide rally for health care reform at the state capitol for November 14. They quickly picked up co-sponsorship from dozens of progressive organizations. Their main speaker was popular Congressman Lloyd Doggett. He gave an energizing report on events leading up to the successful House vote on Nov. 7 and called for the rally goers to focus on winning over the rest of Texas. He specifically dismissed the idea of trying to convert Texas' two hard-headed right-wing Republican Senators, Cornyn and Hutchinson, in favor of building support among the people throughout the state.

State Rep. Elliott Naishtat, whose district includes the capitol, also called for an energetic program of outreach. He lamented Texas' shameful last-place standing in health care coverage for its citizens and children. "I'm angry about the state of health care in Texas and the U.S., and I know that you are, too," he said. "Isn't it time for Congress to act?"

Not all the speakers were popular politicians. They were union activists and workers from all aspects of Texas society. Margarita Alvarez, a mother of 8 from Dallas, was easily the most popular speaker. Blasting away in Spanish, she reminded the crowd that solidarity is not just a word, "It is an action!" she declared. Her call for unity resonated with everyone, especially the mistress of ceremonies, AFL-CIO Vice President Emeritus Linda Chavez-Thompson of San Antonio.

Alto oficial renuncia por la guerra en Afganistán

Por Susan Webb

El asesor sobre asuntos exteriores del vicepresidente Joe Biden se reunió esta semana con un oficial del Servicio Diplomático de Estados Unidos que renunció su puesto en Afganistán, el mes pasado, porque dice que perdió fe en las razones de la guerra, de acuerdo a un artículo en el diario capitalino The Washington Post.

Lo que hizo Matthew Hoh, un ex capitán en la Infantería de Marina con una carrera ejemplar de combate en Irak, después en el Pentágono y en puestos civiles en el departamento de Estado, fue reportado extensamente en el artículo del 27 de octubre escrito por Karen DeYoung.

Hoh fue el oficial civil de más alto rango en la provincia de Zabul en Afganistán, considerada como un centro de los talibanes.

Hoh dijo que tenía "dubios y reservas sobre nuestra estrategia actual y la futura estrategia planeada", en una carta escrita el 10 de septiembre a Nancy Powell, jefa del Servicio Diplomático. "Mi renuncia no está basada en como estamos haciendo la guerra, sino por qué y para qué fin".

Simplificándolo, él escribió, "Yo no veo el valor de continua pérdidas estadounidenses o gastos de recursos para apoyar un gobierno afgano en lo que verdaderamente es una guerra civil de 35 años".

La presencia militar estadoun-

idense y de la OTAN anima a la insurgencia afgana, dijo el ex oficial.

"No soy un jipi pacifista, fumando marihuana que quiere que todo el mundo se quiera", Hoh le dijo a DeYoung. "Hay mucha gente que necesitan que los maten", dijo hablando de Al Qaeda y los talibanes. "Yo nunca estuve más contento que cuando nuestra gente en Irak mataba a un grupo".

Hoh es el primer oficial estadounidense que renuncia como protesta en contra de la guerra en Afganistán, dijo el Washington Post.

Después de escribir su carta, el embajador estadounidense Karl Eikenberry le ofreció un puesto alto en la Embajada en Kabul. También lo enviaron a Washington para reunirse con el presidente Obama y su enviado especial a la región, Richard Holbrooke.

"Tomamos esta carta muy seriamente, porque él es un buen oficial", Holbrooke le dijo al Washington Post. "Todos pensamos que dado la seriedad de su carta, el compromiso que tiene, y su historial que debemos hacerle caso". Holbrooke fue él que le ofreció la nueva posición, pero Hoh la rechazó.

En octubre hubieron 55 muertes de soldados estadounidense, el más alto en toda la guerra. Actualmente, el gobierno de Estados Unidos tiene desplegado a 66 mil soldados en Afganistán, además de otras tropas de los países de la OTAN.

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