



**National
Urban League**

**To Be Equal #2
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More Credit and More Challenges on Jobs for Obama**

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"The good news is that in 2014 people were increasingly finding jobs. The bad news is that we are still digging our way out of the recession, and wage growth remains stagnant and untouched by recovery." - Elise Gould, Economic Policy Institute, Senior Economist

The country's most popular monthly economic scorecard was released last week with promising results - and mixed messages.

On Friday, January 9, the Department of Labor released the latest jobs report, which showed that the U.S. economy added 252,000 jobs in December. This surpassed analyst projections of 240,000 and brought the nation's unemployment rate down to 5.6% - now at its lowest level since 2008 after 11 straight months of job growth.

Overall, the nation's economy is in its best shape - with consumer confidence at a high - since the 2009 recession, and December marked the best year for the U.S. labor market since 1999. Expectedly, politicians have been quick to take note - and to also attempt to take credit. Before the release of the jobs report, in a pitch for the influence of the new Republican majority in Congress on the nation's improving economy, Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said, "After so many years of sluggish growth, we're finally starting to see some economic data that can provide a glimmer of hope. The uptick appears to coincide with the biggest political change of the Obama Administration's long tenure in Washington: the expectation of a new Republican Congress."

This correlation may be politically expedient, but as it adds to good political theater, it also lacks fair acknowledgment of the actions and policies that have helped contribute to the recovery. With less than a week of legislating under the collective belts of the new Republican majority in Congress, and the track record of its predecessors as the second least productive Congress in modern history, who can take credit for this "glimmer of hope"?

Jason Furman, Chairman of the White House Council of Economic Advisers, highlighted the Obama Administration's achievements in the wake of the report's release, including

increasing access to community college, supporting recovery in housing and investing in U.S. manufacturing. I would also point to the President's economic stimulus plan, known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which leading economists agree helped boost the economy; bail-out of the finance and automobile industries; and passing of the Affordable Care Act, which increased health coverage for millions of Americans as well as thousands of jobs in the health care industry. While we absolutely know that there are many factors impacting the nation's economy, we cannot deny the role the current Administration has had in its resurgence.

Still, while the National Urban League celebrates the progress that has been made in our nation's steady climb to economic recovery, we also remain committed to narrowing the job and opportunity gap that finds the African American and Latino communities benefiting from the recovery at disproportionately lower rates than their white counterparts.

As we take a deeper dive into the numbers, we continue to see problems. Earnings is down, with average hourly earnings falling by five cents in December, after an increase of six cents in November. Furman conceded the wage decrease was a weakness in the jobs report, saying "Although earnings rose in 2014 as a whole, the December decline in earnings is a reminder that more progress is still needed to overcome the decades-long challenge in this area that preceded the crisis."

Perhaps most concerning is that when we look at unemployment for African Americans and Latinos, it remains high at 10.4% and 6.5% respectively, compared to 4.8% white unemployment.

As a nation, we can help remedy high joblessness within all of our communities with bipartisan policies focused on job creation, such as a transportation infrastructure initiative. Our country is riddled with broken bridges, roads and railways. We can put people to work fixing our deteriorating infrastructure and then keep them working by maintaining it. We can pass a jobs bill and an infrastructure bill that includes education and job-training components that target the needs of millions who are unemployed or under-employed and face multiple barriers to employment. The problem of joblessness and the pervasiveness of the opportunity gap and its disparities are not dilemmas that conclude at the borders of Black and Brown communities. These disparities hold back the whole economy. When we invest in our most vulnerable communities, we invest in strengthening our entire economy and nation.

While the improving jobs picture is to be applauded, more than eight million people in our country are unemployed, and no matter what the political affiliation, we should never forget that there is more work left to be done - and that we must do it together. As the new Congress gets underway, I remain hopeful that those we have elected will begin 2015 by leaving the political rhetoric behind and keeping the interests of all Americans at the forefront.

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