BUSINESS

Joint Center Concerned About Black Employment

By Stacy M. Brown WI Senior Writer

America's hiring practices are as racist as ever, says a team of researchers at Northwestern University, Harvard, and the Institute for Social Research in Norway.

In their findings released in June, the researchers said they made the determination after looking at every available field experiment on hiring discrimination from 1989 through 2015.

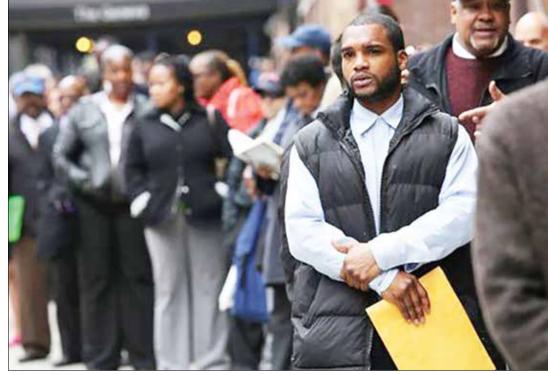
Now, the White House has announced an executive order establishing a National Council for the American Worker, which will develop a strategy for training and retraining workers by gathering input from a variety of stakeholders, both public and private.

While that announcement has been met with skepticism, particularly in the African-American community, the D.C.-based Joint Center for Political and Economy Studies is pushing for dialogue.

Founded in 1970, the think tank produces data, analysis, and ideas to solve challenges that confront the Black community. Currently, officials said, the center's focus is the future of work in African-American communities and congressional staff diversity.

"At the Joint Center, we are deeply committed to workforce development in Black communities in the changing economy," said Spencer Overton, the president of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

'We welcome any and all con-



Was /Courtesy of New Pittsburgh Courier

versations to move toward an inclusive system of training, particularly building off the major reforms and funding efforts from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, which was signed by President Obama in 2014," Overton said. "We hope the new Council will give special attention to communities that have not enjoyed all of the benefits of this economy. We also hope that the President reconsiders previous proposals to cut state job training grants by up to 40 percent, which will disproportionately affect Black communities."

Tanya Wallace-Gobern, executive director of the National Black Worker Center Project, said she's also concerned with the White House's order.

"Who gets appointed to this board is key and is concerning, as [President] Trump does not have a history of appointing folks who are advocates for and have knowledge of the issues that face Blacks and the working poor," Wallace-Gobern said. "It is a common practice for businesses to receive incentives to open shop in cities across America. Real investment in the American workforce must include incentives for workers such as free training, priority hiring status given to those who complete training, inclusion of the formerly incarcerated, and accountability measures to ensure equal opportunity in admittance to the trainings and to ensure quality wages are paid."

Too many Black workers remain disconnected from the labor force, and many who are participating are in occupations at high risk of automation, Overton said.

The Joint Center conducted a study that found that 27 percent of Black workers are concentrated in just 30 jobs at high-risk to automation, such as cashiers, drivers and security guards.

Upskilling is key to help prepare the community for emerging jobs and occupations that pay higher wages, according to the study.

It's also critical for employers and government to address other well-documented barriers to employment in transitioning labor markets, such as implicit bias in recruitment and evaluation.

"The Joint Center welcomes proposals and conversations that are local, placed-based, community-oriented and tailored to specific communities to reduce barriers to employment," Overton said.









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