

FOCUS[®]

The magazine of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

DEAN LEADS CANDIDATES IN BLACK ENDORSEMENTS

By Bria Gillum

As the New Year begins and the battle for the Democratic presidential nomination heats up, Howard Dean's effort to secure African American support is showing results.

Dean leads all other Democratic hopefuls with five endorsements from the 39-member Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), including the Caucus's chair and vice chair. Nevertheless, neither Dean nor any other candidate had galvanized the Black vote as 2004 began.

By mid-December, Dean had received endorsements from Reps. Elijah Cummings, D-MD, the CBC chairman; Shelia Jackson Lee, D-TX; Major Owens, D-NY; Jesse Jackson Jr., D-IL; and Bobby Scott, D-VA. In her press release, Jackson Lee, who is the CBC's vice chairwoman, said, "Howard Dean has an exemplary record of taking care of his constituents...this is a man who can deliver on his word, and we are in need of these kinds of reforms now in our country."

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Election 2004: None More Important Than This One

While every presidential election year is, of course, vital in the life of the nation, the politics of 2004 are particularly important to African Americans, who want to move beyond the bitter taste left by the last election.

This year also marks the 50th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision. More than officially desegregating public schools, the unanimous ruling was a critical event in the series of civil rights victories that enhanced the power of Black America and changed the country forever.

And while we use Black History Month to remember and celebrate African American struggles and successes, this particular February also marks an important current test of Black political power. A number of states with considerable Black populations have political contests in February. All of them are significant, but perhaps none will be as influential in gauging African American leanings as the Democratic presidential primary in South Carolina, where nearly half the electorate is Black.

There is no better way to honor our heroes and heroines, no better way to commemorate our history and no better way to celebrate the civil rights movement than by turning out to vote. The candidates, as we report in our cover story, know the importance of the Black vote, the party's most loyal base, and have worked to line up African American support.

It remains to be seen how the bitter taste left by the last presidential election will affect Black voters this year. African Americans in Florida and elsewhere felt cheated by election procedures that blocked some from the polls and cast aside the ballots of others. But we should not allow the anger and disappointment of 2000 to sap enthusiasm from 2004. To the contrary, the 2000 experience should make Black citizens more determined than ever to not only vote, but also fully engage all parts of the political process.

Among other things, that means working to make the process as open and as transparent as possible. While there have been some improvements since the last presidential election, it is not too late for federal, state and local officials to ensure they have done all they can to make the system as welcoming as possible.

Local officials in Washington, DC, welcomed the presidential candidates to our nation's mostly Black capital by scheduling a presidential primary on January 13, before the contests in Iowa and New Hampshire that traditionally mark the beginning of the presidential election year. The Democratic National Committee, however, refused to sanction the primary, and most of the candidates declined to participate in it. That lack of participation undercut an opportunity to showcase the candidates' positions on issues of Black concern generally and their stance on full voting rights for Washington, D.C. residents, who potentially could send two African Americans to the U.S. Senate.

Though D.C. voters don't have full voting rights, Black citizens in the 50 states do. More than the rest of the country, Black America should not take those rights for granted. This election year, even more than most election years, African Americans have not only the right but the obligation to vigorously exercise their citizenship rights and cast a ballot. ■


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DEAN LEADS In Black Endorsements CANDIDATES

Continued from cover

A physician and former governor of Vermont, Dean has also been endorsed by entertainers Whoopi Goldberg and Gloria Gaynor, former Baltimore Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke and cookie entrepreneur Wally "Famous" Amos. Twenty Black elected officials in Georgia endorsed Dean as a group in December.

He also has a significant number of African American staffers running his campaign. The current list includes 19 people serving as state directors, fundraising, outreach and media consultants and policy advisors. The three most influential African Americans currently working on the Dean campaign are Joe Johnson, the national co-chair; Andy Pringle, deputy campaign manager; and Chris Edley, senior policy advisor.

Cummings serves on Dean's national steering committee. When announcing Cummings' appointment in December, Dean said the congressman "will be an important addition to the campaign, serving as a national spokesperson on critical issues such as health care, education, jobs and urban revitalization."

Also doing well within the African American community is North Carolina

Sen. John Edwards, who has four CBC endorsements: Reps. Albert Wynn, D-MD; Eddie Bernice Johnson, D-TX; Mel Watt, D-NC; and Frank Balance, D-NC.

Wynn issued a statement saying he is "enthusiastically endorsing" Edwards because the senator "is deeply committed to the core principles of the Democratic Party: increasing access to healthcare, fighting for working families, protecting civil liberties, and expanding opportunities for minorities. In addition, he is the candidate that reaches the broadest cross-section of voters."

The top African Americans within Edwards' campaign are Craig Kirby, deputy campaign manager; Derek Albert, Michigan state director; Raymond Corley, South Carolina field director; Antwaun Griffin, deputy political director for the southwest region; Damon Jeter, deputy political director for the midwest region; Sharon White, deputy political director for the southern region; and Terence Tolbert, New York state director.

John Kerry's campaign has won endorsements from Rep. Harold Ford, D-TN; and Rep. Gregory Meeks, D-NY. The Massachusetts senator's top Black campaign staffers include Marcus Jadotte, deputy

campaign manager; James Dukes, state director for South Carolina; Jennifer Ferguson, Michigan campaign director; and Adisa Muse, Virginia deputy state director.

Ohio Rep. Dennis Kucinich's campaign has sought support at the grassroots level but he has also garnered backing from actor Danny Glover. Kucinich's campaign office, like those of candidates Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, Rep. Dick Gephardt of Missouri, and Rev. Al Sharpton of New York, did not return calls to FOCUS seeking information about the racial makeup of their campaign staffs.

Princeton University professor Cornell West has been a visible supporter of Sharpton, as has businessman Don Barden of Detroit. Gephardt, who has appointed Raymond Plowden as Michigan political director, has won endorsements from the South Carolina Conference of Black Mayors and from two CBC members, Rep. William Lacy Clay, D- MO, and Rep. James E. Clyburn, D- SC.

Two other CBC members, Illinois Reps. Bobby Rush and Danny Davis, have endorsed former Illinois Senator Carol

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BUSH IS THE ISSUE, BUT NOT THE ONLY ONE

BY JOE DAVIDSON

No matter which Democrat faces George W. Bush for the presidency in the November election, African Americans will be looking for answers

to important issues that have a special resonance for them.

While the struggling economy and the war in Iraq will be center stage for all voters, those topics and others have a particular twist for African Americans. Various polls have shown that a comparatively high percentage of Black people oppose the war against Iraq, just as they do other Bush policies.

The administration strongly defends those policies and points to Bush's

support for education and increased aid to Africa as examples of his progress on African American concerns. "We believe in opportunity for all, a society where every person can dream, and work, and realize his or her potential," he told the National Urban League's annual conference last July. "We're dedicated to bringing economic hope to every neighbor-

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Moseley Braun. About half of her small staff are African Americans and hold key roles as campaign office manager, operational manager, and field directors. Rep. Charlie Rangel, D-NY; and Andrew Young, a former congressman, Atlanta mayor, and United Nations ambassador both back former General Wesley Clark. His office did not release information regarding the ethnicity of its workers.

The thrust of Black endorsements and support could certainly change within the coming weeks and months. David A. Bositis, a Joint Center senior research associate, said many people are waiting to make an endorsement, because the primary season is just beginning and later timing may have a greater impact.

As the primary race moves beyond Iowa and New Hampshire, African Americans will account for a larger share of the Democratic turnout. One place where Black voter strength is sure to be felt is South Carolina, where about half of the Feb. 3 Democratic primary electorate is Black.

South Carolina could potentially be a turning point, as those competing for the nomination will have to attract a coalition of Black and moderate White voters. And though many voters in South Carolina are African American, in general voters there are more conservative than those in New Hampshire and Iowa. Furthermore, open primary rules allow Republicans to vote for Democratic candidates. The result is a South Carolina electorate that looks a lot like America. That includes, as Dean said in a statement whose wording he later regretted, the working class and poor white voters he described as the “guys with Confederate flags in their pickup trucks.” ■



For more information on this and related topics, visit our website.

Bush... Continued from page 3

hood, a good education to every child, and comfort and compassion to the afflicted.”

Despite those good words, there is one overriding issue for African American voters around the country, and that's defeating Bush, according to David A. Bositis, a Joint Center senior research associate. “It's not what your position is on Medicaid or foreign policy, but by and large the issue is who can beat Bush,” he said.

African Americans are eager to “re-defeat” Bush, as his critics urge, because Black voters were important to his popular vote defeat in 2000 and felt cheated by his ultimate victory. Furthermore, on a number of issues, his administration has not performed in a way that likely will win him a large percentage of the Black vote in 2004.

The recent prescription drug program enacted by Congress and signed by Bush with fanfare is an example. While the high cost of prescriptions has been at the center of the general health care debate recently, there are even more fundamental health care issues facing many Black Americans. Ronald Walters, a University of Maryland political scientist, said “when Blacks talk about health care they are not talking about prescription drug coverage. They are talking about the lack of health insurance... and the lack of access to health care in general.”

That access has been hampered by the closing of public hospitals that serve poor communities and cutbacks in public health programs. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reported in late December that over the last two years, federally funded health insurance programs in 34 states have cut about 1.5 million low-income people from coverage,

including approximately 500,000 children.

“Cuts of this magnitude in health coverage for low-income families are unprecedented...” said Leighton Ku, a senior fellow at the Center. “Most of the people who lose public coverage will become uninsured.”

Many people are already uninsured because they are unemployed or employed in low-level, low-pay jobs without benefits. Although the Black unemployment rate dropped in November, it remained in double-digits and was still twice the White rate.

That relatively small improvement in the job picture has done little to stem criticism of Bush's economic policies by African American leaders. Congressional Black Caucus Chairman Elijah Cummings said he is “encouraged by the creation of every new job, but the reality remains that since President Bush entered office nearly three years ago, more than 3 million American jobs have been lost. President Bush is the first president since Herbert Hoover to have a net job loss during his administration.”

While the economy and other issues have many masters, federal judicial appointments are solely the responsibility of the president. Some of Bush's appointments have generated strenuous protests from civil rights advocates. The NAACP, for example, helped block the nomination of Janice Rogers Brown, currently a California Supreme Court justice, to the federal appeals court in Washington, DC.

With wording that largely reflects African American attitudes toward the Bush administration in general, the NAACP said Brown, a Black woman, has been “extremely detrimental towards laws that protect the civil rights and civil liberties of African Americans and other racial and ethnic minorities.”

POLITICAL REPORT

Death Row Verdicts and Population Drop

By Richard Dieter

The number of executions and death sentences, the size of death row and public support for capital punishment all fell during 2003, according to the Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC).

The year also saw 10 death row exonerations, more regional isolation of the death penalty, and a growing movement within states and Congress to address the issues of unfairness and inaccuracy that continue to plague the death penalty, according to the organization's *Year End Report*.

The decrease in the use of the death penalty is a strong indication that the public's mood is turning against capital punishment. Once information is complete for 2003, it appears death sentences will have declined every year since 1998. Death verdicts from 1996 through 2002 dropped more than 50 percent, from 320 to 159.

The number of individuals on death row fell by about 5 percent last year, after decades of increase. Executions in 2003 also were down 30 percent when compared to the 98 executions in 1999. Of the executions that did take place, only three were conducted outside of the South, which accounted for almost 90 percent of the 65 executions in 2003.

Around the country, public support for capital punishment reached its lowest level in 25 years, after an increase in support following 9/11. An October Gallup Poll measured public support for the death penalty at 64 percent, down six percentage

points from 2002. That support erodes further, to about half, in polls where respondents were asked to choose between

death or life without parole for those convicted of murder.

Yet while evidence shows support for capital punishment declining in various ways, the racial disparity in its implementation remains severe. As has been the case for many years, those executed in 2003 were almost exclusively guilty of murdering a White victim. Only 18 percent of those executed were convicted of killing a Black person, despite the fact that African Americans are victims in about half the nation's homicides. No White person convicted solely of murdering a Black person last year was executed.

Among other events shaping 2003 was former Illinois Governor George Ryan's historic commutation of all 171 inmates on the state's death row. These clemencies included four pardons based on innocence. Across the country, 10 men were exonerated from death row in 2003, a record-tying year for death row exonerations.

The risk of executing innocent people that is illustrated by these exonerations spurred legislative reform efforts in states such as Illinois, North Carolina and New Jersey, as well as in Congress. The U.S. House of Representatives passed a judicial reform package that contained funding for DNA testing and the improvement of legal representation in capital cases. The Senate will consider the bill this year. The Supreme Court continued to exercise closer scrutiny over the death penalty as high court justices criticized both ineffective defense counsel and prosecutorial misconduct.

Several new voices calling for the U.S. to either totally abandon capital punishment or at least temporarily halt executions emerged around the country in 2003. Charles B. Blackmar, for example, a senior judge of Missouri's Supreme Court, noted that the U.S. policy allowing the death penalty is a stark departure from the norms of our allies around the world.

"Most nations that share our political and cultural traditions have done away with the death penalty," Blackmar said. "Nothing

Death Row Inmates by State (As of Oct. 1, 2003)

California	632
Texas	451
Florida	381
Pennsylvania	241
Ohio	209
North Carolina	207
Alabama	194
Arizona	126
Georgia	116
Oklahoma	105
Tennessee	104
Louisiana	92
Nevada	89
South Carolina	74
Mississippi	69
Missouri	67
Arkansas	40
Indiana	39
Kentucky	38
Oregon	31
Virginia	27
U.S. Government	26
Idaho	21
Delaware	21
New Jersey	15
Maryland	14
Washington	11
Utah	11
Illinois	8
Connecticut	7
Nebraska	7
U.S. Military	7
Kansas	7
New York	6
Colorado	6
Montana	5
South Dakota	4
New Mexico	2
Wyoming	1
Total death row	3,504

(7 inmates sentenced in more than one state)

Source: DPIC/NAACP Legal Defense Fund

States with executions	2003	2002
Texas	24	33
Oklahoma	14	7
North Carolina	7	2
Georgia	3	4
Florida	3	3
Ohio	3	3
Alabama	3	2
Virginia	2	4
Missouri	2	6
Indiana	2	0
U.S. Gov't	1	0
Arkansas	1	0
South Carolina	0	3
Mississippi	0	2
California	0	1
Louisiana	0	1
Totals	65	71

Source: Death Penalty Information Center

would be lost if death penalty statutes were repealed.”

Richard Dieter is executive director of the Death Penalty Information Center, a Washington, DC non-profit organization that provides information and analysis on capital punishment.

State Budgets Improve But Big Problems Loom

By Jason White and Pamela M. Prah

Don't break out the champagne quite yet, but for the first time in more than two years, most state budgets are in the black.

Only 10 states report budget gaps for the first quarter of fiscal 2004, compared with 31 states that had gaps at the same time in

fiscal 2003, the National Conference of State Legislatures said in a November survey.

“I do believe states have in fact bottomed-out and the crisis is easing somewhat,” said Ray Scheppach, executive director of the National Governors Association (NGA), an organization that represents the governors' interests in Washington, D.C. “I'm optimistic that within a quarter or two we're going to see more moderate revenue growth.”

Scheppach delivered his remarks during a December news conference announcing the release of a new report — *The Fiscal Survey of the States* — compiled biannually by the NGA and the National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO). The report comes at a time when the national economy is emerging from a nearly three-year slump, and many states are reaping the benefits. However, the report also reveals a state fiscal landscape pockmarked with problem areas. “States have done a lot of one-time cuts, they've got under-funded pensions, they've borrowed money from trust funds, they've securitized tobacco [settlements] and they've moved payroll dates around. There's going to be some backfilling on that hole,” Scheppach said.

Moreover, even with the improving picture, many state officials are still worried. Twenty-two states see spending overruns ahead, according to the NCSL survey. Medicaid is already over budget in 13 states, including Georgia, which is \$173 million above estimates. Spending on prisons is exceeding budgeted levels in six states, including Mississippi, whose corrections budget faces a \$60 million shortfall.

Indeed, the hole from which states are emerging is a deep one. To keep above water, states have suppressed their normal budget increases. State general fund spending grew by only 0.6 percent in fiscal year 2003 and 0.2 percent in fiscal 2004, a marked departure from their average annual growth rate of 6.2 percent, according to the NGA-NASBO report. “This is

the smallest nominal general fund increase since 1979. It's unprecedented to have close to three years of nearly flat spending, but that's what we're finding in the survey,” said Scott Pattison, NASBO's executive director and a former Virginia budget director.

The spending amounts look worse when the eroding effects of inflation are factored in. Once adjusted for that, state budgets are expected to shrink — by 1.6 percent in fiscal 2003 and 2 percent in fiscal 2004, the NGA-NASBO report finds.

Even these downsized budgets would have been inadequate to balancing the ledgers had states not resorted to sizable increases in taxes and fees. Eighteen states raised taxes by a total of nearly \$6.2 billion for fiscal year 2004, according to *The 2003 Tax and Budget Review*, a report released in December by the Rockefeller Institute of Government at the State University of New York, Albany. This is in addition to at least \$2.6 billion in state fee hikes, which is many times more than states have ever before raised fees in a single year. “This shift toward fee increases appears to result from states shying away from more tax increases, while still needing new revenue to close budget gaps,” the Rockefeller report said.

On the spending side, states found savings in a variety of places. Sixteen states laid off employees, 13 used early retirement to pare their work forces and 13 reorganized programs to find cost-savings, according to the NASBO-NGA report. ■

This article is adapted from reports by Jason White and Pamela M. Prah, who write for Stateline.org.



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ECONOMIC REPORT

Economic Recovery: Election Implications for Black Americans

By Margaret C. Simms

In the autumn of 2003, the economy seemed to be in an upward trend. Third quarter reports indicated that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) had increased at an annual rate of 8.2 percent between the first of July and the end of September, and forecasters were predicting a fairly robust rate of growth for the fourth quarter. Projections for retail sales during the Christmas season were also optimistic. Political pundits were speculating that the economy had moved way down on the list of policies the Democrats could use to “bash” President Bush with in the election campaign.

Employment Lags

However, the employment outlook is not that rosy, as indicated by statistics released late in the year. The unemployment rate for November, released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in early December, held steady at 5.9 percent. This translated into an unemployment rate of 10.2 percent for African Americans. To most economists, the fact that the unemployment rate did not go down was not surprising. Employment growth usually lags behind the expansion of production as businesses rely on extended work hours for existing employees, temporary employees, and other measures to address increased demand in the short term. Only when they have assurance that the expansion is going to last do they make new hires.

The level of consumer confidence reflects the caution expressed by business. During

the last two months of 2003, consumer confidence tended upward, but not consistently. The Conference Board reported that it had gained 10 points, to 91.7, between October and November. But the University of Michigan reported a reversal in their confidence index in mid-December. According to figures released

If the overall unemployment rate goes down slowly, what does that mean for African Americans? An examination of the pace of recovery over the past two decades would suggest that African American workers may see little in the way of relief before the November election.

then, the Michigan index had fallen from 96 to 89.6 between the end of November and the middle of December. While observers of the economy saw little to worry about in this shift, the stock market acted on the news, with prices falling the day of the release.

Even without accounting for consumer hesitancy, the economic outlook suggests that employment will not expand quickly. The forecasts generated by more than 30 economic forecasters polled by *The Wall Street Journal* in late 2003 show a consensus growth rate for GDP of between 3.8 percent and 4.1 percent during 2004. While this is a good strong rate of growth, it is not likely to generate enough jobs to handle the influx of new workers into the economy and provide slots for those workers who are currently unemployed or have withdrawn from the labor market since the recession began. The *Journal*

economists' consensus for the unemployment rate was 5.4 percent by May of 2004. This compares to a rate of 4.0 in May 2000.

In the minutes from their meeting in October (released in December) the Federal Reserve Open Market Committee discussed the likelihood of holding interest rates low throughout much of 2004 because they anticipate that jobs will be expanding slowly and inflationary pressures will be low. While this bodes well for the availability of credit, it means that unemployed workers will be searching for jobs for much longer than they might have anticipated.

This is certainly consistent with the patterns for past recessions. After the 1981-82 and 1990-91 recessions, it took two years for employment-to-population ratios to get back to the levels prior to the recession and nearly five years before unemployment rates moved back to their earlier lows. The difference between the two measures is due to the fact that an expanding economy usually induces more people to enter the labor market, generating more candidates for the new positions.

Little Relief Soon

If the overall unemployment rate goes down slowly, what does that mean for African Americans? An examination of the pace of recovery over the past two decades would suggest that African American workers may see little in the way of relief before the November election. One year after the 1982 peak in unemployment, Black unemployment had dropped about 23 percent, compared to a drop in White unemployment of about 37 percent.

However, because of the influx of new workers into the economy, the gains in terms of the proportion of the population with jobs was much smaller, only about 1 percent for each population group. In contrast, a year after the 1992 peak in unemployment, the White rate had dropped nearly 12 percent, and for Black people it had barely budged. In terms of

employment gains, Black workers did a little better with about a 3 percent gain in the proportion with jobs. It is not clear which of the past two recoveries the current one is likely to reflect. It is also possible that the emphasis on productivity improvements (that is, producing more with fewer workers) will make for an even slower job expansion.

Even during the relatively good times of the late 1990s, Black workers remained without jobs far longer than White workers. According to data released by the Census Bureau in late 2003, African American workers had median unemployment spells between 1996 and 1999 that were 69 percent longer than those endured by non-Hispanic Whites and a third longer than those of Hispanic workers. Spells were longer for men than for women, especially among African Americans.

Moreover, a number of economists argue that many of the three million jobs lost since the recent recession began will not be coming back. For example, Joint Center

Board member Andrew Brimmer, a former governor of the Federal Reserve Board, notes that not all of the job loss was due to the recession. Some jobs were lost because of technological change or organizational restructuring. Others have been outsourced or taken off-shore. In an analysis that he completed for a presentation at the Allied Social Sciences Association this January, Brimmer examines the impact of these job reductions. Based on this research he says that the job loss will be disproportionately heavy among African Americans. They hold a major share of moderate-skill manufacturing jobs such as operative or line positions, many of which are going to places like China and India — countries that have already developed major low-cost manufacturing centers.

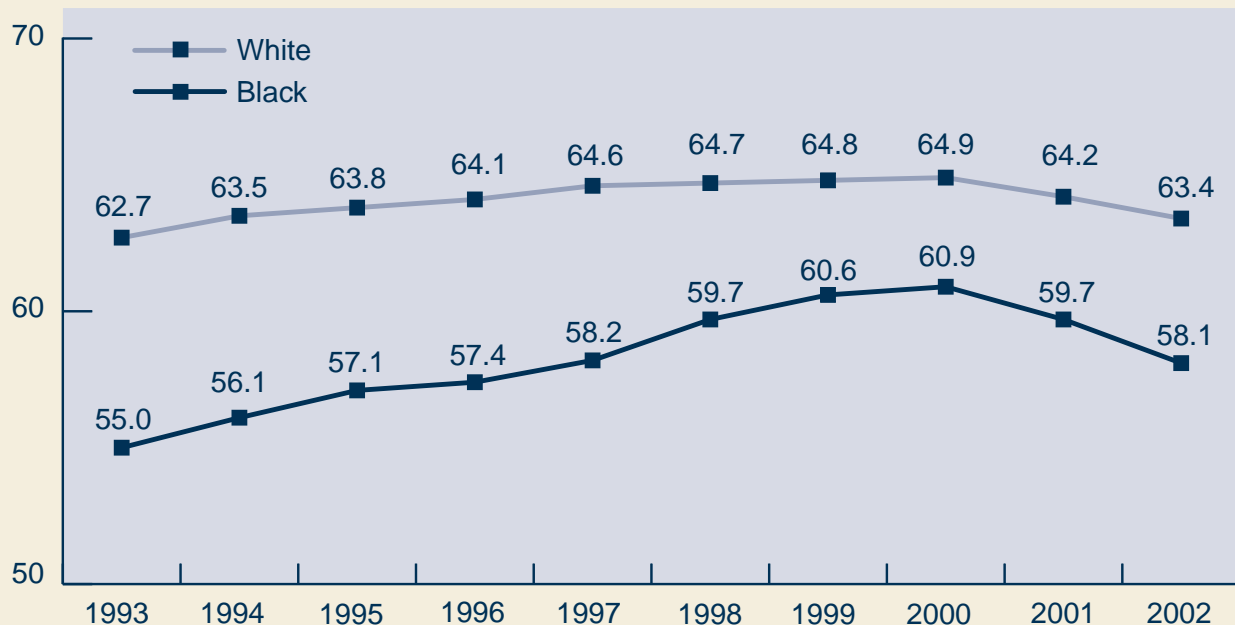
Policy Implications

The economic forecasts indicate it is unlikely that African Americans will see a strong expansion in employment in their communities between now and the election.

In part, this is due to the lags between the growth in GDP and the expansion in jobs. Time will take care of that, but in the interim those without jobs would benefit from public support that is increasingly difficult to get. A more serious problem is the loss of jobs through restructuring and moving them abroad. If African Americans are disproportionately affected because they occupy the lower skill positions, they will need to obtain additional education and training in order to be competitive. How the presidential candidates propose to deal with these two issues should be a question that African Americans consider as they follow the debates and policy proposals offered in the coming months. ■

For more information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, visit www.bls.gov; the Conference Board, www.conference-board.org; and The Wall Street Journal, www.wsj.com.

Employment-Population Ratio, by Race, 1993–2002



Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

AIDS SHAPES CRISIS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

SIX MILLION NEED FOOD AID

JOHANNESBURG (IRIN) – The HIV/AIDS epidemic in Southern Africa fuels a triple threat in the region, where hunger and weakened government capacity also are part of a “deadly triad,” according to the United Nations.

Food insecurity, that is, the lack of adequate nutrition, and HIV/AIDS are inextricably linked in Southern Africa, the worst HIV/AIDS-affected area in the world, according to the latest UNAIDS *AIDS Epidemic Update*. Experts predict that more than 6 million people will need food aid to survive the beginning of the New Year.

A “new kind of humanitarian crisis is emerging in Southern Africa,” the UN warns. “It is a deadly triad consisting of a lethal epidemic, deepening food insecurity and a hollowing out of government capacity. The HIV epidemic, having reached hitherto unimaginable prevalence levels — bordering on 40 percent of adults in some countries — is now entering the phase of massive death from AIDS.”

About 22,000 people die every week within the mainland Southern African Development Community region, according to the report. With severe poverty and the lack of essential public services, the epidemic continues to worsen, “bringing in its wake new patterns of food insecurity, destitution and vulnerability,” the UN added.

Southern Africa was plunged into a humanitarian crisis in 2002, when food shortages affected 14 million people in six countries — Lesotho, Swaziland, Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Aid agencies said the shortages were brought on by adverse weather conditions and governance failures, worsened by the prevalence of HIV/AIDS.

These conditions strike the nations’ most valuable resource — the workforce. “AIDS strikes at productive adults, the asset most likely to help during a crisis,” the report said. “Infected adults may be unable to work. The burden of care increases, in both financial and social terms... . The impoverishment that results in all households as they use assets and savings during a crisis is amplified in HIV/AIDS-affected households,” the UN added. In such households, food security is undermined. And when working adults die, a child or elderly relative may head the household or it might simply disintegrate.

Aid efforts by UN agencies, governments and non-governmental organizations averted a humanitarian catastrophe in 2002. While some of the six affected countries have managed to stage a remarkable short-term recovery, there is concern that the long-term impact of HIV/AIDS could erode recent gains.

HIV/AIDS was both a cause and an effect of food insecurity, as families weakened by

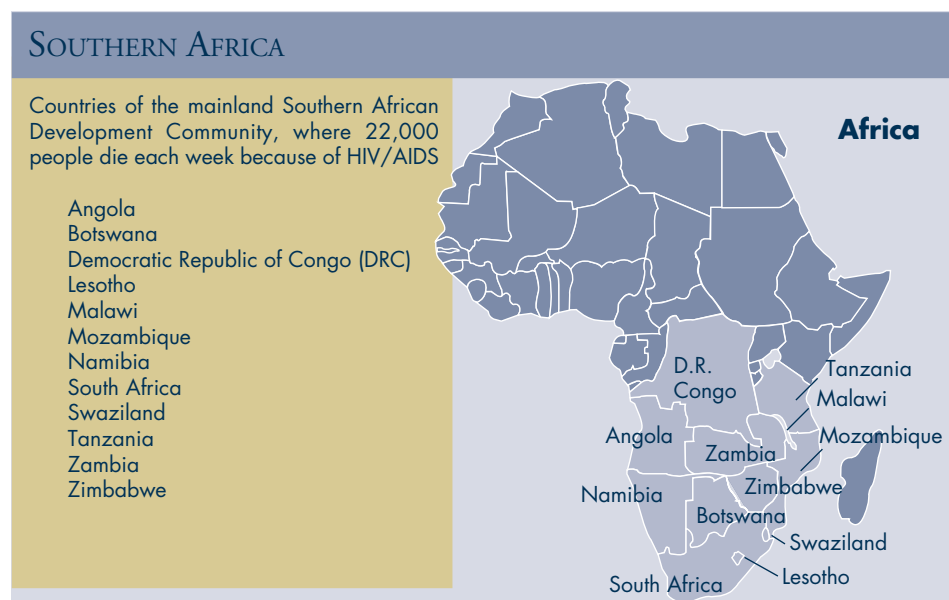
the disease were usually unable to work and produce either crops or income to sustain themselves. The resulting increase in poverty also led to an increase in child prostitution that fueled the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

“The vulnerability assessments show the linkage with AIDS Compared to five years ago, we are now seeing real evidence of how orphans and children in families affected by HIV/AIDS are affected in terms of nutrition and health status, schooling, property rights, and abuse,” said Mark Sterling, UNAIDS inter-country team leader in the region.

He also called for better contingency planning and disaster management and response. “Many plans of dealing with HIV have been derailed by floods and droughts,” he said.

For now, the outlook is not good. The UN document notes that “the threat that AIDS may reverse decades of development, undermine economic growth, and unravel the social fabric that has held communities together during previous crises, demands a retooling of UN responses.” ■

IRIN, the Integrated Regional Information Networks of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, provided reprint permission for this story.



Source: Southern African Development Community; IRIN

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STATE ILLS REMAIN DESPITE MEDICARE BILL

MEDICAID HAS SERIOUS PROBLEMS

BY ERIN MADIGAN

While Congress closed last year with a Medicare bill in its trophy case, serious problems with Medicaid will make 2004 a challenging time for the states.

Although many states have improving fiscal pictures, state officials say the cost of patching the nation's frayed health safety net is busting state budgets. States now spend over one-fifth of their budgets on Medicaid, which provides coverage for more than 40 million people, half of them children.

"There isn't a state that isn't worried about (Medicaid) and isn't concerned," said Sandra Shewry, director of health policy at the National Governors Association.

After years of signing more people up for Medicaid, difficult times forced states to scale back eligibility and trim optional benefits — actions that have a particularly hard impact on African Americans. Michigan and Oklahoma eliminated adult dental care for Medicaid recipients. Texas cut services for the mentally ill and coverage for 7,800 low-income pregnant women. Five states also froze enrollment in their

Children's Health Insurance Programs, which insure children in families that earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but still can't afford private insurance.

The outlook for 2004 is no rosier. "States will have an exceptionally difficult set of choices to make going into their next legislative session," said Trudi Matthews, chief health policy analyst at The Council of State Governments.

Growth in Medicaid spending slowed for the first time in seven years last year, but is still expected to climb at least 8 percent a year for the rest of the decade. A project of The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation surveyed states and found that:

- 49 states planned to reduce or freeze payments to physicians, hospitals and other providers for fiscal 2004.
- 44 states would likely restrict the drugs Medicaid patients can buy.
- 20 states planned to pare dental and vision coverage, doctor visits and home care.

- 18 states were eyeing tighter eligibility standards for Medicaid and long-term care.

"A lot of governors and legislatures tried very hard to preserve the gains they had made during more robust economic times, but they've got more folks clamoring at the door," said Alwyn Cassil, spokeswoman for the Center for Studying Health System Change, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank funded by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Despite the dismal picture, state officials agreed there is one bright spot — the \$20 billion Congress provided states under the Bush tax cut package, including \$10 billion for Medicaid. That helped stave off even deeper cuts, state Medicaid directors said. But the fiscal relief was only temporary.

"If I was a governor and knew the fiscal relief was going to expire at the beginning of fiscal year 2005, I would have to do some hard thinking about my priorities and ... (how) to fill the hole," said Victoria Wachino, associate director of the Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured. ■

Erin Madigan writes for Stateline.org, which provided this article.



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