



DISTRICT'S ECONOMIC STABILITY AT STAKE

By Rev. Stephen E. Tucker
President, JOBS Coalition

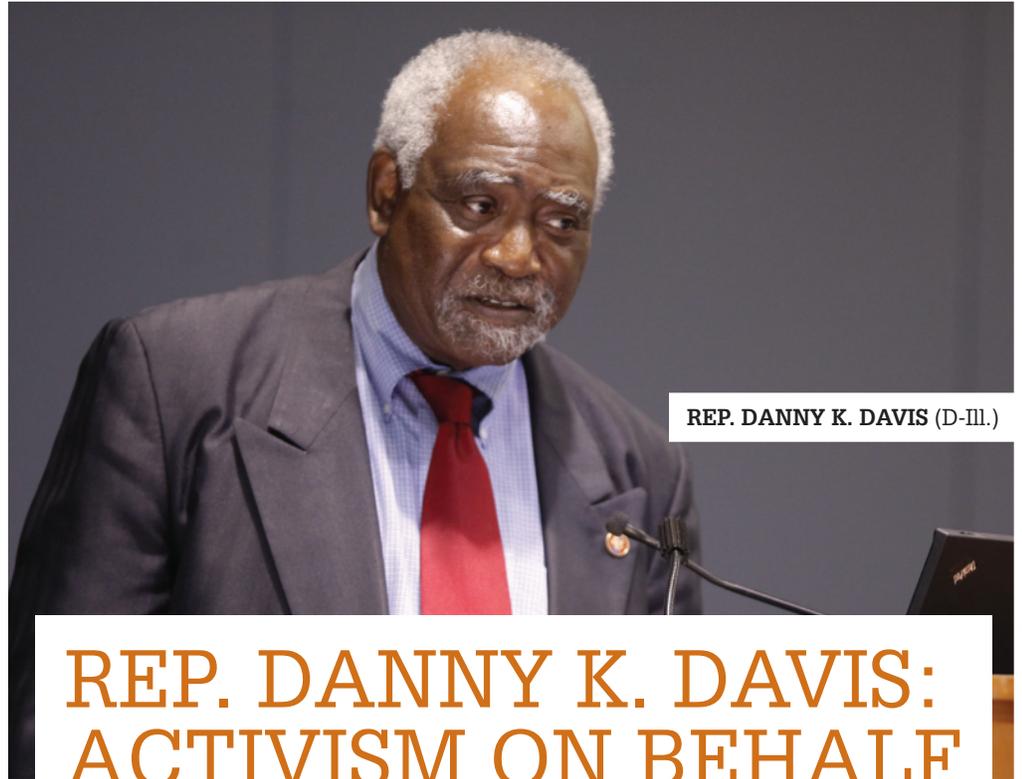
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MAKING STRIDES: JOBS COALITION ACCOMPLISHMENTS



While raising awareness of workforce challenges and potential barriers to employment, the JOBS Coalition and its members have combined their resources and industry expertise to achieve the following results:

- > Built the Bellevue Resource Center, a program facility serving the hard-to-reach, hard-to-employ, and returning ex-offender populations. The Center was completed on September 30, 2003.
- > Guided the creation of the Construction & Design Academy at Cardozo, providing District students access, training, and preparation for careers in the construction industry and trades after graduation. The Academy officially opened in September 2005.
- > Leading the Children of Mine Center, in partnership with the Architecture Research Institute at the University of the District of Columbia, in designing, planning and developing a new community center in the Anacostia/Hillsdale community, and restoring the historic home of the city's first mayor. □



REP. DANNY K. DAVIS (D-ILL.)

REP. DANNY K. DAVIS: ACTIVISM ON BEHALF OF EX-OFFENDERS

Almost every day, U.S. Rep. Danny K. Davis (D-Ill.) encounters African-American men who have been in the criminal justice system. It's an experience that has helped make him a proponent of giving ex-offenders a second chance in life. "As a nation, we have more people in prisons than any nation in the world, both proportionally and in actual numbers," Davis said during the annual forum he hosts on the challenges faced by the formerly incarcerated. "People hear that, but they're not aware of what it means. It means that in some communities you walk through, if you run into 10 African-American males, five or six of them would have some kind of criminal record." *By Joye Mercer Barksdale*

Behind those numbers, the experiences of ex-offenders trying to re-enter society are often dismal. They struggle to find jobs, locate places to live and reconnect with the children they have left behind. These issues, and the federal efforts to address them, were at the heart of Davis' forum, part of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's 2010 Annual Legislative Conference.

Joshua DuBois, special assistant to President Barack Obama and executive director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, announced that his office would be starting a new program within the Department of Justice to help non-profit groups win funding for re-entry efforts. President Obama, he said, considers the issue of ex-offender re-entry a "silent storm" – a per-

nicious challenge to which minimal attention is paid. "There are not long lines of folks who are watching out for ex-offenders day-in and day-out," DuBois said. "But our nation has done big things in the past, and we can do big things now." He said that those "big things" must be accomplished through partnerships, and the mission of his office is to "connect government and grassroots."

Agency-Wide Efforts

Across agencies, the focus is on providing returning ex-offenders with the skills they need to improve themselves and their circumstances. The U.S. Department of Labor is funding programs that provide education and training to ex-offenders to help them get a "foot in the door."

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Incoming District Mayor Vincent Gray has described the city's unemployment rate as a "ticking time bomb," and his proposed jobs plan – including efforts to bolster requirements that city contractors hire D.C. residents – is a hopeful sign that the real picture behind the city's employment and economic development data is finally being revealed. It's not enough to simply provide job training as prescribed by outgoing Mayor Adrian Fenty, who has pointed to secured federal stimulus funding to provide job training in District Wards hardest hit by the recession.

In their joint 2008 industry sector analysis, the D.C. Chamber of Commerce and the District Workforce Investment Council outlined a number of recommendations to establish collaborative networks among employers, job training providers, public schools, vocational educators and career academies. If even half those measures had been implemented, the District would have taken a significant step toward reducing then-high unemployment numbers. Further, those efforts might have mitigated now skyrocketing joblessness in District communities that fall below the radar in reports that the local economy has fared comparatively well during the recession. Since that report in 2008, a host of District voices have weighed in on this critical issue. The University of the District of Columbia's (UDC) demographic analysis describes the District as an educationally dysfunctional town in which jobs are being created but unemployment is rising.

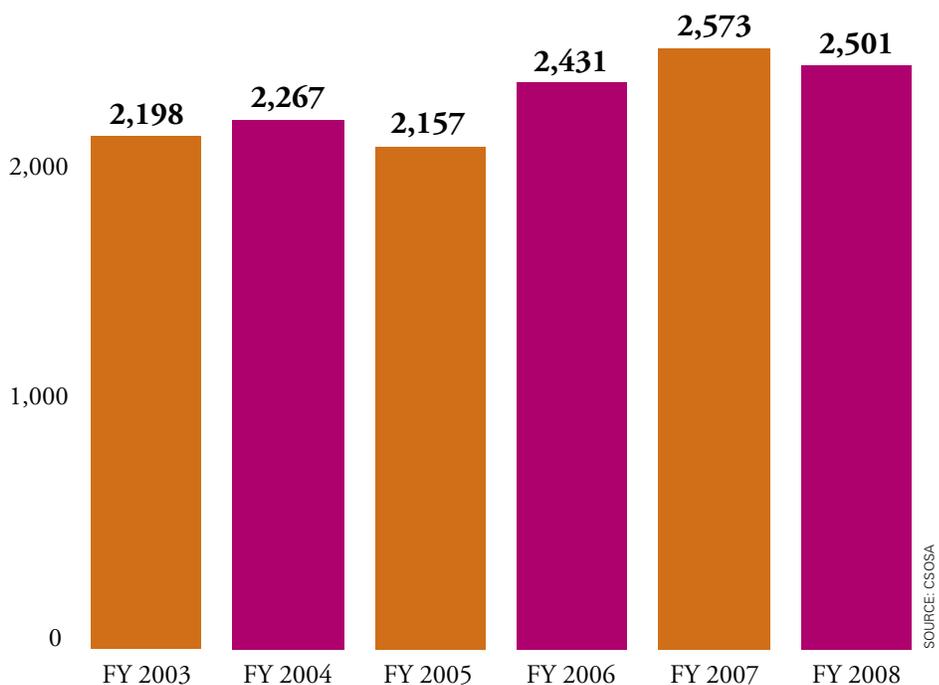
For their part, job seekers are taking advantage of worker retraining programs to gain marketable skills. In the fall of 2009, the District Council implemented the Jobs Now Initiative, a federal stimulus-funded partnership between the Department of Employment Services and the Community College of the District of Columbia's Division of Workforce Development, which delivers skilled job training free of charge to city residents in classes offered at Cardozo, Roosevelt and Phelps High Schools. To position themselves for new job opportunities, highly motivated participants have committed to nine months of training (and in some cases financial sacrifice) to complete these certification programs, geared towards industries that are poised to rebound as the economic recovery gains steam. These adult education programs have worked to bring trainees together with industry employers, largely without input and assistance from District agencies.

There are jobs! Employment is already expanding in some sectors of the local and regional economy, including health care, hos-

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OFFENDER RE-ENTRY IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

The number of offenders released to the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency for supervision



Danny Davis *Continued from page 1*

"We've focused on apprenticeship programs in jails and prisons, so you at least have the beginnings of skills that can move you into formal apprenticeships," according to Gerri Fiala, deputy assistant secretary for employment and training at the U.S. Department of Labor.

Meanwhile, at the Department of Health and Human Services, the emphasis is on building stronger families through responsible fatherhood programs, said Doug Steiger, deputy assistant secretary for legislation. He explained that a major thrust is to work with state bureaucracies to create child support systems that don't burden ex-offenders with financial obligations they can never meet, thus preventing them from reconnecting with their children.

Similarly, the Department of Justice (DOJ) is planning to implement programs to help ex-offenders rebuild their connections to their communities and families. As part of the Department's newest initiative, DOJ is partnering with the Department of Housing and Urban Development to allow ex-offenders to sign leases, said Gary L. Dennis, senior policy advisor for corrections at the Department of Justice. Often, apartment managers will not rent to people with criminal records. The Department has also funded projects that bring families into prisons for re-entry therapy and provide treatment for offenders with mental health problems.

Giving Praise

Several speakers lauded Davis as the key sponsor of the Second Chance Act, which is approaching



REP. DAVIS (here, during CBC 2005) has long rallied for ex-offender rights.

reauthorization. Davis pushed for the Act for several years before it was signed into law in 2008, and panelists said that it has been a game-changer in ex-offender re-entry.

"When we look back in history at the Second Chance Act, I think that piece of legislation moved the consciousness of Americans. That's what makes it so impactful," said George Williams, vice president of community and government affairs for Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities, an Illinois-based nonprofit organization that provides substance abuse and mental health services.

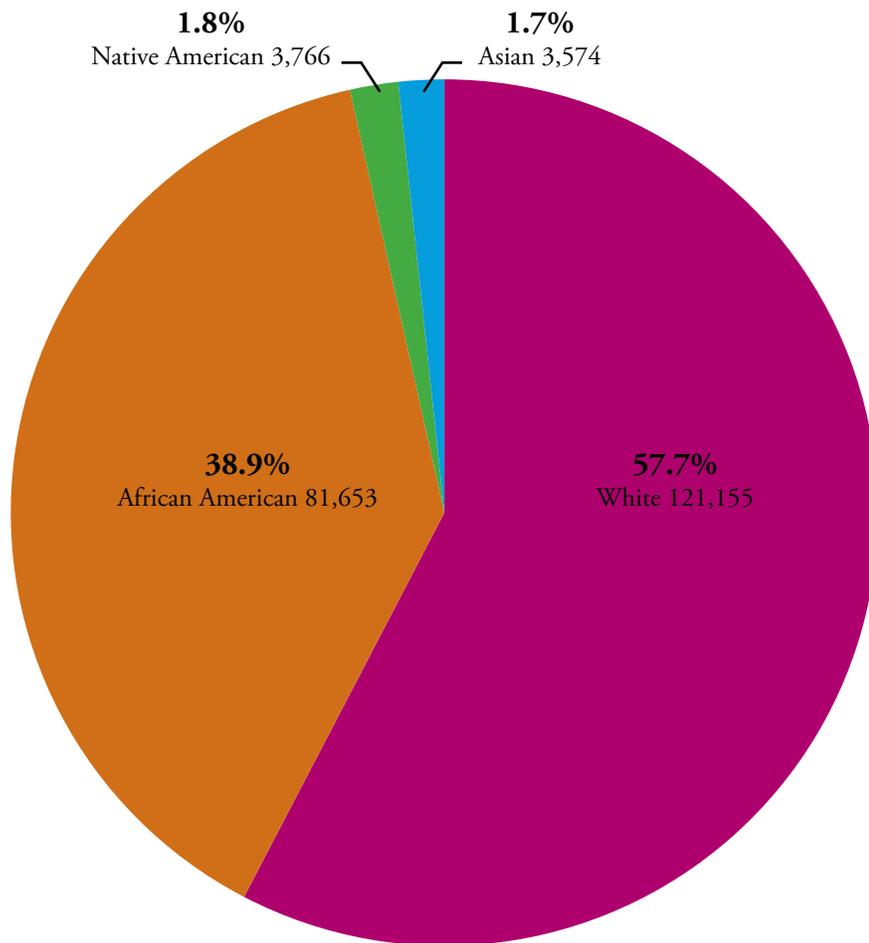
In the 2010 fiscal year, which ended September 30, Congress appropriated \$100 million for the Second Chance Act. The funds included: grants for substance abuse treatment programs, both for imprisoned men and women and for ex-offenders; funds for vocational programs and technology training for incarcerated youths and adults; and funds for mentoring programs.

The Julia Carson Responsible Fatherhood and

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INMATE POPULATION

Total Inmate Population: 210,148



SOURCE: FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS

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 pitality, financial services, academic institutions, security and retail. However, too frequently, certified and credentialed graduates of the District’s job training programs are finding their efforts stifled by the status quo in District workforce policies that have not kept pace with job market realities.

For example, the JOBS Coalition has testified against First Source and Project Labor Agreements, stating that both policies are punitive in nature and fail statistically to make any measurable impact on unemployment.

Also, since its inception in 2001, the JOBS Coalition has functioned as an intermediary, linking the challenges and concerns of employers and training providers with the needs of job seekers in the District’s unemployed, underemployed and returning ex-offender populations. To a great extent, our mission and work are based on the “Accords of Corporate Social Responsibility,” which encourage fair competition, tiered levels of employee compensation and training, and working in partnerships to improve quality of life. For industries such as hospitality and construction, the Accords offer a useful framework for employers, District officials and training providers to spell out emerging labor requirements and define the levels and types of skilled workers required to get the job done.

This jobs crisis is real. The analysis is done. The “ticking time bomb” of chronic unemployment is a call to action to establish greater accountability, collaboration and transparency among training providers, District workforce policies and area employers. To that end, the JOBS Coalition calls on the new mayor to convene, within 45 days of his swearing-in, a District jobs summit bringing together industry chief executives and directors of the Department of Employment Services and related workforce training organizations to answer and collectively address three fundamental questions: Which industries have jobs available now? What are the entry-level skill requirements for those jobs? What can be done collectively to ensure that District residents are ready and able to meet those requirements?

The JOBS Coalition urges action and is ready to help implement the Accords. A heightened level of public and private collaboration is needed to put District residents back to work and into jobs that support families in local communities. Let’s stop playing a numbers game and put a human face on the issue of unemployment. No more studies. What we need is a practical and sustainable commitment to reduce unemployment now, because the city’s long-term economic stability is at stake. □

THE JOBS COALITION is in no way affiliated with the National Capital Jobs Coalition, which has been demonstrating in front of the Rhode Island Avenue Metro Project in Washington, D.C.

Danny Davis *Continued from page 2*
 Healthy Families Act, sponsored by Rep. Davis in the House and by Sen. Evan Bayh (D-Ind.) in the Senate, builds on the Second Chance Act by: funding job training and financial literacy programs for fathers; ensuring that child support payments don’t count as income and result in loss of food stamps; and prohibiting unequal treatment of two-parent families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). This legislation would make “enormous strides in creating a ladder of mobility for low-income families,” states

Kirk E. Harris, a faculty member in the Department of Urban Planning at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee.

For those transitioning after incarceration, the road is a challenging one, filled with a series of barriers that can be a struggle to overcome. Davis recognizes the obstacles this population faces, and has worked hard during his tenure in Congress to sponsor legislation that could make a difference. Every encounter he has with an African-American man who has served time is a reminder to Davis that there is still much work to be done. □

JOBS Coalition Pathways

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The *JOBS Coalition Pathways* is the exclusive property of the JOBS Coalition, 633 Park Road, NW, Washington, D.C. 20010; 202-726-7400. *JOBS Coalition Pathways* is dedicated to disseminating information that will help strengthen the city’s apprenticeship training and job placement programs, broadening the scope to reach the young, the underserved, the unemployed and the returning ex-offender. *JOBS Coalition Pathways* is published by the Jobs Coalition.

