

STATEMENT OF SENATOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
PRESENTED TO THE JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE
“Addressing the Problem of African-American Male Unemployment”

March 8th, 2008

I want to thank the Chairman of the Joint Economic Committee and my distinguished colleague from New York, Senator Schumer, for convening today’s hearing on the serious problem of African American male unemployment in our country. I want to also commend the members of the Joint Economic Committee for holding this hearing so that we may begin a serious discussion about federal policy solutions to this persistent yet under-reported problem. The most recent figures that put the unemployment rate for African-American men over 20 at 7.5%, more than double the rate of white males over 20, only underscores the timeliness and importance of today’s search for solutions.

Indeed the challenges facing African American males in the workforce are daunting. The hollowing out of the our Nation’s manufacturing sector, the bedrock of our economy that enabled the creation of the middle class as we know it, presents fewer and fewer opportunities for African Americans to get into the jobs that can provide a level of income that enables home ownership, saving for their children’s education and their retirement. Outsourcing challenges from other rapidly developing nations creates even more competition not only for blue collar jobs, but increasingly for skilled, white collar jobs as well. The tax and economic policies of the last six years that have been focused on rewarding the wealthy at the expense of our fiscal stability, the needed investments in education, job training and small business development, have failed to produce the rising tide that lifts all boats. Instead, while worker productivity is up dramatically, wages and income have remained stagnant and the gulf between rich and poor, between have and have not has only widened. The fact that our upside down economic priorities have resulted in the United States spending more each year simply paying the interest on our exploding debt, than on education, job training, and poverty relief combined shows that we need to put forward an agenda that will put workers and job opportunities first.

Indeed, government can, and should, play an active role in ushering in prosperity for all, and I hope that today's hearing will begin to address the underlying causes for such a wide gap of employment and employment opportunities among African American males as well as sensible and innovative solutions to curb this trend. The proposals that will be discussed during this hearing such as the STRIVE approach, which combines innovative job training while opening up new employment opportunities hold great promise, and I am heartened that the Committee will address them today.

There is no reason why in 2007, in these United States of America that our government cannot take steps to ensure an equality of opportunity for all Americans and address the troubling unemployment rate of African American males. I believe that over the last six years, we've only lacked the leadership, commitment and vision to take action. Senator Schumer today has shown his understanding of these challenges and has demonstrated his leadership and willingness to take these issues head on in holding this hearing. I welcome the opportunity to work with him and all of my colleagues in Congress in moving an agenda forward.

Today, millions of Americans, and not just African Americans, are asking the question: "Isn't this America?" When it comes to our broken health care system, crumbling schools, lack of affordable housing, and so many other challenges this is a question we not only should ask – but answer with smart solutions that uplift all. We must speak out and work hard so more Americans have the opportunity to realize their potential and follow their dreams.