

Stealing from our future: Communities of color announce opposition to Props 1A & 1D

LOS ANGELES—On May 19th Californians will once again be asked to vote on a slate of ballot measures in a special election. These initiatives are the result of negotiations between the Democratic leaders, Republican legislators, and the Governor to address the 2008-2009 budget shortfall and the 2009-10 budget. In particular, two ballot measures, Proposition 1A and 1D, if passed, will have a devastating affect on the health of communities of color.

“Proposition 1A does nothing to address the state’s fundamental budget problems. It will have no impact on the budget this year or next. Proposition 1A will, however, comprise California’s ability to meet the needs of a growing, changing, and aging population,” states Jean Ross, Executive Director of the California Budget Project.

Proposition 1A would place an arbitrary spending cap on safety-net programs—in good times and bad.

The Proposition also gives the governor unilateral power to make mid-year cuts—circumventing the government’s important checks and balance system. “Our community has serious concerns about centralizing so much power in the hands of one person,” says Jan Robinson Flint, Executive

Director of Black Women for Wellness, a Los Angeles-based organization. “Do we trust our current and future governors to do what’s right for our communities?”

Proposition 1D will divert funds from important local health and education funds for children to the state’s general fund, endangering thousands of low-income children’s access to health insurance and early childhood education. “In Monterey and San Benito counties, First 5 funding enables us to educate our families about the importance of access to health care and early childhood education,” says Nayamin Martinez, Program Coordinator, Centro Binacional Para El Desarrollo Indigena Oaxaqueño. “Without this information the health and well-being of our communities will be seriously threatened.”

“After years of state budget reductions our health care system is in ruin,” says Alice Chen, MD, MPH, Board member of the California Pan-Ethnic Health Network. “Proposition 1A will harm communities of color by limiting California’s ability to invest in health care, and Proposition 1D will result in more children becoming uninsured. Once again, our communities will shoulder the cost of our broken system.” ■

President: Too many people are out of work Obama offers plan to aid education while keeping unemployment benefits

WASHINGTON—President Barack Obama said Friday, May 8, there have been “somewhat encouraging” improvements in the country’s stricken labor markets, but the rate of joblessness is “still a sobering toll.”

The president spoke shortly after the government reported that the jobless rate rose to 8.9 percent in April, although the pace of layoffs slowed to 539,000 from well over 600,000 the previous month. He also announced a new plan to permit jobless people to return to college without losing their unemployment benefits.

Obama said that “if we want to come out of this recession better than before, we have to make sure we have a work force that’s trained better than before.”

As for the overall economy, he said: “Although we have a long way to go before we can put this recession behind us, the gears of our economic engine do seem to be slowly turning once again.”

The most valuable skill

The president asked states and colleges to help jobless people pursue education and training without losing their unemployment

benefits, which typically happens when they enroll in school. They also often fail to qualify for federal grants because eligibility is based on the previous year’s income.

Under Obama’s plan the Labor Department will encourage states to update rules during economic downturns so the unemployed can enroll in community colleges and other education or training programs without giving up their benefits. States generally require people who collect unemployment to be actively looking for work, which can make it difficult to sign up for school or job training. Going to school will satisfy the requirement that they be actively seeking new employment.

“In a 21st century economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge,” Obama said, “education is the single best bet we can make not just for our individual success, but for the success of our nation as a whole.”

The Education Department will encourage colleges to increase financial aid packages for the unemployed. Colleges can consider unemployed workers’ situation and make them eligible for Pell Grants, which

help low-income students afford college, and other aid.

An unemployed person could get a Pell Grant and use it to pay for education or job training without giving up unemployment benefits. Beginning in July, the maximum Pell Grant will increase by \$500, to \$5,350.

“Our unemployment insurance system should no longer be a safety net, but a steppingstone to a new future,” Obama said at the White House. “It should offer folks educational opportunities they wouldn’t otherwise have” and give them skills they need to “get ahead when the economy comes back.”

Obama has directed Labor Secretary Hilda Solis and Education Secretary Arne Duncan to implement the changes. Both departments have launched a new web site, to help inform the public.

States are to send letters to every unemployment recipient describing available training opportunities and financial support.

The \$787 billion economic recovery package that Obama signed into law in February gave states billions of dollars to provide extended benefits to the unemployed. (AP)

California may need to borrow over \$20 billion next year

SAN FRANCISCO—California may have to borrow more than \$20 billion in the coming 2009-2010 fiscal year as it struggles with cash flow problem, a budget watchdog for the state said on Thursday, May 7.

In new a report, the California Legislative Analyst’s Office

said the state might need to borrow more than \$20 billion, but added the state’s credit rating had weakened and it might have trouble raising the cash.

California, the eighth-largest economy in the world, may face another multibillion dollar state budget shortfall despite sealing a landmark deal earlier this year to

plug a \$42 billion gap, state officials have said.

In April, the California Department of Finance wrote that it expected to borrow \$13 billion in cash during the 2009-2010 fiscal year that begins July, and that a lack of cash flow had already caused the state to halt thousands of infrastructure projects.

“California is likely to have difficulty borrowing anywhere close to the needed amounts from the short-term bond markets based on the state government’s own credit,” the report said.

The report also recommended that the state government be cautious in accepting federal

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‘HappySlip’ campaign reaps dividends for RP

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experiencephilippines.ph through the HappySlip video blogs.

“Statistics would show that traffic to the website increased a day after each HappySlip video blog was uploaded on the website happyslip.com,” according to DOT Team North America head Corazon Jorda-Apo. “In the first four months of 2008 alone, the DOT website tallied 50,000 visits.”

One day last year, a record was achieved when 1,742 visits to the DOT’s website was recorded during a 24-hour period.

“Through the video blogs, more Filipino-Americans saw the Philippines as an ideal vacation destination,” she said. “Likewise, through the video blogs, Fil-Ams saw brand new experiences that they can look forward to in the Philippines.”

Because of this innovative approach, the DOT received this year’s Grand Bronze Anvil Award and the Anvil Award of Excellence for its online marketing program for the most outstanding public relations tool—the second straight time the department has been recognized by Anvil for innovative marketing.

The “HappySlip Blogs” campaign leveraged the power of Internet videos and the popularity of Gambito to capture the interest of second- and third-generation Americans and Canadians.

This eventually enticed “thousands” of North Americans to explore the Philippines and its destinations, book travel packages and return to the country with their families and friends, DOT said.

According to Jorda-Apo, the DOT website received “thousands of feedback” through happyslip.com subscribers.

“Positive viewer comments on wanting to go back or travelling for the first time to the Philippines, purchasing tickets soon and confirming that the Philippines is a safe place to travel to, are some of the themes of the notable feedback posted by HappySlip fans,” she said.

Last year, tourist arrivals from the US were reported at 578,246 or 18.42 percent of the total tourist arrivals for that year. Tourists from Canada reached 102,381 for a 3.26-percent share. All told, the North American market produced 680,627 tourists for the Philippines in 2008.

According to DOT estimates, total tourists from the US generate for the country on the average \$48.57 million per day in tourists receipts.

To gain these benefits, the DOT’s HappySlip campaign spent around P2.5 million—a fraction of the estimated media exposure value that the department and the country gained. During the campaign, 18 news and feature articles were published in the local print media equivalent to P1.6 million in advertising value, and P13.3 million in “media value.” The campaign was also featured on TV shows and news programs, generating publicity worth P8.1 million in advertising value and P81.1 million in media value.

And how does the weak global economy play into plans of tourism authorities this year?

“The challenge for DOT during these days of crisis is to keep a positive rate, or at least a steady zero growth rate in tourist arrivals,” Jorda-Apo said. “[We are] confident that, through our efforts in niche marketing and staying on course of its marketing strategies, our objectives will be achieved.” ■



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