

Benghazi-IRS-Leaks-- What about jobs?

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By Bob Weiner & Nakia Gladden
The nation's media are transfixed with obsessive coverage of Hillary Clinton's role (there was none) in the talking points on the Benghazi deaths, IRS investigation of Tea Party groups' tax deductions (the same way they earlier asked the same of the NAACP), the Justice Department's demand for AP's phone records concerning leaks on Yemeni terrorists (after Congress had demanded the investigation of the leaks); and the press properly wants to know what to do about Syria, and how to end sex abuse in the U.S. military.

Meanwhile, WHAT ABOUT JOBS? That's the real problem that will define our future success as a country for the rest of this century, and it is a question Rep. John Conyers is asking. The silence has been deafening. At the President's news conferences, which we attended this week and last week, there was not a single question from the media about jobs.

Despite the Dow reaching all-time highs, the number of jobs available has seen no such luck. "Are we in the midst of a jobless recovery?" asked MSNBC's Chuck Todd last week on "Andrea Mitchell Reports." According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, unemployment is at 7.5%. Though that is the lowest it has been in the last four years, the U.S. post-World War II norm is about 5% unemployment and has often been at 4% or under. .

Michigan's unemployment rate is a staggering 8.5%. Michigan tops the list for African Americans who are unemployed at 18.7%.

What are the major factors contributing to the slow recovery of jobs in the US? Outsourcing is at the top of the list. Shipping jobs overseas for cheaper labor hinders the opportunity for job growth. Moreover, based on recent tragic events in Bangladesh's and China's factories, lives would be saved because companies would be regulated under U.S. standards. Unfortunately, major companies would prefer to increase their profit margins than to make those jobs available for Americans who need them. Yet U.S. company profits are not at issue—they are at all time records. It's our jobs—the factor which helps most American families—that are at low numbers.

There is a glimmer of hope, however. Last week the President began a series what he calls the "Middle Class Job and Opportunity Tours." According to White House spokesman Josh Earnest, the President will visit cities exhibiting job growth to "learn what has helped them become successful and use these models of growth to encourage Congress to act." He launched his first events in Austin, TX and Baltimore, MD. Although it is a start, we need more than just stump speeches, we need immediate action.

Rep. John Conyers (D-MI), the Dean of the Congressional Black Caucus, has reintroduced his "Humphrey-Hawkins 21st Century Full Employment and Training Act" and is creating a "Jobs Caucus". The Act is a "jobs-for-all bill that would create millions of new fast track jobs and allocate billions of dollars for job training." The bill currently has 35 cosponsors and counting. Hopefully, Conyers can use the same noise and clamor he used for the single payer health care bill. It



goes without saying that he made the President's health bill a better one. He can do the same on jobs by making sure that they get included on the agenda and not just debt, deficit, austerity, and rich tax breaks. Conyers is pressing the issue. At his weekly jobs strategy meeting, where he pulls in national, Michigan and Detroit organizations and leaders, he said that every time he sees the President— and Obama listens since Conyers was the first congressman to endorse him—Conyers tells him, "Jobs should be the number one concern. Full employment is the single most important issue on the agenda. Jobs are the way the economy will improve, and government emphasizing employment is the way for families to come out of poverty and

joblessness." End the debt by jobs and productivity, not by cutting programs, says Conyers.

Conyers is also concerned with the social ramifications of high unemployment rates. He says, "When jobs go up, crime goes down. Alcohol and drug use also go down."

Once again, later this summer, the debt ceiling rears its ugly head. Jobs do not seem to be at the top of the agenda of most in Congress -- they are focused more on the deficit, tax cuts, and program cuts, a spiral which we and Europe have seen in the past and now makes everything worse. We need JOBS, not austerity. Lest anyone think John Conyers, despite his incredible history, is not out there pitching, they should see his high energy, constant meetings, and leadership discussions pushing jobs onto the national agenda.

Robert Weiner is a former White House spokesman in the Clinton administration and former chief of staff for Cong. Claude Pepper (D-FL), spokesman for the House Government Operations Committee, and senior staff for Cong. John Conyers (D-MI), Charles Rangel (D-NY), Ed Koch (D-NY), and Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-MA). He wrote the epilogue to Bankole Thompson's groundbreaking book, *Obama and Christian Loyalty*. Nakia Gladden is policy and research analyst for Solutions for Change.
