

La Nueva Mayoría

By David R. Jones



Expand NY Works, Dump Stop-and-Frisk

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Young people across the country and here in New York have been hard hit by joblessness. Many young people in urban areas lack a decent education that could provide them with the skills for jobs in our economy.

A recent proposal by Governor Cuomo, the NY Youth Works program, will provide \$62 million for job training and \$25 million in tax credits for businesses that hire unemployed youth. It is to the governor's credit that he has taken this step targeting the chronic issue of youth unemployment. But these funds are for one year and are to be used statewide. A press release put out by the governor's office last month announced that businesses would be creating jobs for 2,900 youths, with perhaps another 1,000 to participate in job training.

New York City alone has about 170,000 young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither in school nor working. These disconnected youths are unprepared for the future in the midst of the worst economy in our lifetimes. About four in ten in the city are Latinos.

And for too many, their main contact with government is not through meaningful job-readiness or training programs, but as the targets of dubious stop-and-frisk policies. In 2011, 684,330 New Yorkers - the vast majority Latino and black men - were stopped by police. Of that number, nine out of ten were not arrested, nor did they receive summonses.

Until we get serious about scaling up programs like the governor's to the true need, while scaling back ineffective and discriminatory stop-and-frisk policies that scar entire communities, we will come nowhere near what is needed to make a dent in this problem.

Initiatives to connect youth to jobs and educational opportunities do not always require large outlays of funds. Increasing GED programs and other efforts to connect individuals who did not complete high school to education, training, and jobs would put young people on a path to economic stability. Also, summer youth employment, which has been drastically cut back in recent years, must be increased. Studies have shown that if people are not employed by age 25, their chances of finding sustaining employment for the rest of their lives are greatly diminished.

There is a need to strengthen career and technical education (CTE) programs with better funding and certified teachers working in classes that are serious about moving young people from school to a job or an apprenticeship. We should also consider expanding alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent youthful offenders. A prison sentence for a young person is a lifetime stigma that often leads to a form of "civil death" after incarceration - no job, no money, no place to live, no health care - and a likely trip back to prison. And HUD officials in Washington and New York should be working to maximize employment opportunities for young people at public housing facilities through the Section 3 provisions of the 1968 Housing Act.

A recent op-ed column in *The New York Times* by a Columbia University professor set out the possibility that millions of Americans, unable to find work during and after the recession, will be jobless throughout their lives - people who would be superfluous to our economy and the nation. This is not a fantasy; it has happened in Britain, where whole families - many in the north of England - live their entire lives on the dole.

Unless we have the political will to confront this growing problem, we will be creating a permanent underclass of millions of Americans - along with the accompanying damage of long-term joblessness, higher welfare and prison costs, a spike in homelessness, and a lower quality of life for all of us.

David R. Jones is president and CEO of the Community Service Society (CSS), the leading voice on behalf of low-income New Yorkers for over 168 years. For over 10 years he served as a member of the board of directors of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund. The views expressed in this column are solely those of the writer.