

La Nueva Mayoría

By David R. Jones



With Obama's Reelection, Hope Still Lives in America

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President Obama's reelection last week is a blessing for the working people of America. There is hope that discretionary spending – on food stamps, unemployment insurance benefits, tax credits – will be protected from draconian cuts. Hopefully, President Obama will be able to fashion a budget for next year that will not be devastating to those most vulnerable of our citizens – children, many of whom already live in poverty, older people on fixed incomes, the unemployed and uninsured – those who are without the political clout to protect themselves in an era of cutthroat politics. And earned income tax credits and child tax credits for working families will not be held hostage to more tax breaks for the nation's wealthiest people.

The president's reelection means that the Affordable Care Act is safe for now. Its full effects will not be felt until 2014, when millions of uninsured Americans will finally have the security of medical care coverage. Had right wing politicians been able to repeal the Affordable Care Act and block grant Medicaid to the states, it would have precipitated a health care disaster. Analysis from the Commonwealth Fund reports that repealing the Affordable Care Act, block granting Medicaid, and giving tax incentives to individuals to purchase their own insurance would lead to an estimated 72 million uninsured Americans by 2022.

The most important area that the president and Congress must address is the question of the core competitiveness of the United States. If the federal government doesn't concentrate our resources on expanding educational opportunities and upgrading the nation's infrastructure, we are in danger of becoming a second rate power.

The president must make his case for government action even when it means an expansion of the federal government's authority. There is a debate in this country between those who want to shrink government, especially the federal government, and those who see a strong central government as necessary to our health and safety as a nation. It is a debate that has raged since the founding of our nation.

During the election campaign, right wing politicians talked about shutting down the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and off-loading disaster relief to the

states. Could you just see individual states – with their budgets at the breaking point – dealing with billions of dollars of devastation from Hurricane Sandy?

The bailout of the auto industry – which saved millions of jobs – was possible only by the federal government. No other entity, public or private, could have accomplished it. And when President Obama did so, the right wing naysayers – who wanted the auto industry to go bankrupt - predicted the end of auto makers in America. But now the auto industry is booming.

Many jobs created in the past few years are low income with few, if any, benefits. Worker protection is crucial and this means that the war on unions must be combated. There are many people who look at our limping economy and its consequent endemic poverty and believe that there is nothing that can be done to change it. But political decisions got us into this mess, and it will take the courage of political decisions to get us out.

Last week, America's voters made a choice. In an election where billionaires publicly spent millions to try to defeat him, where state officials tried to shut down early voting and even tried to prevent people from voting in heavily Democratic precincts, when right wingers screamed "socialism" at every attempt to stimulate the economy, the voters rejected the fear mongering, the outright lies, the hypocrisy, the intolerance, and the hatred, and reelected Barack Obama. And they returned a Democratic U.S. Senate. The politics of fear didn't work in 2012.

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.