

A job is best social service program

Written by Al McFarlane and B.P. Ford, the editors
Monday, 02 March 2009 18:24

Louis King, President of Summit Academy Opportunities Industrialization Centers, and H.I.R.E co-convenor with environmentalist Will Steger, is preaching about the principles that guide his passion for getting our community back to work. He's selling the world on his idea of responsibility, accountability and justice. He makes the point over and over again, whether talking to overflow Town Hall Meetings around Twin Cities, to the State Legislature in hearings at the Capitol, or in Legislative Hearings in the community, or in churches he views and visits as core institutions at the heart of his efforts to create jobs for our community.

"The best social service program in the world is a job," King said, describing the first principle that guides the H.I.R.E. MN initiative. "There's a lot of talk in this state about job cuts. We hear listening on TV that about 54,000 people are out of work," King told standing room audiences at Lao Family Center in St. Paul, at the American Indian Center in South Minneapolis, and at Glover Sudduth Center for Neighborhood and Economic Development.

The second principle is to recognize that" Barack Obama did for a lot of us in saying this black-white thing is old news. It's all of us. The world is no longer like the old black and white TVs. It's multi-colored, and it's multi-ethnic. So we organize across boundaries – from North Minneapolis and South Minneapolis to here in St. Paul at the LaoFamily Center. Environmentalists have joined with community organizers and workforce specialists. It takes all of us to make this work. We organize beyond boundaries and we set aside perceived and real differences because we have some business to take care of," he said.

"Because if you're not working that means that you don't eat at the diner. And if you don't eat at the diner, the waitress can't shop at the Target. And if the waitress can't shop at Target, the cashier can't take her children to McDonalds. And if there's no McDonald's, there's no after school programs or after school work for our children."

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King said “When we hear about 54,000 people losing work, there’s a whole food chain going down.”

“The third principle: be heard and be prepared. Not only are we going to inform the public policy agenda, we are going to be part of rebuilding the infrastructure of this community, and also part of developing the renewable energy industry that will lead this country into greatness again,” he said.

Dr. Bruce Corrie, dean of the School of Business at Concordia University in St. Paul, and co-host of the Lao Family Center Town Hall Meeting said the challenge for us in the green economy is who’s going to build it? “And so we as a group, we call ourselves ALANA, - Africans, Latinos, Asians and Native Americans, - we had a summit on September 15th of last year and we called green experts and community people to strategize. At the State Capitol we presented our strategies to grow green businesses and green jobs in the new economy,” he said. (The report is online at alanagreen.org).

“ALANA communities are going to be the fastest-growing segment of the primary labor work force by 2030, and the ALANA firms are growing faster than the overall firms and businesses in MinnesotaMinnesota. Our challenge is our firms are not in the sector where these green economies or businesses are growing. Our challenge is that the occupational groups today where we are found in Minnesota are not the sectors that will grow when the green economy will grow,” Corrie said. today. We have our values very similar to the values of the green economy, but the challenge that we face with this opportunity is that our kids in the schools have one of the worst rates of graduation in schools and science in

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“So we need to do something. It’s Minnesota’s choice. If Minnesota is going to be a global competitor in 2030, it needs to address this challenge and make the investments today. Otherwise, in 2030 we’ll be a declining state, because our prime workforce needs that investment,” he said.

Karen Monahan heads the Environmental Justice Advocates of Minnesota, an organization that works on various environmental justice issues, said climate change is a big focus because it “does not affect everyone equally. The folks who are disproportionately affected, oftentimes, have the least amount of resources to deal with the effects. For example, dirty coal plants are often put into communities of color and low-income communities. Coal plants cause asthma. African-Americans have the highest rate of asthma. Asthma is the number one reason students miss school. You link that to test scores, you link that to dropout rates – people still have to be able to eat, they still have to put a roof over their head. Oftentimes, you know, social services are out there to help with that, and people turn to other means,” Monahan said.

“When you’re talking about environmental justice you are also talking about healthcare. Often these families don’t have healthcare. It could mean \$10,000 out of pocket expense. It means lost wages,” she said.

“Talking about the environment means talking about issues of race and class,” Monahan said.

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The Reverend Ronnie Patterson is pastor of St. Paul's New Hope Baptist Church, and president of the St. Paul Black Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance. He said "as pastors we feel the impact, because we know that if jobs are not available and our folks are not working, then we suffer even in the religious community. We love preaching. We love praying. We love singing. We love shouting. But in order to have a quality ministry, you've got to have money. So we are very concerned about our people having jobs."

Bill Means offered a traditional greeting in the indigenous language of this area. He said "when you walk outside you're actually kicking up the dust of our ancestors. We know something about this green. I represent the OIC State Council. We got five OIC programs in the state. As you know, at OIC, we give a hand up, not a handout. We take people off the welfare rolls and put them on the payrolls. That's our business. We've been here in the State of Minnesota since 1964. We know what we're doing when it comes to job training. We're here tonight to say we want these jobs for our communities. When you go by a highway project that we're paying for with the gas tax, you can't tell me it takes a rocket scientist to hold a sign that says slow down or stop. That pays 16, 17 dollars an hour. We want to see some Black faces, some Indian faces, some Chicano faces, and some women. We're here to try to help all protected classes, including women."

"We're going to send a message to America that we don't want our people left out. We don't want all the traditional corporations getting all these jobs, sending people into our community. We train our own community members; we'll fix our own buildings. That's what we're about – community," Means said.