

Jeff Hayden (l), Don Samuels participate in Sept. 8 voting rally for solutions to Black unemployment  
Credit: Charles Hallman

### Black unemployment tops 10%

by Charles Hallman  
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#### *Candidates and concerned citizens offer their views on rising joblessness*

The federal government reported September 5 that the Black jobless rate is now 10.6 percent, over four percentage points higher than the nation's overall unemployment rate of 6.1 percent.

"African American unemployment over the past year has shot up by 2.9 percentage points, the largest one-year increase in 24 years," said Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama in a released statement. He outlined an Emergency Economic Plan that includes cutting taxes for 95 percent of working families; establishing a \$25 billion fund to offset any state and local cuts in health, education and housing; and providing a \$25 billion job and growth fund to replenish the federal highway trust fund, which pays for road and bridge maintenance.

The MSR contacted the John McCain campaign office for more specifics on addressing the high Black unemployment rate, but received no response to our request by press time. However, GOP candidate McCain says on his website that he will overhaul unemployment insurance and cut the corporate tax rate from 35 to 25 percent.

U.S. Senator Norm Coleman (R-Minn.) says on his website that he "is also working to address the current challenges facing our economy" and "is also pushing to make Community Development Block Grant funding available for communities hit hard by the crisis."

A Coleman reelection campaign staffer told us last week that a statement from Sen. Coleman on the Black jobless rate was forthcoming, but it was not received by press time.

Barb Davis White, a Republican who is running against Democratic U.S. Congressman Keith Ellison, believes "a bipartisan effort is needed to attract more businesses to the Black community, her spokesperson, Donald Allen, told us in a phone interview.

On his website, Rep. Ellison identifies no specifics to address Black unemployment but says, "Every element of [his] legislative agenda is aimed at leveling the playing field so that all working families have the opportunity to achieve the American Dream," that he voted for the fair minimum wage bill.

During a September 6 voting rally at the Capri Theater in North Minneapolis, Rachel Dykoski of South Minneapolis said she believes that the Black jobless rate on the North Side is three times higher than the national average. "I am not shocked [at the high rate] added. "I think education is a part of it — students of color are underperforming [academically] across the board in our schools.

The MSR talked with several other candidates and elected officials about how they would address the current high Black unemployment rate.

#### **Al Franken, Democrat candidate for U.S. Senate**

"There are a few things I would do right away. One is an infrastructure stimulus package to put people to work on projects that can be started in 90 days. Also, retrofit foreclosed homes to make them energy efficient. This would jumpstart a new industry. It would

create jobs, especially in neighborhoods where there have been foreclosures, and would increase the values of [foreclosed] homes and increase the value of homes in the neighborhood.”

**Yoman Brunson, Republican candidate for State House District 58B**

“I run into a lot of people who say that they have gotten laid off [their jobs] or that there are not that many jobs out there. If they have a job, they are unable to purchase the basic necessities that they need to live day by day. We need some type of incentive packages for businesses in our [North Minneapolis] area, and [we need] to attract more businesses into our area so we can create more jobs.”

**Bobby Champion, DFL candidate for District 58B**

“What I would do first of all is encourage...a comprehensive plan for economic development in our area. Then I would work with officials [to see] that the residents of our district also [become] employees in those economically driven initiatives.”

**Jeff Hayden, DFL candidate for State House District 61B**

“I think that a way that we attack unemployment, especially in my district and in communities of color, is to take things like the foreclosure crisis and other redevelopment plans and make sure that we get a Community Benefits Agreement, that we get as many people [as possible] inside those communities working on those projects. My plan is to first start employing people in the communities [that have been] devastated by the foreclosure crisis, [and] train those people to work on those houses.”

**Phyllis Kahn, DFL state representative, District 59B, running for reelection**

“I think we need a real concentration on job programs [and] on higher education, too, because we see that the better jobs are now [requiring] higher education. We really need to be sure that people get back to college [or] get into a college program that credits their experience. We have to make sure that people are trained not just to go into any job, but trained for good jobs and get the education along with it that’s necessary. You can’t do these programs without government taking charge and doing them, or without taking responsibility for charge and paying for them.”

**Mpls City Council Member Don Samuels**

More training is needed, especially in specialized jobs, says Council Member Samuels. “There is a shortage of the skills, the training and the processes that are not geared to our schools and our communities,” he points out, adding that there is “a strong disconnection” between the community and the existing businesses located on the North Side. “When you have a large company they tend to hire in a more comprehensive way, and when you have a small company, they tend to hire from friends and [current] employee relationships. We [City officials] are trying to make a concerted effort to change that.”

Several community residents also offered their thoughts about the latest Black unemployment figures.

Paul Amla of South Minneapolis said, “This is a serious issue that could increase violence in the streets if we don’t do something about it. We can hope that change will come in Washington and that somebody will be there to listen to our cries.”

Sondra Samuels of North Minneapolis said, “I think, quite frankly, that the big picture of how to move the economy and how to deal with unemployment is to get the right people elected.”

Saundra Crump of North Minneapolis said, “It’s really scary. I’m hoping that we get some real jobs, not just service jobs. Increasing [minimum wage] jobs are not getting it. I think [Obama] has some realistic ideas about creating “green” jobs and actually understanding that you need to hire the engineers to develop the technology to create the jobs.”

*Charles Hallman welcomes reader responses to [challman@spokesman-recorder.com](mailto:challman@spokesman-recorder.com), or read his blog: [www.wwwwchallman.blogspot.com](http://www.wwwwchallman.blogspot.com).*

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