



# Republicans' "Pledge to America" Fails Communities of Color

Many Will Suffer Under Plan for Conservative Rule

By Tony Carrk   October 5, 2010

Republican leaders unveiled their "Pledge to America," a 48-page document laying out a Republican governing philosophy should they find themselves in the majority next year. Republicans claimed the pledge was the culmination of a year-long listening tour and based on ideas solicited directly from the American people. Noticeably lacking from the Republican pledge is any idea or agenda that speaks to communities of color in the United States. In fact, many of the proposals Republicans plan to enact would harm them.

Minorities accounted for nearly half the births in the United States last year. There will be no ethnic majority in the United States by the year 2050. The Hispanic population is expected to grow by nearly 67 million people, from 35.6 million people today to 102.6 million in 2050—a 188 percent expansion. And the African-American population is projected to rise by 71 percent or 26 million people from 35.8 million today to 61.4 million in 2050. Given these trends, neglecting communities of color will have disastrous consequences for the long-term prosperity of our nation.

---

## The state of the economy particularly affects communities of color

The American middle class as a whole continues to struggle as the economy very slowly comes out of the worst economic recession since the Great Depression. The economic situation is worse among African Americans and Hispanics. New U.S. Census numbers highlight the disparities. The poverty rate among African Americans and Hispanics was nearly double the overall rate in 2009—25.8 percent for African Americans and 25.3 percent for Hispanics compared to an

average 14.3 percent. The child poverty rate was hardly better—35.7 percent for African Americans and 33.1 percent for Hispanics compared to an overall average of 20.7 percent. Real median household income for African Americans, \$32,584, was roughly one-third below the average median household income of \$49,777 in 2009; for Hispanics, it was roughly one-quarter below the average at \$38,039. And the unemployment rate for African Americans and Hispanics was substantially higher in August 2010 than the national average of 9.6 percent: 16.3 percent and 12 percent, respectively.

---

## Republicans pledge a return to Bush policies and higher deficits

Republicans pledge to improve the economy by extending all of President Bush's tax cuts and reducing spending to the Bush administration level. In other words, Republicans pledge to pursue the very same economic policies that created the Great Recession and turned record surpluses into record deficits. Under these policies, we saw median household income fall \$2,875 for African-American families and \$3,557 for Hispanic families, and watched the poverty rate in communities of color increase faster compared to the national average. Returning to these same failed policies would produce the same results: higher deficits while putting the needs of the richest 2 percent above working- and middle-class families.

In fact, a Center for American Progress analysis estimated the entire Republican "Pledge to America" would cost \$11.1 trillion in deficits over the next 10 years.

---

## Republicans pledge \$100,000 tax cuts for millionaires, job losses, cuts to services for everyone else

Republicans are fighting President Obama's proposal to extend tax cuts to those making under \$250,000, or 98 percent of the population. They pledge to extend all the tax cuts instead, an approach that would have a negligible benefit for communities of color as only 0.7 percent of African-American families and 0.9 percent of Hispanic families earned more than \$250,000 in 2007.<sup>1</sup> They are also pledging to return spending to "pre-stimulus, pre-bailout levels," similar to the proposal House Republican Leader John Boehner (R-OH) recently outlined.

While extending the tax cuts for the top 2 percent would give millionaires an average \$100,000 tax cut, it would add \$830 billion more in deficits over the next 10

years, when interest payments on the national debt are included, saddling future generations with debt at a time when our nation cannot afford it. It would not spur economic growth that could help the rest of us. The Congressional Budget Office, CBO, ranked extending the tax cuts as the least effective way to stimulate the economy and create jobs. Wealthier Americans are more likely to save their money whereas middle class families are more likely to spend the additional income to make ends meet.

On the spending side, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimated a 21 percent across-the-board cut to nondefense discretionary programs would be required to reduce federal spending to 2008 levels. Some of these programs provide vital services to communities of color. Foremost among them is education. A 21 percent reduction would mean a \$15 billion cut in education spending. Pell Grants would be cut by \$5 billion, affecting 8 million students. 200,000 children would be cut from Head Start. At a time when graduation rates among communities of color lag behind white students and an achievement gap persists in our education system, communities of color can ill afford these reductions.

These cuts would also result in fewer jobs. According to the Economic Policy Institute, cutting federal spending to 2008 levels and pursuing tax cuts for the top 2 percent would mean a loss of 1.1 million jobs.

---

## Republicans pledge to repeal programs that help communities of color

While Republicans pledge to enact policies that disproportionately benefit the top 2 percent, they are also pledging to repeal policies that have helped middle class families and communities of color.

First, echoing a theme they have been touting for months, Republicans pledge to repeal the Affordable Care Act. Republicans say they would enact their own health proposals, but these proposals would limit access to coverage, threaten many of the consumer protections in the law such as banning discrimination based on pre-existing conditions, and increase premiums. This could take some time, so Republicans have also pledged not to fund the Affordable Care Act while they try to repeal it. The Affordable Care Act provides high-quality health coverage to millions of Americans and reforms a health care system that simply was not working for communities of color.

The Center for American Progress issued a report highlighting racial and ethnic disparities in the current health system. The findings were striking: the mortality rate for African Americans was 1.6 times higher than for whites; half of Latinos and more than 25 percent of African Americans do not have a regular doctor, compared to 20 percent of white Americans; and people of color are more likely to suffer from a chronic disease such as diabetes or hypertension. Communities of color represent more than half of the uninsured population in the United States in the wake of the Great Recession. Hispanics in particular represent nearly one-third of all uninsured individuals in the United States, with approximately half of all Hispanics between the ages of 18 and 34 going without health insurance.

When fully implemented, the Affordable Care Act will expand health coverage to 32 million Americans by expanding eligibility for the Medicaid program and by providing help with private insurance premiums for moderate-income families. This assistance with health insurance costs will be particularly helpful to people of color, who make up a disproportionate share of Americans living at or near the poverty level. Members of racial and ethnic minority groups will also be more likely to obtain employer-based coverage, as small businesses get help with premiums and large business face new incentives for providing coverage. In addition, through investments in the primary care workforce and new focus on prevention, the Affordable Care Act will ensure that all Americans have better access to primary care providers and receive the preventive care they need. Health plans will cover preventive services such as diabetes testing and cancer screening without copayments, and Medicare and Medicaid will encourage physicians to develop primary care medical homes, which are associated with reduced health care disparities and better access to preventive services.

Second, Republicans pledge to cancel Recovery Act funding that has yet to be spent. This approach is consistent with the party's near unanimous opposition to the Recovery Act since it was passed—except for when members have touted the spending in their districts, of course.

The Recovery Act has helped communities of color in a variety of ways. The Recovery Act cut taxes for 110 million families, or 95 percent, of working families. CBO estimated the Recovery Act created or saved up to 3.3 million jobs and lowered the unemployment rate 1.8 percentage points in the second quarter of 2010. So far, it has spent \$242 billion on tax breaks targeted toward working- and middle-class families; it has also provided \$232 billion in aid to states, the unemployed, and other victims of the recession. Of the remaining funds that have to be spent, \$46

billion is slated for working-class families and businesses; \$35 billion is slated for infrastructure improvements; and \$24 billion is slated for education spending.

Third, Republicans' pledge to end government involvement in Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac is another idea that would adversely affect the communities of color. An estimated 17 percent of Latino families and 11 percent of African-American families have lost their homes or are at an imminent risk of losing their homes, yet Republicans want to eliminate the government-run mortgage lenders. While these institutions need to be reformed, they do serve important functions such as making the 30-year, fixed-rate mortgages available to the general public and providing mortgage credit and affordable rental housing for communities of color. The Republican proposal would take this away and worsen the home buying environment for communities of color as the economy recovers. Fewer mortgages would be available to working-class families in the long run without some government-backed financing.

---

## Republicans pledge no bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform

If the Republican pledge is to be believed, there will not be a bipartisan effort for comprehensive immigration reform in the near future. On the contrary, Republicans appear to endorse the controversial Arizona immigration law when they pledge to “reaffirm the authority of state and local law enforcement to assist in the enforcement of all federal immigration laws.” Many Latinos feel this “enforcement-only” policy criminalizes their community and other communities of color. Further, it strains relationships with law enforcement, making it harder for law enforcement officials to keep all neighborhoods safe.

---

## Conclusion

The Republicans' "Pledge to America" is intended to show the American people how they would govern if they regain the majority next year. Based on this pledge, one could conclude that Republicans would help the richest 2 percent of Americans often to the detriment of middle- and working-class families. And absent from the GOP document is any real attempt to address issues facing communities of color.

Like so many families in America, communities of color are facing a stubborn job market, tighter budgets, and increased health care costs. The fact is that the Republican "Pledge to America" will make their situation worse, not better.

---

## Endnote

1 Table 679 [http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/income\\_expenditures\\_poverty\\_wealth.html](http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/income_expenditures_poverty_wealth.html).

---

---

The Center for American Progress Action Fund transforms progressive ideas into policy through rapid response communications, legislative action, grassroots organizing and advocacy, and partnerships with other progressive leaders throughout the country and the world. The Action Fund is also the home of the Progress Report and ThinkProgress.

---

---

Center for American Progress Action Fund

