

True change is never easy

Written by Dr. Dorothy Height, NNPA Special Commentary
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Over the course of his first few weeks in office, President Obama has made brilliant strides to correcting the trajectory of this nation.

He has made a whole stroke toward women's equality in the workplace through signing the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. He has begun the march toward expanding health care coverage to all in need by extending the State Children's Health Improvement Program (SCHIP) to millions of children who would have otherwise gone without.

He has inspired America to face the challenging days ahead through a truly visionary address to a joint session of Congress, and introduced a budget that puts a strong priority on basic American needs that have gone neglected for far too long.

Yet, in the midst of these victories, he faces sobering political challenges.

In spite of multiple attempts to bring lawmakers together to enact the change mandate he was elected to implement, he has at times, been met with significant resistance. Time and time again, he has been attacked for doing what most economists agree needed to be done — implementing targeted investments into the economy in order to get the nation out of the financial devastation that was brought on by years of unbridled greed and regulatory neglect.

And now, even at a time when jobless claims have hit a quarter century high, governors of some of the poorest states in the nation have threatened to turn down stimulus funding for extending unemployment benefits to residents in their states—states that have especially large African-American populations.

All throughout the campaign season and culminating on November 4th, the African-American community organized, campaigned, and voted along with the majority of the rest of America to radically change the direction of this nation. We voted for an end to a war that should have never been waged in the first place.

We voted for a sound plan to put our economy back on track, keep millions of vulnerable families in their homes, and to improve educational opportunities throughout this nation from preschool, to grade school, to putting a college education within the grasp of everyone who has the desire and ability to attend. We worked for change. We voted for change. But our work is not yet done.

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If there is one thing I have learned from the long struggles that I have faced for racial and gender equality in America, it is the simple truth that change never comes easy. As brilliant and hard-working as our President is, he is but one man. The change that he seeks, and that we seek, cannot be achieved by one person and it will not take place in the blink of an eye.

Just as in the campaign, our President needs our long-term assistance now. He needs millions of supporters to actively push for the legislative agenda we voted for just a few short months ago.

He needs active engagement on the state level to force Governors to not sabotage a plan that our citizens need, not only for their own personal survival today, but for this nation's economy to finally turn the corner towards a better tomorrow. He needs phone calls, e-mails, and letters to Congress to remind legislators that voters are watching and will remember who helps and who stands in the way of the new direction that this nation so urgently requires.

America needs the same spirit of persistent engagement and activism that led to the historic victory that many of us thought we would never see.

We also need patience to understand that even with our best efforts, the road ahead will be long, but any goal worth fighting for is also worth seeing through to the end. Yes, the need for change remains. It is now up to all of us to ensure that it eventually comes to pass.

Dr. Dorothy I. Height is chair and president emerita of the National Council of Negro Women. The "Whispering Out Loud" series is sponsored by the Black Women's Roundtable.