

Job creation must start here and now

BY DAVID R. JONES

President Barack Obama has challenged Congress to combat the nation's job crisis with a \$447 billion package of tax cuts and spending designed to stimulate economic growth. Our city and state governments must act as well to create jobs that offer real paths to economic security. Equally important, we need to prepare the workforce to hold those jobs.

According to a recent survey commissioned by the Commu-

nity Service Society, New Yorkers overwhelmingly want to focus on job creation rather than austerity measures. A full 47% of those surveyed said that creating more jobs should be the top priority for the next mayor, compared with only 9% who said that the key task is to keep spending down. The survey, conducted by Lake Research Partners, used random digit dialing to conduct telephone interviews with 1,419 city residents in July. The margin of error for the full sample is

plus or minus 2.6 percentage points.

Specifically, when we asked whether we need a mayor who supports policies that make New York City a good place to do business or a mayor who supports policies that help working New Yorkers and their families get ahead, nearly 70% chose the latter. Just 18% favored policies to improve the business climate, while 13% wanted both.

Here's what we need to do to create jobs:

- Initiate our own re-employ-

ment benefits program, which would allow unemployment benefits to be used as an incentive for employers to train and hire the long-term unemployed. Unlike Georgia's version, New York's program would convert UI benefits into temporary wage subsidies for permanent hires.

- Increase GED programs and other efforts to connect high school dropouts to education, training and decent jobs. More than 91,000 young people ages 16 to 24 do not have a high school diploma and are no longer in school. Another 741,100 working-age adults lack a high school education. Yet only 8,886 people took and passed the GED in 2009, the most recent for which data are available, down from the 13,536 who passed in 2007.

- Step up efforts to spend federal funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development in order to maximize employment opportunities for low-income residents of public housing and Section 8 voucher-holders, as required by law. We estimate that as many as 60,000 such residents are unemployed.

- Take advantage of low interest rates to build and repair schools, roads and parks. The High Line stands as a dramatic example of how much economic development can



be generated by visionary public works.

- Press large city banks that were bailed out by taxpayers to ease lending restrictions on small businesses and startup entrepreneurs.

Helping those who've been hit hardest by the prolonged economic downturn—young people, especially the less-educated, and older workers who have now been out of work for months or even years—must be the focus of any job-creation offensive.

A recent analysis of the city's labor trends by the Fiscal Policy Institute found that unemployment rates now exceed their recession levels for black males, individuals without high school diplomas, and workers who are aged 55 and over. Such sobering news underscores the need to start thinking about new policies, because the old ones aren't working.

David R. Jones is president and CEO of the Community Service Society of New York.