



## **We Need Government Action on Jobs**

By David R. Jones  
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The millions of Americans desperate for work look to Washington to act on job creation. With the private sector afraid to take on any large-scale hiring and state and local governments straining to balance their budgets, only the federal government can provide relief in the form of public works programs, funding for job training, tax breaks for hiring, and credit easements to expanding small businesses.

Latino families have been hard hit by the recession. The Latino unemployment rate in October 2010 was 12.6 percent, but this does not include those who have given up looking for work. Young Latinos attempting to enter the nation's workforce have been especially hurt by the stagnant economy. To help gain and retain employment, the Community Service Society strongly advocates for quality GED programs for out-of-school youth as well as transitional workforce programs that help prepare young people to make successful transitions into either college or employment.

New York's Congressman Jerrold Nadler introduced a bill (H.R. 2497) entitled the Transportation Jobs Corps Act that would recruit young people for jobs in the transportation industry. Diversity and serving underrepresented segments of the population will be particular priorities for these grants. Given the poor state of much of America's transportation infrastructure, a transportation corps could furnish many jobs for disconnected youth while providing a safer, more efficient, environmentally sound and sustainable transportation.

Legislation introduced by Congressman Charles Rangel - amending the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) to include low-skill youth who have been out of work and school for the past six months - was made part of the 2009 stimulus package, but it must be reauthorized by the next Congress. The WOTC provides employers with a credit against their income tax by employing certain groups of disadvantaged workers.

As for the GED program in the city, it is in a shambles. In 2007, for instance, only 47.5 percent passed the test. And the relatively few city residents who do pass the exam and move on to college — the point at which they can truly enhance employability and earning power — have poor rates of retention and graduation.

Over the last several years, the Community Service Society has conducted in-depth research on the city's GED system. The results of this research are captured in a report on the GED, "From Basic Skills to Better Futures: Generating Economic Dividends for New York City."

Insufficient resources, lack of oversight, and a complete absence of coordination contribute to our system's poor performance. The majority of programs that aim to support individuals in attaining a GED

are funded at approximately \$1,000 per participant annually. Programs funded at this level simply cannot offer the supportive services they need to succeed. In addition, those who wish to enter a GED program have no single resource to help them sort through all existing options to find the one that is right for them.

Council Speaker Christine Quinn, in her 2010 State of the City message, highlighted the need to overhaul the GED system. There is plenty of work to do here, and it can be done without waiting for help from Washington.

As for the national context, President Obama must have the political will to strongly promote programs to help populations with high rates of unemployment, beginning with work programs and job training for industries, such as energy, which will be expanding in the future. And he must be able to explain the importance of these programs to the American people.

Latinos are looking for economic stability for their families. Survey research shows that Latino voters are an important part of the Democratic Party's base. If President Obama is going to win a second term in office, he will have to address their needs.

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David R. Jones is president and CEO of the Community Service Society (CSS), the leading voice on behalf of low-income New Yorkers for over 165 years. For over 10 years he served as a member of the board of directors of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund. The views expressed in this column are solely those of the writer.