

James H. Buford Column
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It's Time to Change our Priorities

The 2008 National Urban League Conference will go down in history as being a nationwide summit about crises that are affecting our country today. During his keynote address, National Urban League President Marc Morial described America as being at a crossroads. Whether it is from higher gas prices, soaring foreclosures, a weakening U.S. dollar or the slowing economy, our country is currently operating in a crisis mode. With all of these challenges in the making, we believe that it is time for the U.S. government to refocus its energies on rebuilding our country's domestic strength.

Currently, the United States is running \$389 billion budget deficit while spending nearly \$100 billion a year on the war in Iraq. Obviously little thought has been given to solving the troubles brewing at home, where more than 455,000 Americans have lost their jobs, millions are losing their homes and gas prices are wreaking havoc on everyone's pocketbooks. The rise in unemployment can be attributed to the massive layoffs that have occurred in the auto and banking industries and at other major companies. In St. Louis alone, many jobs were lost with the closing of Macy's Midwest, Ford and the Chrysler South Plant. In the near future, more St. Louis jobs may be threatened with the pending buyout of Anheuser-Busch.

One of the forerunners of America's economic crisis has been the meteoric rise in home foreclosures. A result of the subprime mortgage industry, millions purchased homes using substandard loans. These loans often contained adjustable interest rates that ballooned to astronomical amounts after a short period of time. Many were given to people who could otherwise

not afford their homes. As a result, millions have lost their homes, including one million families in the State of Missouri this year. To remedy this situation, Congress recently passed the American Housing Rescue and Foreclosure Prevention Act. This legislation will enable 400,000 families to refinance their homes and offers \$15 billion in tax incentives to Americans impacted by the mortgage crisis. Although this legislation will certainly help some homeowners, there are thousands more who will not be helped and will lose their homes. I commend the government for their action, but I believe that there is more that can be done to help working families during this economic downturn.

As Morial stated, there needs to be a shift of priorities for the United States government and also for its citizens. No longer can we sit idly by and watch as jobs are moved overseas, 45 million Americans cannot afford health insurance, billions of tax dollars are being spent in Iraq and 37 million citizens are living in poverty. Now is the time to get involved. September is Voter Registration Month and I encourage everyone to register and vote for the political candidate of your choice. If you are already registered, help someone else to register. It is also important to stay abreast of the issues affecting your community and the nation as a whole. Get involved with your local churches, social and community organizations and work to make a difference in the lives of people around you. Now is the time to take a stand.