



## **JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE HEARING**

**MARCH 8, 2007**

### **ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE UNEMPLOYMENT**

#### **OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR SAM BROWNBACK SENIOR REPUBLICAN SENATOR**

Chairman Schumer, let me commend you for dedicating Joint Economic Committee time to examine the need to address the disproportionately bad labor market and social outcomes encountered by African Americans, and particularly by young African-American males.

While labor market and social problems afflicting African Americans have been known for decades, it is important to continue to focus attention and efforts on resolving those problems.

Recent research, including some by Professor Mincy, one of our witnesses today, highlights a large pool of African-American males who are relatively poorly educated and seem in some ways to be more and more disconnected from mainstream society. It is important to determine ways to change some of the forces leading to such a disconnection.

For young African Americans, especially in inner cities, finishing high school is often the exception, prison time is often the routine, and incarceration rates have climbed even as overall urban crime rates have declined. Young African-American males have fared poorly in the Nation's labor markets--even during the arguably over-heated expansion of the late 1990s.

I am a firm believer in the positive power of the family. Too often, young African-Americans obtain their start in life in fatherless families. They often obtain life skills from distortions in the media or from the streets and their role models often seem to come more from the media or young friends than from parents and family.

To help counter these and other difficulties, some programs exist that place as much emphasis on teaching life skills such as parenting, conflict resolution, and character building as they do on the more traditional approaches of teaching job skills. To his credit, Mr. Carmona has channeled his energies into a comprehensive program called STRIVE in

response to the difficulties encountered by many young African-American men and women. His efforts deserve recognition.

Education and incarceration are also important components of the adverse labor market and social outcomes that many young African-Americans experience. By 2004, around 50 percent of African-American males in their 20's who lacked a college education were jobless, as were 72 percent of high school dropouts. In the inner cities, more than half of all African-American males do not finish high school. Incarceration rates for young African-American males climbed in the 1990s and have also risen in the past few years. By their mid-30s, around 60 percent of African-American males who dropped out of school have spent time in prison.

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you again for calling today's hearing on this important economic and cultural issue. I look forward to our witnesses' testimony and our question and answer time. I am particularly interested in our witnesses' views on what we can do to strengthen the family structure in the African-American community. It is clear to me that we are unlikely to have any meaningful impact on this problem if we fail to do what we can to restore the fabric of the family and social responsibility in this nation – particularly in our inner cities.