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## 2006 STATE OF THE UNION AND AFRICAN AMERICANS

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### **Bolster U.S. Competitiveness/Keep America #1**

There are 1.6 million African Americans looking for work – which is 227,000 or 17 percent higher than when President Bush took office. [BLS, 1/06] Over the last five years, the number of African Americans living in poverty has grown by 1.4 million; there are now 9.4 million African Americans (or nearly 25 percent) living below the poverty line. Today, the real median household income of African American families is down \$2,273 since the beginning of the Bush Administration. [CPS, 8/05] But Republicans have ignored the economic challenges facing African American families -- delivering instead for wealthy special interests and corporations which ship jobs overseas. Democrats are promoting an Innovation Agenda, investing in R&D and technology to spur innovation, growth, and prosperity. The Innovation Agenda would also help the 1.2 million African American-owned small businesses. [Census, 7/28/05]

### **Reduce Energy Costs and U.S. Dependence on Foreign Oil**

On average, homeowners will see a 25 percent increase in home heating costs this winter. The average family using heating oil or natural gas will pay double what they paid in 2001-2002, the first winter President Bush was in office. [EIA, 1/06] Americans families are also paying \$2.34 a gallon on average for gasoline – which is 48 cents higher than a year ago and 89 cents higher than in 2001. [EIA, 1/06] Republicans have refused to address high energy costs, instead giving away billions in subsidies for oil and gas companies. Democrats are fighting to reduce energy costs and decrease dependence on foreign oil through clean energy alternatives and through investing in energy assistance.

### **Health Care That Works for Everyone**

In 2004, the number of African Americans without health insurance climbed to about 7.4 million. Over the last five years, the number of African Americans without any health insurance coverage has grown 760,000 or 11 percent. [CPS, 8/05] For the past five years, health care costs have increased by nearly 60 percent. Instead, Republicans have created a flawed Medicare prescription drug plan, written by the drug industry, which is failing to meet the needs of the 3.8 million African American Medicare beneficiaries – with many being denied medications or charged too much. [2002, KKF, Summer 2005] This is unconscionable as African-American seniors are more than twice as likely as whites to go without prescription drugs because they cannot afford the cost. [Robert Wood Johnson Study, 8/03] Democrats will create a health care system that works for everyone by continuing to fight for an affordable, meaningful Medicare prescription drug program, repealing the special interest provisions, and lowering the costs of health care.

### **End Out of Control Deficits**

The national debt has increased to \$8 trillion. Instead of balancing the budget, Republicans are fighting for tax breaks for the wealthy few – providing millionaires with tax cuts averaging \$12,000 in 2009, while middle-income families would get \$39. [CTJ, 11/18/05] Democrats will stop the mortgaging of our children's future by restoring pay-as-you-go budget discipline.

## **Strong National Defense/Protect America Here At Home**

More than 28,000 brave African American men and women are in Afghanistan and Iraq serving our nation making up 20 percent of our forces. [DOD, Active Duty Forces Deployed as of 9/30/05] But Republicans have failed to provide our forces with needed equipment and resources to get the job done and return home safely. There are 2.4 million African American veterans. [Census, 1/25/06] And yet last year, Republicans shut 260,000 veterans out of the VA health care system. Democrats are fighting to provide needed health care for veterans and end the Disabled Veterans Tax to provide promised benefits for about 400,000 military retirees. Democrats will strengthen our national security and invest in our first responders and tighter security at U.S. ports and borders.

## **Excellence in Education**

Even with about 8 million African American children enrolled in K-12 school, Republicans have failed to provide promised funding for education reforms, denying 3 million children help in reading and math and denying 1.7 million children after-school programs to boost academic achievement and keep kids safe. Only 18 percent of African Americans adults have graduated college. [Census, 3/28/05] And yet, Republicans are pushing historic cuts in the student loan program, at a time when college costs are up 46 percent since 2001. To promote U.S. competitiveness, we must give all American children the needed tools and opportunities to succeed in science, math and literacy -- through quality early childhood education, good teachers in strong public schools, and an affordable college education.