

WILLIAM SPRIGGS

Director, National Urban League's Institute of Opportunity and Equality

Take Back America Conference

Campaign for America's Future / Institute for America's Future

Plenary Session: An Apollo Project for Energy Independence

**Thursday, June 5, 2003
Washington, DC**

Thank you. I want to take up the charge that was just laid that these aren't new ideas and that we squandered 20 years. I want to challenge you by thinking about what these topics really have in common, environmentalism, civil rights, and unions. What I would say to you is that what they really have in common is that those of us who fight to have a clean and safe environment, who fight to have a country that has opportunities for everyone, that has decent wages and a decent working condition for everyone, all of us are trying to say to the market what we think the outcome should be. That's what we have in common and we can't fight those battles alone. The thought that mysteriously this will all come to take place, Bob Baugh pointed out, this doesn't come from above. Pollution isn't God's idea, you know? You read the Bible and in the beginning he didn't say, "I'm going to pollute the earth." And he didn't say that people would starve and struggle to try and get decent livings. No, these are man-made policies. I'm excluding women here. These are man-made policies to pollute the earth and to deny people a decent living.

We can't separate those things out. We have to have a different outcome by understanding that what all of us want is to say that market power, that the Enrons of the world, cannot dictate to us what the outcome will be. They can't dictate to us \$500 electric bills, that's not an acceptable market outcome. We have to determine what are the market outcomes we want to live under, and more importantly, our children to live under. We all know that at some point, if we're going to have global growth and allow every country to give its workers a decent living standard, at some point the current energy policies that we have in the world will choke us to death. We will have enough greenhouse gases that our earth will not be inhabitable by humans. That's going to happen. Somebody, somewhere, has to have a vision that the market has to have a certain outcome in terms of energy use. That day will come, sooner than some of us think.

Our country has already become more diverse. Unless we want our diversity to become the source of gross inequality, sooner rather than later we're going to have to change market outcomes to make sure that a decent lifestyle is obtainable by all Americans. Sooner rather than later, if we continue to lose manufacturing jobs at the rate we are losing them, if we pile up trade deficit on top of trade deficit, the dollars that flow out will come back to the US, but they will come back as investment, which is good but it means

somebody else owns the country. Sooner rather than later, someone else will own the United States at that rate. We must be committed to saying what the market outcomes will be because the folks who are leading the ship now are going to lead it straight into the rocks and we're all going to sink together. What we have to do to make sure we don't waste another 20 years is to pull together, to understand what those market outcomes need to be. We need to have a sustainable way of growing, and that can't be with the current energy policies we have. And we have to have workers who make a decent living or this won't be the country that most of us grew up in; it will not be the country we want our children to grow up in.

This isn't going to just happen. It's a neat idea, but all the pieces don't come together, they won't just happen. We have to make sure that all the pieces come together right to make sure we have the outcome that we want. Now, a lot of folks would like to think that we can reduce it to just one of these engines pulling the other, that if we could just solve the environmental problem it will pull the labor and the civil rights issues along with it. Or that if we just do civil rights, that everything else will pull together. If we just get more unionized workers it will just pull it all together. It's not going to happen that way. We have to commit ourselves to understand what the common good is here and we're all going to have to pull together because all of it has to be there.

You can have all the black workers you want making \$2 an hour and nobody's going to be happy. You can have a huge manufacturing sector and it all had been shifted to right to work states, and no one will be unionized and no one will be making a decent wage. No one will be making a decent living. We can't do it that way.

Now, the Apollo Project understands that. What it calls on us to do is to look at it holistically and to understand that what we need to do is to pull all those elements together. Some of this can happen, some of the elements can happen by luck. The Internet explosion that took place during the 1990s had a lot of good things that happened. We laid a lot of cable, the backbone of the Internet. This is kind of a non-polluting thing to lay down this cable. It's irritating, it tears up roads, but it's sort of non-polluting. We generated a lot of jobs. The news media paid attention to the Bill Gates of the world, it paid attention to those who were computer engineers. But the bulk of the jobs were laying the cable, maintaining and installing the switching equipment, and maintaining the equipment that got installed, the computers that got installed. Disproportionately, those jobs were unionized jobs. Disproportionately, they were held by minorities. African-Americans, Latinos made up a disproportionate share of those workers laying the cable, maintaining and switching it. So many African-Americans got employed in the IT industry, the entire industry. Not just the glitz part, but the entire industry. Today there are more African-Americans who are in the IT industry than are public school teachers, which is sort of thought of as the black middle-class job. Or as postal workers, which is thought of as the black middle-class job.

If we clean up the environment and we put in the right regulations for our urban buildings, there are going to be a lot of jobs that can't be moved. You're not going to move the people who installed the new thermostats. You're not going to be able to

move overseas the jobs of those who installed the new heating and air conditioning systems. You're not going to be able to move overseas those jobs at all. Those are jobs that we hope will be unionized, they are now. We hope that they will be jobs that will be able to take advantage of the diversity of the American workforce that we see taking place. It sounds like we want a bunch of geeky, computer-trained engineers who are going to give us high tech fuel cells. But understand that someone has to install those fuel cells, someone has to manufacture this fuel cell, someone has to install them. Understand that once we lower the energy content of what we do, we've democratized potential sources of energy. It doesn't have to be the Enrons of the world. Once you get it down to a fuel cell, you've lowered the cost of entry into the market. There's going to be a lot more competition for how you can get your energy. We can take it away from those who assert market power because they can.

We can make this outcome different. If we don't then, as you heard before, we're going to spend another 20 years and we're going to talk about another 2 million jobs lost and we're going to talk about our problem with the US currency because we're going to have a dollar that's gonna be worth \$0.10 in order to pay off our foreign debt, because it will be huge by then. And we won't have any manufacturing jobs left. We can bankrupt this country. But if we pull together now and commit ourselves to saying that market power cannot dictate the outcome for our country, for our children, if we do that now, then 20 years from now we will be celebrating a new America, it's not just going to be re-taking America, it will be a new America, one which looks a lot better than the path we're on today.