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## **For Jobs, It's War**

By CHARLES M. BLOW

The American political discussion has finally turned to the right target: jobs.

Even so, the president's jobs bill is already being nicked and dimed from the **right** — and the **left** — even though it is only throwing nickels and dimes at the problem to begin with. But at least it's a start, even if a long-overdue one.

To understand just how overdue it is, one need look no further than the absolutely dreadful data issued this week by the Census Bureau about the increasing numbers of people falling into poverty. No matter how you slice it, it's bloody.

There are now 46.2 million poor Americans.

Of those, 2.6 million fell into poverty last year.

At 15.1 percent, the poverty rate is at its highest since 1993.

Bloody, bloody, bloody.

But even those numbers somewhat obscure the true historic nature of the crisis and the effect that the recession, falling wages and chronic joblessness have had on those living in poverty. If you remove children and the elderly and just look at working-age adults — those 18 to 64 — the picture is even more bleak. The percentage of that group that is in poverty is the highest recorded since President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a “**war on poverty**” during his first State of the Union address in January 1964.

And it's not that most of these people don't have jobs. It's that they don't have good jobs that pay enough to push them out of poverty. Three out of four of those below the poverty line work: half have full-time jobs, a quarter work part time. Only a quarter do not work at all.

This raises an important distinction — not only do we need to create more jobs, we need to increase the number of good jobs. And we can't see that quest for good jobs as an internal

skirmish between warring political ideologies. It's an international war. At least that is the way **Jim Clifton, chairman of Gallup, frames it in his fascinating — and frightening — new book, “The Coming Jobs War.”**

According to Clifton, “the coming world war is an all-out global war for good jobs.”

(He defines a good job, also known as a formal job, as one with a “paycheck from an employer and steady work that averages 30-plus hours per week.”)

In the book he makes this striking statement, drawing from all of Gallup's data: “The primary will of the world is no longer about peace or freedom or even democracy; it is not about having a family, and it is neither about God nor about owning a home or land. The will of the world is first and foremost to have a good job. Everything else comes after that.” The only problem is that there are not enough good jobs to go around.

Clifton explains that of the world's five billion people over 15 years old, three billion said they worked or wanted to work, but there are only 1.2 billion full-time, formal jobs. Therefore his conclusion “from reviewing Gallup's polling on what the world is thinking on pretty much everything is that the next 30 years won't be led by U.S. political or military force.”

“Instead,” he says, “the world will be led with economic force — a force that is primarily driven by job creation and quality G.D.P. growth.” And guess who is vying for the lead? That's right: China.

And I must say, we don't appear to be poised to fight this war. In education we've gone from leading to lagging, our infrastructure is literally crumbling around us, ever-expanding health care costs threaten to suffocate us and our politics have succumbed to paralysis.

A widely-cited 2009 study by the consulting firm McKinsey & Company, “The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's Schools,” found that the recent American educational achievement gaps — between black and Latino students and white ones; between low-income students and the rest; between low-performing states and the rest; and between the United States as a whole and better-performing countries — not only cost the economy trillions of dollars, they also “impose on the United States the economic equivalent of a permanent national recession.”

According to a **recent report** by the Urban Land Institute and Ernst & Young, China has “about 9 percent of G.D.P. devoted to infrastructure, compared with less than 3 percent in the United States.” And the **Report Card for America’s Infrastructure** graded by the American Society of Civil Engineers in 2009 was so full of C’s and D’s that it looked like **Rick Perry’s college transcript**. The group estimated that \$2.2 trillion of investment over five years was needed to bring conditions up to par. We’re not even close to that.

Furthermore, Clifton points out that 30 percent of America’s students drop out or do not graduate on time. He concludes, “If this problem isn’t fixed fast, the United States will lose the next worldwide, economic, jobs-based war because its players can’t read, write or think as well as their competitors in a game for keeps.”

And, a **Rand Corporation study** released last week found that “between 1999 and 2009, total spending on health care in the United States nearly doubled, from \$1.3 trillion to \$2.5 trillion. During the same period, the percentage of the nation’s gross domestic product devoted to health care climbed from 13.8 percent to 17.6 percent. Per person health care spending grew from \$4,600 to just over \$8,000 annually.”

We simply can’t sustain that sort of growth.

Clifton enumerates 10 “demands” that America will have to master to “lead the new will of the world” — from drastically increasing exports, to having investments follow “rare entrepreneurs versus the worldwide oversupply of innovation,” to something as basic as doing a better job of identifying where likely customers are. But at the top of the list is understanding that the world has a shortage of good jobs and every decision of every leader must be informed by increasing the share of those jobs.

He puts it this way:

**“The war for global jobs is like World War II: a war for all the marbles. The global war for jobs determines the leader of the free world. If the United States allows China or any country or region to out-enterprise, out-job-create, out-grow its G.D.P., everything changes. This is America’s next war for everything.”**