

We, as African Americans, must get more involved in making policy. If you are not at the “table” you will probably end up on the menu. In other words, we too often are left out of the benefit side of a law, rule or regulation. The pain side of such matters is usually where you will find us. As one of my mentors taught me, “You can be one of two things: A political activist or a political victim.” Don’t assume that our needs will be taken care of. They haven’t yet and it is our fault. We must get into the “game” and ensure our needs will be met. The following is an overview of our current status.

Today, the US economy is teetering between progress and regression. As businesses work to overcome staggering odds, many of which are imposed by Washington, each step forward seems to be met by two in the opposite direction. Few would argue that the anemic growth the country has experienced over the last four years is enough to rebound from the trough we find ourselves in, yet policymakers continue to revert to the same failed policies that have wielded little in the way of results.

In the wake of the economic downturn of 2008 the American public unwittingly surrendered innovation and individualism for the promise of federal rescue. Now, as the markets settle, the sober realization that further government intervention has failed is setting in. Recently, the rate of small business startups hit a record low, businesses revised down their hiring expectations, and government spending peaked – all at the expense of taxpayers.

Instead of empowering the private sector, the Obama Administration has targeted it. The President’s own comments earlier this month underscore how aloof he is from business owners. He said, “If you’ve got a small business – you didn’t build that. Somebody else made that happen.” Before that he assessed that the private sector is “doing fine.” All came after an Environmental Protection Agency official’s comments became public where he explained the organization’s policy of “crucifying” businesses.

More than ever, business owners are struggling. Cleverly disguised, there are more than 4,000 federal regulations that won’t hit until after the November elections. These rules carry a price tag of over a half-trillion dollars. This tidal wave of regulation stands to hurt the economy and American public alike.

Small businesses are poised to take the biggest fall. Each year, small businesses create

two-third of new jobs, and they produce half the US GDP. Unlike their larger competitors, these companies often can't afford to hire specialists to navigate the burdens federal requirements put on them. It takes valuable time and resources keeping up with all that's asked of them. It shouldn't come as a surprise that small businesses recently downgraded their hiring expectations or that earlier this year nearly half of those surveyed said that government regulation was their biggest deterrent to creating new jobs.

But the impact of government overreach is much broader. In private markets, Washington is limiting competition.

Once proven safe chemicals have been targeted by regulators in favor of less-tested, possibly insufficient alternatives. The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) de facto regulatory program, Design for the Environment, needlessly promotes compounds that haven't been sufficiently tested over those already approved. Such moves not only challenge small businesses, they put consumers at risk as well.

In the telecommunications world, a market where competition is driving technological innovation and cutting costs, lawmakers seem intent on slow-walking important development. Current regulations are still designed for mid-twentieth century technology, which makes no sense in today's digital age. They should focus efforts on deregulating IP technology to provide greater access to information and services.

Developments in domestic energy resources, which have already cut prices at the pump and lowered heating and utility costs for homeowners, continue to be stymied by strict federal and state regulation. The Administration has cut offshore drilling permits by a third while upping the approval process has increased nearly three times. At the same time, federal and state agencies have acutely hamstrung developers through excessive regulation in spite of proven safety measures.

Instead of simply more, regulators should strive for more efficient. By partnering with businesses, particularly small businesses, policymakers can create rules that protect our communities, the environment, and the economy. In the last five years the country has edged towards greater government involvement as a cure for our economic woes, and collectively we've seen those efforts fall short. It's time to repower private industry.

America is a country built on individualism, opportunity, and innovation. Now is not the time to abandon those values.

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