

STATEMENT BY SEN. BERNARD SANDERS ON THE EMPLOY YOUNG AMERICANS ACT

Let me begin by thanking Ray Bell and everyone at H.O.P.E. Project DC for hosting us, and for all the important work you do providing young people the critical training and development needed to secure a good job.

One of the great crises facing this country, a crisis that we talk too little about, is youth unemployment in general and black and Hispanic youth unemployment in particular. Today, in our country, youth unemployment is 17 percent and black youth unemployment (ages 16-19) is 27 percent. This is unacceptable, this is having a huge impact on our society, and this cannot be allowed to continue.

Today in America, over 5.5 million young people have either dropped out of high school or have graduated high school and do not have jobs. It is no great secret that without work, without education, and without hope, people get into trouble.

And the result is that tragically we have more people in jail today than any other country on Earth including China – an authoritarian Communist country with a population four times our size. Today, the United States is five percent of the world's population, yet we have 25 percent of the world's prisoners. Incredibly, over three percent of our country's population is under some form of correctional control. According to the NAACP, from 1980 to 2008, the number of people incarcerated in America quadrupled from roughly 500,000 to 2.3 million people.

If current trends continue, one in three black males born today can expect to spend time in prison during his lifetime. This is an unspeakable tragedy.

But this crisis is not just a destruction of human life, it is also very, very costly to the taxpayers of our country. In America now we spend nearly \$200 billion on public safety, including \$70 billion on correctional facilities each and every year.

So let me be very clear: in my view it makes a lot more sense to invest in jobs, in job training, and in education than spending incredible amounts of money on jails and law enforcement.

The time is long overdue for us to start investing in our young people, to help them get the jobs they need, to help them get the education they need, and to help them get the job training they need so that they can be part of the middle class. The answer to unemployment and poverty

is not and cannot be the mass incarceration of young African Americans. It's time to bring hope and economic opportunity to communities across the country.

The legislation that Congressman Conyers and I are introducing today will provide \$5.5 billion in immediate funding to States and localities throughout the country to employ 1 million young Americans between the ages of 16 and 24 and provide job training to hundreds of thousands of other young Americans.

Under our bill the U.S. Department of Labor would provide \$4 billion in grants to States and local governments to provide summer jobs and year-round employment opportunities for economically disadvantaged youth, with direct links to academic and occupational learning.

In addition, this bill would also provide \$1.5 billion in competitive grants to local areas all over this country to provide work-based training to low-income youth and disadvantaged young adults, just like you are doing here today.

We cannot continue to ignore the crisis of youth unemployment in America. We are talking about the future of an entire generation. We are talking about the future of the United States of America. Let's start focusing on this issue. We have got to make sure that young people in Washington, DC and all over this country have the opportunity to earn a paycheck and to make it into the middle class.