

## Tampa's Economic Development



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One of the issues Tampa struggles with is its lack of jobs: jobs for the poor, jobs for the middle class, jobs for those who were laid off, and jobs that pay a living wage. There are numerous people throughout Tampa who, for various reasons, are finding it difficult to find gainful employment.

The problems are more acute for minorities and those who have been laid off for more than 6 months. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Tampa's unemployment rate in April 2011 was 10.5% while the national unemployment rate that same month was 9.0%.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics analysis shows that in May 2011 the national unemployment rate for whites was 8% while for African Americans it was 16.2%. Hispanics had a 11.9% unemployment rate while Asians had only a 7.0% unemployment.

These numbers indicate several things. First, the overall unemployment rate is still too high. Second, the unemployment rate for African Americans is beyond acceptable for any group. Tampa's unemployment rates are slightly higher than the national averages. This means African Americans in Tampa have approximately a 1 in 5 chance of not finding gainful employment.

In June 2011, the Tampa City Council had a workshop on Economic Development. The whole discussion was about bringing large companies with multi-million or multi-billion dollar revenues to Tampa.

The process was explained as a long-term process that included tax breaks and other incentives. That's wonderful in the long run but what about now? Our residents, particularly the African Americans, need employment now.

Tampa needs to find a short-term or gap solution to the unemployment problem. Currently, Tampa's contracts frequently go to out-of-state businesses. As an example, the city of Tampa is opening health clinics for its employees. The contract to manage these clinics was given to an out-of-state company. Does the city believe there is no one or no business inside the city of Tampa who could manage these clinics? The Tampa Convention Center requires any company that provides souvenirs to the Center pay a large annual fee. As a result, an out-of-state company provides the souvenirs sold at the TAMPA convention center. So, come to Tampa and buy items from some other state. Construction contracts are bundled so much that only out-of-state contractors can bid on them. These out-of-state contractors often bring in subs from outside the state instead of hiring local subs. As a result of this bundling, local sheetrock installers, tile workers, etc, do not get to bid on our projects. Our tax money is going out-of-state.

Tampa should pass a law that says preference on all Tampa contracts will go first to Tampa companies, second to Hillsborough County companies, third to Florida companies and as

a last resort to out-of-state companies. And our contracts should be unbundled so that a company does not need to have billions of dollars in revenues just to bid on them. This will accomplish several things. First, many of our dollars will stay here to help us and our economy. Second, many of Tampa's smaller businesses will have an opportunity to bid on and get contracts that will feed our residents, grow the business and bring more jobs to Tampa. In the short-run it will keep money in Tampa to feed and clothe Tampa's residents.

The large, long-run economic development should be encouraged. However, so should the short-run assistance.

Let's think about our money staying here.

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