



NEWS RELEASE **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

ROBERT L. JOHNSON CALLS ON PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA TO RENEW HIS COMMITMENT TO CLOSE THE EMPLOYMENT GAP BETWEEN BLACKS AND WHITES BY USING ‘THE RLJ RULE’ TO INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS

December 14th Washington Post Article Proves Alarming Disparity in Employment Between Black Americans and White Americans

BETHESDA, MD//DECEMBER 17, 2012// Robert L. Johnson, chairman of The RLJ Companies and founder of Black Entertainment Television (BET) today calls on President Barack Obama to renew his commitment in addressing the employment gap between African Americans and White Americans, by encouraging U.S. corporations to adopt the RLJ Rule to address the overwhelming gap in unemployment.

Last December, Johnson met with President Obama, who voiced his support of the RLJ Rule during a meeting at the White House assembled by Congressional Black Caucus Chairman Emanuel Cleaver and a number of Black business owners to address the critical and timely needs of African American employment. Once learning about the RLJ Rule, President Obama thought this was also something his Jobs Council could support.

The RLJ Rule (1) encourages companies to voluntarily implement a plan to interview a minimum of two qualified minority candidates for every job opening at the vice president level and above; and, (2) companies would interview at least two qualified minority-owned firms for vendor supplier/services contracts before awarding a new company contract to a vendor. The RLJ Rule is an adaptation of the National Football League’s (NFL) *Rooney Rule*, which afforded minority candidates seeking head-coaching or general manager positions within the League to be considered before a final hiring decision.

In response to a recent Washington Post article, *Black Jobless Rate is Twice That of Whites*, (written by Michael A. Fletcher, published December 14, 2012) Johnson has once again called on the need for corporate America to adopt a more aggressive and enhanced employment strategy that will help to eliminate the disparity in employment between African Americans and White Americans.

“We as Black Americans are facing a fiscal cliff of our own in the disparity of unemployment,” said Johnson. “In my lifetime, Black unemployment has always been twice that of White Americans. This is an unjustified disparity that must not be allowed to continue unless we are willing to accept once again a nation that is economically separate and unequal.”

Consider these alarming facts from the article:

“The African American jobless rate is about twice that of whites, a disparity that has barely budged since the government began tracking the data in 1972. In last week’s jobs report, the black unemployment rate was 13.2 percent, while the white rate stood at 6.8 percent.”

(more)

Discrimination has long been seen as the primary reason for this disparity, which is evident among workers from engineers to laborers. But fresh research has led scholars to conclude that African Americans also suffer in the labor market from having weaker social networks than other groups.

The racial gap in the unemployment rate defies educational attainment and occupational endeavor. African Americans with at least a bachelor's degree had a 7.1 percent jobless rate in 2011, while the white rate was 3.9 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Similarly, black workers with only a high school education had a jobless rate of 15.5 percent, while similarly educated white workers had an unemployment rate of 8.4 percent.

Black workers in computer and mathematical occupations — which job-training officials say are hard to fill — had an 8.1 percent jobless rate last year, while for whites the rate was 4.1 percent. Among construction workers, who were hard hit by the recession, the black jobless rate was 30.4 percent, compared with 15.3 percent for whites.

'The 2-to-1 gap in the unemployment rate is one of the most pronounced signs of the presence of discrimination in our society,' said William A. Darity, a professor at Duke University. 'That disparity, I think, is an index of discrimination.'

Commenting on the above facts and the conclusion of Duke University Professor, William A. Darity, Johnson said, "The RLJ Rule, if embraced by all U.S. companies large and small, can point the way as President Obama noted in his 2011 remarks at Osawatomie, Kansas, that 'In America we are greater together – when everyone engages in fair play and everybody gets a fair shot and everybody does their fair share... everyone in America gets a fair shot at success.'"

By encouraging companies to voluntarily adopt the RLJ Rule is not to suggest quotas or that companies hire any minority who is not qualified. The RLJ Rule, if implemented properly, is designed to further enhance a company's already established commitment to diversity and inclusion.

"If companies voluntarily implement the RLJ Rule they can further their commitment to reduce the employment disparity among African Americans, and in doing so, we can demonstrate the fact that talented African-Americans, if given the opportunity, can succeed at the highest levels, and we will close the employment gap between Black and White Americans."

To date, the RLJ Rule has been endorsed by the Congressional Black Caucus; the National Urban League, led by Marc Morial; and the U.S. Black Chamber, Inc. led by Ron Busby.

About The RLJ Companies: *The RLJ Companies, founded by Robert L. Johnson, is an innovative business network that provides strategic investments in a diverse portfolio of companies. Within The RLJ Companies portfolio, Johnson owns or holds interests in businesses operating in hotel real estate investment trust; private equity; financial services; asset management; insurance services; automobile dealerships; sports and entertainment; and video lottery terminal (VLT) gaming. The RLJ Companies is headquartered in Bethesda, MD, with affiliate operations in Charlotte, NC; Little Rock, AR; Los Angeles, CA; San Juan, PR; and Monrovia, Liberia. Prior to founding The RLJ Companies, Johnson was founder and chairman of Black Entertainment Television (BET). For additional information please visit: www.rljcompanies.com. For Media Inquiries contact: Traci Otey Blunt 240.744.7858 or press@rljcompanies.com.*