



## BET founder Robert L. Johnson: Companies need to interview minority candidates for high-level jobs

By Melissa Anders | [manders@mlive.com](mailto:manders@mlive.com)  
on May 29, 2013 at 4:45 PM, updated May 29, 2013 at 4:55 PM

MACKINAC ISLAND, MI — Affirmative action legislation and quotas aren't the answer to closing the unemployment gap between black and white Americans, said Robert L. Johnson, founder of Black Entertainment Television.

Instead, Johnson recommends employers make it a best practice to interview at least two minority candidates for jobs at the director level or higher.

It's based on the NFL's Rooney Rule, which requires football teams to interview a minority candidate before hiring a coach or other certain high-ranking employees.

"It's not a mandate to hire, it's not a quota. It's building up a pipeline of people who could fill that job or a future job," he told Michigan business and government leaders at the Detroit Regional Chamber's Mackinac Policy Conference on Tuesday. He said the same policy should apply to companies' selection of vendors.

Black men and women account for less than 1 percent of Fortune 500 company CEOs, and the black unemployment rate has been much higher than that of the general population for decades, he said.

"I want to give millions of other minority Americans, and by extension this country, a fair shot at success so that we can compete on a global basis in one of the greatest countries on earth," Johnson said.

Johnson, 67, has been cited as the nation's first black billionaire. In 2001 he sold the BET cable television network to Viacom for \$3 billion and focused his efforts on The RLJ Companies, a diverse group of ventures that includes everything from hotel real estate investment and private equity to nearly 40 automobile dealerships, an NBA franchise and a film production studio.

He also owns OppsPlace LLC, an online network aimed at helping minority job seekers and vendors gain access to jobs and business opportunities.



Robert L. Johnson, founder of Black Entertainment Television, spoke with attendees of the Mackinac Policy Conference on Tuesday.

Fritz Klug | [MLive.com](http://MLive.com)

He said the unemployment and wealth gap between black and white Americans can't be wished away or solved with education, explaining that educated black people are unemployed at a higher level than their white counterparts.

Savior Moss-Service, who owns and operates McDonald's franchises in the Detroit area, said Johnson is "right on the mark" with his rule for employers to interview minority applicants.

"Unless the CEOs hold their staff, their counterparts accountable, it will never happen, but if it becomes part of the environment, then it just kind of happens," she said.

Johnson's proposal led Dave Adams to do a self-assessment as an employer.

"I think it was a great suggestion for all employers to give minorities, African Americans in particular, an opportunity," said Adams, president and CEO of the Michigan Credit Union League.

Not everyone seems to agree with Johnson's support of the Rooney Rule.

ESPN's Howard Bryant recently published a column in ESPN The Magazine calling the NFL's Rooney Rule a "piece of nonsense" that only offers "false hope and illusory change." Others say the rule hasn't worked as well as some had hoped.

*Email Melissa Anders at [manders@mlive.com](mailto:manders@mlive.com). Follow her on Google+ and Twitter: @MelissaDAnders. Download the MLive app for iPhone and Android.*

[http://www.mlive.com/business/index.ssf/2013/05/bet\\_founder\\_robert\\_l\\_johnson\\_c.html](http://www.mlive.com/business/index.ssf/2013/05/bet_founder_robert_l_johnson_c.html)