

## **Congressman Elijah Cummings**

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### *Our future is in our own hands*

Election Year 2010 is so important for Maryland's African American families that it is essential that we remain engaged, register to vote and vote in large numbers this November. Fortunately, here in Maryland, we hold the future in our own hands.

The congressional races this year will have a lasting impact on our community – and the alternatives are compelling.

Either our nation will vote to move forward toward President Obama's vision of a more prosperous and equitable America - or House Republican Leader John Boehner and his allies in the Tea Party will be given an opportunity to gut the President's initiatives on jobs, health care, Wall Street Reform and the environment.

Do we move forward with the President or return to December, 2008, when Bush Administration policies were allowing this country to lose more than 700,000 jobs every month?

Those of us who are "Obama voters" are determined to grasp a better future – not to retreat into the past.

In Washington, President Obama and our Democratic Congress have enacted historic stimulus legislation to halt the economic hemorrhaging that Bush-era policies helped to create. As a result, we now have had eight straight months of private sector job growth.

Why, then, would we change drivers in the middle of our national drive toward full recovery?

Why (as the President has observed) would we put the Republicans - who drove the American economy into the ditch - back behind the wheel?

We Americans have better memories (and better sense) than to return to failed policies that left America reeling. We also have a better strategy for our economy.

President Obama proposed another national initiative on Labor Day. He challenged us to invest \$50 billion to create more jobs while we also rebuild 150,000 miles of roads and 4000 miles of railways.

Our President understands that we can (and must) create good jobs in our community now – even as those same investments also provide for a better, safer transportation network in our future. As a senior member of the House Transportation Committee, I will work with him and my House colleagues to make this new initiative a reality.

The Maryland Governor's race also is crucial for our community.

The early projections indicate that the outcome in November could be close enough that Black voters in Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Howard County will decide the result. If we show up and vote in large numbers, as we did in 2006 and 2008, the odds are very good that Governor O'Malley and our legislators in Washington and Annapolis will win.

That outcome is an important goal for Maryland's working families – and, especially, for those of us who own or work for a minority business. We need strong, committed and cooperative leadership in Annapolis if we are to make the new federal jobs initiatives a reality in our community.

The O'Malley Administration has demonstrated a positive record of supporting minority businesses and jobs. In just three years, Martin O'Malley and Anthony Brown have increased state contracting awards to Minority and Women-owned firms by \$1.65 billion (62%). For the first time, Maryland's minority contracting dollars begin to reflect our numerical strength in this state.

We should remember, as well, that Governor O'Malley has been a strong supporter of our public schools, expanded our access to health care and frozen our college tuition bills over the past four years. Equally important, we must not forget that our next Governor will have the major role in redrawing Maryland's election districts for the next decade.

All things considered, African American voters have good reasons to support Governor Martin O'Malley and Lt. Governor Anthony Brown this November. We need to move forward with the positive, progressive agenda that has helped to keep our economy, our schools and our health care system in better shape than those of the rest of our nation.

By registering and voting in record numbers this year, we have the opportunity to stand with our President and our Governor at an historic moment.

However, if we stay home on General Election Day, that failure to vote could allow Robert Ehrlich to prevail - along with his pledge to take Maryland back to the past.

Our future is in our own hands.

*Congressman Elijah E. Cummings represents Maryland's Seventh Congressional District in the United States House of Representatives.*