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Opinion

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Federal death sentences highlights racial gap

ASSOCIATED PRESS

White defendants in federal capital cases are more likely than blacks to negotiate plea bargains that spare their lives, according to an analysis of 146 cases prosecuted since Congress reinstated capital punishment.

Sixty percent of white defendants avoided capital punishment through a negotiated settlement in cases in which the Justice Department chose to pursue the death penalty. Typically, those plea bargains result in either life sentences or long prison terms.

For black defendants in those cases, 41 percent reached an agreement with prosecutors, according to the Federal Death Penalty Resource Counsel Project, a private group that receives federal funding to track federal capital cases.

"This raises a red flag," said David Baldus, a University of Iowa law professor who has studied race and the death penalty. "The sample on the plea agreements isn't so small at all, and the magnitude of the disparity is very strong."

The analysis parallels a Justice Department study of geographic and racial differences in the imposition of the death penalty. This month, President Bill Clinton ordered the postponement of the first federal execution in 40 years, scheduled for Aug. 5, until the Justice Department could complete the review and establish clemency procedures.

Attorney General Janet Reno said last week she expects the results soon. Justice Department spokesman Myron Marlin said the statistical disparity alone does not necessarily demonstrate racial bias by federal prosecutors. "Plea bargain numbers alone can be misleading," Marlin said told the Chicago Tribune. "They do not show how often pleas are offered or the rates at which they were rejected or accepted... One cannot tell the severity of the offense involved, the strength of the case or considerations affected by judicial rulings during the course of the trial."

Powers becomes GOP's attack dog against Hillary Clinton

ASSOCIATED PRESS

A Marine Corps veteran who pulled New York's Republican Party up by its bootstraps a decade ago, William Powers has become the GOP's attack dog in the battle against Hillary Rodham Clinton's run for the U.S. Senate.

According to Powers, the only first lady to ever run for public office is "cold-blooded and hotheaded" and "a shrill and scheming person" who is "opportunistic, hypocritical and egotistical."

Not to mention that she is "polarizing and power hungry."

And that is just from one letter he has sent out to potential donors.

A second fund-raising letter that surfaced Thursday said she was "an angry woman" driven by "blind political ambition."

The letter went on to call Clinton an "ambitious, ruthless, scheming, calculating, manipulating woman" who was really one of "the outsiders who mock our New York values and scoff at our commonsense conservatism."

At a news conference Thursday, Powers said he wasn't calling the first lady names or being a male chauvinist, just pointing out what he feels are the facts about her. And, he promised, there was plenty more where that came from. Powers said he had three more such letters ready to go.

The letters, said Powers, are helping him raise record amounts of money for the party.

"I've never seen a response to direct mail like we're getting from her," he told reporters.

The letters are also serving to get out attacks on the first lady that her new Republican opponent, Rep. Rick Lazio, does not want to personally utter. The congressman from Long Island, with his wife and two young daughters often in tow, is seeking to project an image as a clean-cut, earnest, honest family man. He does not want to be viewed as a street-fighting, take-no-prisoners politician.

Powers has no such qualms. He, in fact, seems to relish the attention the attacks are bringing him.

"I kind of like it. I talk about myself. She talks about me. Other people talk about me. That's good for me," he said.

Powers said he is also unconcerned about the letters might backfire and

create the impression that Clinton is a victim. When that happened during the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal involving President Clinton, the first lady's favorable poll numbers took a jump.

"It's about motivating your base," Powers said. "My letters are going to our base."

In fact, Powers is of the belief that Clinton is such a polarizing figure that Republicans and conservatives will come out in record numbers in New York this year just to vote against her. That, he said, will not only help Lazio, but could benefit Texas Gov. George W. Bush's presidential campaign in New York and other Republican candidates across the state.

For Powers, it marks the latest in a series of political battles he has been waging for well over a decade. A top aide to then-Sen. Alfonse D'Amato, Powers got himself elected state chairman in the wake of the party's disastrous showing in the 1990 election for governor when GOP candidate Pierre Rinfret collected just 22 percent of the vote and Democrat Mario Cuomo coasted to a third term. Powers inherited a party deep in debt and demoralized.

He got in his car and began traveling the state, attending local party functions and raising money. He would stop home for clean clothes and hit the road again. He did little else for the first year as chairman.

In 1992, he helped D'Amato narrowly escape defeat at the hands of then-state Attorney General Robert Abrams. In 1993, Powers played a key role in helping elect Republican Rudolph Giuliani as mayor of New York City. The big payoff came in 1994 when, with a big assist from D'Amato, Powers helped a little-known Republican state senator, George Pataki, topple Cuomo in the governor's race. A former federal prosecutor from Buffalo, Republican Dennis Vacco, was also elected attorney general.

Things have not been quite as rosy for Powers since then. In 1998, Pataki won a second term, but both D'Amato and Vacco went down to defeat.

While there has been speculation that Powers may step down from the state chairmanship, he seems intent on at least one last battle against a major opponent worthy of the effort. "I respect her," Powers said.

Letter to the Editor

To the Editor

The people of the third district of Oregon should be proud of Rep. Earl Blumenauer for his recent efforts to reduce wasteful government spending.

On July 11, he voted for an amendment that would have eliminated \$7 million in handouts to western ranchers. The Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services program uses hard-earned taxpayer dollars to hunt and kill coyotes and other predators. However, the program is not effective or efficient. Despite a 47 percent increase in funding from taxpayers between 1984 and 1997, livestock losses have not declined. Further, the efforts to kill

predators have led to numerous deaths of household pets.

The costs of Wildlife Services lethal predator control program are borne primarily by taxpayers and not by the ranchers that benefit from the program. Currently, livestock ranchers and other beneficiaries of Wildlife Services contribute less than

1% annually to the costs of the program.

Although the amendment failed, Rep. Blumenauer deserves the gratitude of taxpayers for his attempt to end this government handout.

Sincerely,
Jill Lancelot
Legislative Director

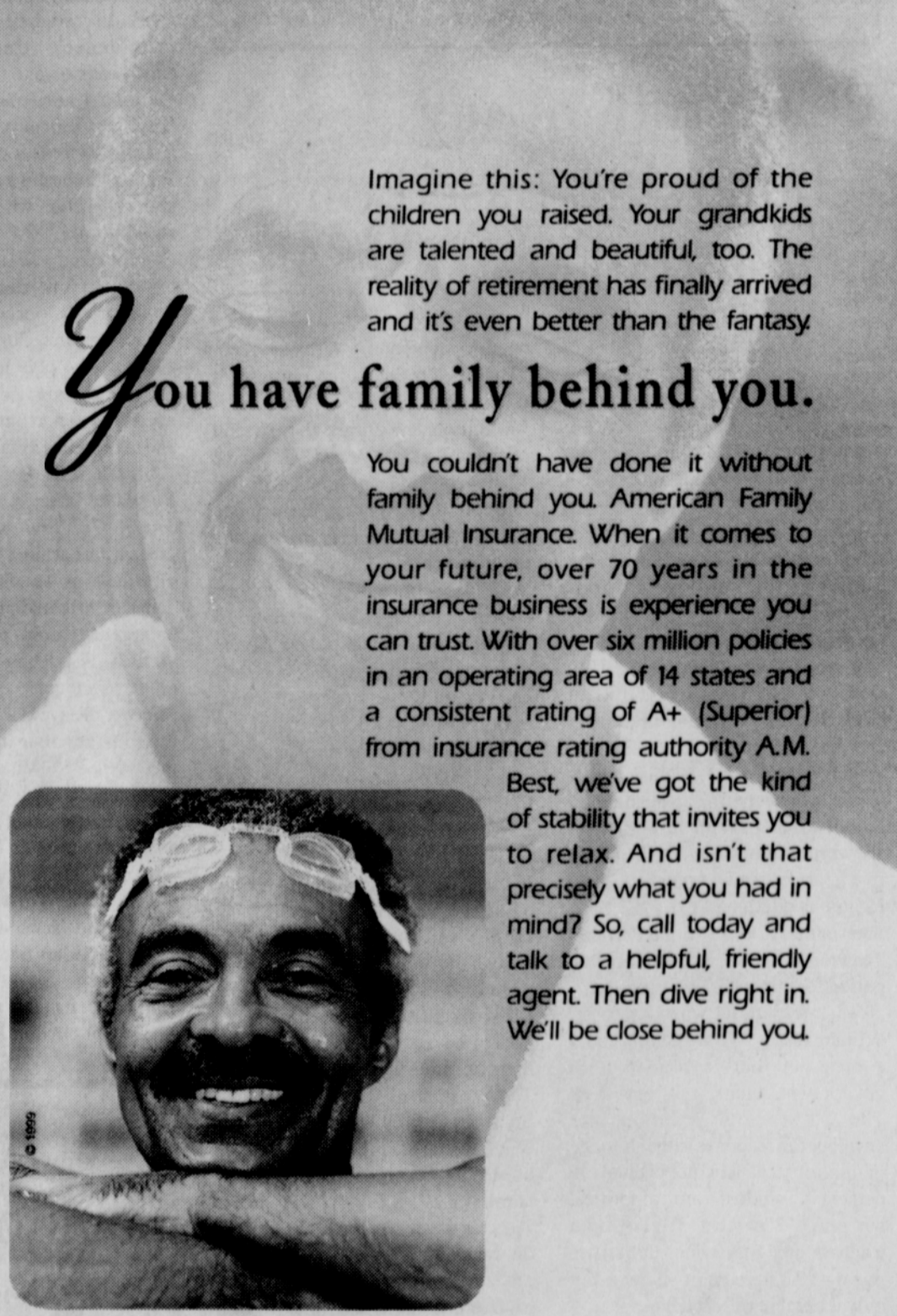
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