

OPINION

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Restore Black Colleges and Opportunity

The ability to afford college is a gap that's widening

BY SEN. JOE LIEBERMAN

I welcome President Bush's announcement that he intends to provide more funding to historically black colleges and universities—but time will tell whether this is a serious effort to increase educational opportunity or just a well-timed photo opportunity.

In supporting historically black colleges, he is in danger of graduating magna cum lately. Historically black colleges and universities throughout the country—which educate some 300,000 African-Americans—are struggling to preserve their deteriorating facilities. For months, I've been fighting alongside Rep. Jim Claiborne to help these schools save and restore their campuses. If President Bush is truly committed to strengthening these schools so they can serve this and future generations of African-Americans, he'll support our bill—which he has up to now ignored.

The sad fact is, this President has stood by while college has slipped out of fiscal reach for middle class families of all races and backgrounds. My dad worked days and nights to save enough to send me to college; I was the first in my family to get that chance. But these days, tuition costs are rising faster than even two-income families can af-

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— Sen. Joe Lieberman, D-Conn.

ford, and aid isn't keeping up—resulting in a widening economic opportunity gap. During the 2000 Presidential campaign, then-Governor Bush decry that problem and called for a meaningful increase in the size of Pell Grants, but that support has never materialized.

In the coming months, I'll introduce a comprehensive plan to make college more accessible and affordable to students at all income levels—and help ensure that when students graduate, they are prepared to enter the workforce and start climbing the ladder of economic opportunity.

Access to a college education is what makes the American Dream more than a mirage for millions of young people. On the day we celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legacy and every day, we can never forget that.

Joe Lieberman is senator for the state of Connecticut and a Democratic candidate for president in 2004.



BY BEN DIR/MINUTEMAN MEDIA

Why Gov. Ryan Cleared Death Row

Corruption in death sentences extend beyond Illinois

BY STEVEN W. HAWKINS

Before outgoing Illinois Gov. George Ryan commuted the death sentences of 156 people, more than two-thirds of those on Illinois' death row were black. These included 35 African Americans who were convicted or condemned to die by all-white juries. And they included Aaron Patterson, who, under torture at the hands of the Chicago police department, took a paper clip and scratched a message on to the bench of the interrogation room: "Aaron 4/30 I lie about murders. Slapped and suffocated me with plastic."

Ryan's decision to commute the sentences of his states' death row inmates to life without parole was an occasion to celebrate, but it also raised troubling questions. We must ask ourselves how the justice system in Illinois became so corrupted that it allowed 17 innocent people to be sentenced to death. We must ask ourselves why the Illinois Legislature failed to pass the reforms recommended by the Governor's Commission after he declared a moratorium in 2000. Finally, we must ask ourselves if the same problems that exist in Illinois also are in place elsewhere.

Ryan recognized that the death penalty is an emotional issue for many people. He expressed his sympathy for the families of the murdered as well as the families of the exonerated. But he was brave enough to ask the people of Illinois whether execution of

another human being was a fitting memorial for the innocent victims of terrible crimes. Ryan further commented that perhaps the staggering amount of money Illinois spent on putting people to death could be used to provide counseling, support and health care for the victims' loved ones. The former governor understands that his is not a popular position. Opposition to the death penalty will never be popular with politicians, because it might lead to the accusation that they are soft on crime. Ryan, in this regard, was a true political leader: unwilling to shirk the demands of his office in order to avoid criticism.

We can hope that the governor's decision will spur other states to debate moratorium legislation, as well as bills that would establish death penalty commissions. The same problems that exist in Illinois certainly

exist in Texas, Florida, Missouri, Oklahoma, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina and the other states that most frequently put people to death.

Ryan correctly noted that while reforms might reduce the potential for error, they would not create "a perfect system." His decision to extend a blanket commutation has brought the world's attention to the fact that the death penalty, by its fatal nature, will always make mistakes. Now we must ask, with former Governor George Ryan, "How many more cases of wrongful conviction need to occur before we can all agree that the system is broken?" I ask further, how many innocent people must go to death row and be executed, before we agree that the system cannot be fixed.

Hawkins is executive director of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty.

To the Editor: Truths Taken to Heart

Thank you for printing a very fine column by Michael Hudson (All Faiths Can Unite in King's Dream, Jan. 15 issue). His words are a reminder that the truths of the Rev. Dr. King's message can be taken to heart by people of all faiths. Keep up the good work with your excellent newspaper.

— Asher Abrams

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The screenshot shows a Microsoft Internet Explorer browser window displaying the website for The Portland Observer. The page includes a navigation menu on the left with categories like Top Stories, Metro, Sports, Focus, Health, Opinion, Police/Vancouver, Religion, Observador, General News, and Contact Us. The main content area features a top story titled 'Adams High Awaits Wrecking Ball' with a sub-headline 'The Portland School District has proclaimed that there will be a new Whitaker Middle School to replace the empty and former Adams High School at 5700 NE 39th Ave. Of course the new building will look very different and will bring new housing with it—something that makes nearby existing neighbors a little nervous.' Below this are other news items: 'Keeping a Close Eye On Crime' and 'Spraying Makes Progress in Mosquito Fight'. A sidebar on the right contains a 'Top Stories' section with a '1... 2... 3' indicator and a 'Call us at: 503.288.0033' box. At the bottom, there is a 'THE WEEK IN REVIEW' section.