

OPINION

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Troops' Bravery Commended

Our military reflects the diversity of our nation

Julian Bond, chairman of the board of directors of the NAACP, urges support for United States troops in Iraq, despite earlier opposition to the war.

"Last fall, we opposed unilateral war against Iraq, but we are as one with all Americans in supporting our fighting forces,"



Julian Bond

and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform, who represent all races and faiths."

The NAACP Board of Directors unanimously passed a resolution last October expressing opposition to war before all options were exercised in the United Nations.

Bond also is speaking out regarding an incident in which a sergeant with the 101st Airborne Division has been accused of throwing grenades that killed and injured his fellow soldiers.

"We mourn the lives lost and condemn the attack by an

American soldier on his own comrades," Bond said.

Bond added that he is praying "for a swift end to this conflict and for a just peace at home and abroad."

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization. Its half-million adult and youth members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities and monitor equal opportunity in the public and private sectors.

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Reject Gun Industry Protections

There should be no escape from liability for misuse of guns

The NAACP is urging the U.S. Senate to reject legislation that would prevent civil liability against the gun industry for damages resulting from the misuse of a firearm.

"Some in Congress, goaded

by the gun lobby, are determined to slam the courthouse door in the face of current and future victims of gun violence," said Kweisi Mfume, NAACP president and chief executive officer.

A bill introduced by Rep. Cliff Stearns, R-Fla., H.R. 1036, The Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act, would immunize the gun industry from legal action - even when it acts in a negligent and irresponsible manner.

"For decades the NAACP has fought on behalf of victims of gun violence. Part of that



Kweisi Mfume

fight includes the NAACP's current legal action against firearms' manufacturers and dealers who have facilitated the supply of handguns to an unlawful underground market,"

Mfume said.

The proposed law comes just as the civil rights organization is preparing for a trial in a lawsuit against gun makers.

"We urge all members of Congress to reject H.R. 1036. In pushing this bill just weeks before our trial is slated to begin, the gun lobby clearly placed the NAACP's legal efforts in its sights," Mfume said. "H.R. 1036 makes specific reference to suits brought by 'private interest groups' and contains language that would stop dead in its tracks all pending legal action against the gun industry."

Health Care is Headed the Wrong Way

BY STEVEN WOLFSON

A recent report from the Institute of Medicine found that our health care system is confronting a crisis and is incapable of meeting the present, let alone the future needs of the American public.

A previous report from this agency estimated that 18,000 Americans died last year simply because they had no medical insurance. And the ranks of the uninsured are growing every year.

Medicaid and Medicare, designed to provide universal coverage to the elderly and

the indigent, once succeeded in their tasks. But the years have brought progressive unfunding relative to need. Medicaid now pays about 40 percent of the real costs of care. Medicare is headed for the same slope.

The magic bullet suggested for escalating health care costs was said to be managed care. But the managers not only did not constrain costs, they added to the costs by superimposing administrative expenses approaching 30 percent. And when they did not meet the profit expectations of their stockholders, they left. The HMOs deserted the Medicaid and Medicare programs in droves.

The next approach taken by the insurance industry has been the "defined benefit", meaning that people who can afford insurance will be given a choice of the coverage they will, or will not, have.

In essence, people are asked to gamble with their lives and fortunes. Gamble that they will not need outpatient care during the coming year, or drug coverage, or psychiatric services, or with

premium rates rising progressively, that they will be healthy this year.

The impact is to shift even more costs to the consumer. The main burden, of course, is borne by those who have the poor fortune to get sick at the wrong time or in the wrong body part.

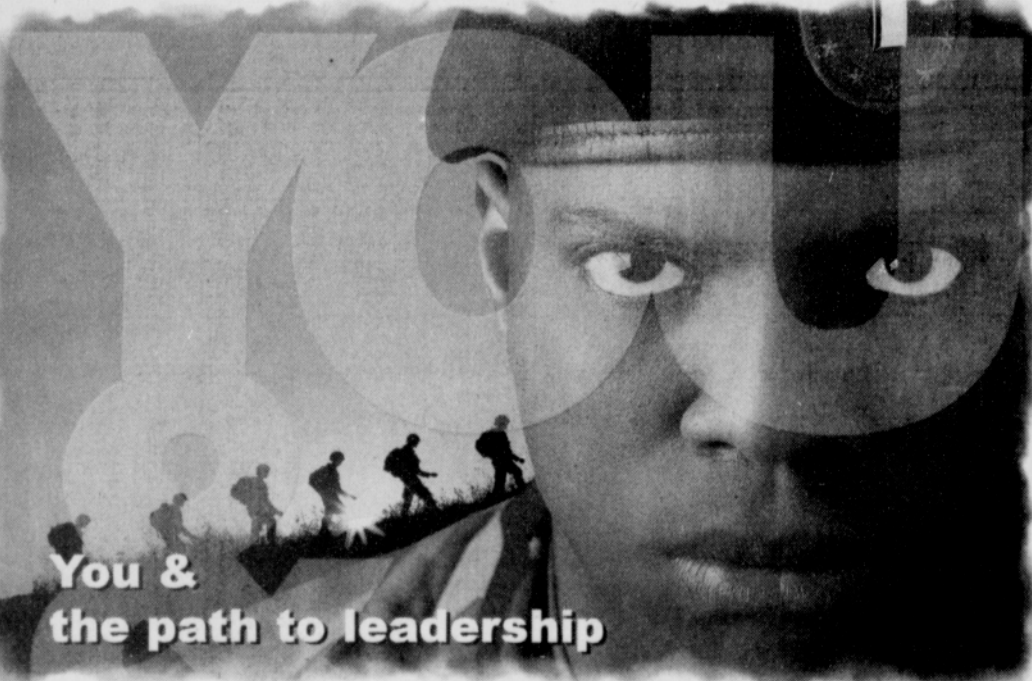
Now, the headlines tell us that the president and Congress are planning to reform Medicare. The approach is to be "competition". The instrument will be the HMO. The controlling force will be the insurance industry.

It does not take much sense to know that we are headed for disaster. The costs of health care are growing as the components get more expensive and we can do more for the sick. The insurance offered is more expensive but covers less. The social net is eroding and the nation is aging.

How can reasonable people propose such an unreasonable solution?

"The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind. The answer is blowing in the wind."

Steven Wolfson is a cardiologist in New Haven, Conn.



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