

OPINION

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Vouchers Won't Help School Children

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

Action by Congress makes my blood boil

I must admit that I'm not objective about it. It makes my blood boil. I'm talking about the move to cram school vouchers down the throats of the people of the District of Columbia. It's just racist and undemocratic. And it didn't happen by chance.

Most of the D.C. City Council and 85 percent of the people of the District don't want them. How dare Dianne Feinstein, who lives 3,000 miles away and would not dare to support vouchers for schools in California, decide what is best for the children of D.C.? How dare the Republican leadership of Congress make decisions for the people of the District of Columbia, which is mostly Democratic? How dare the House leadership, in a particularly devious and

surprise move, schedule a vote on D.C. vouchers (for a majority African American school system) on the very evening that the Congressional Black Caucus was sponsoring a Presidential television debate in Baltimore? How dare Washington Mayor Anthony Williams prance himself onto the Senate floor, the first D.C. Mayor to be invited to do so in 25 years, like a grinning poster child of the bill's sponsors, while he sold out thousands of D.C. public school children? It just makes my blood boil.

Many of the cities targeted by the right do have very real problems in public education, but vouchers won't solve these problems. Vouchers won't solve the very real needs of children living in dire pov-

learning materials they use. Vouchers won't solve the problems of the school systems which face buildings which are falling apart and which are facing tax cuts as states are forced to cut budgets because of falling revenues. Vouchers won't solve the problems of 95 percent of the children who will be left behind in public schools, which will have even fewer dollars, when they can't or won't be accepted into private schools.

Vouchers won't solve the problems of 95 percent of the children who will be left behind in public schools.

-Bernice Powell Jackson




people of that city will have the right to choose what they want for themselves and their children.

The good news is that the plan for school vouchers in D.C. was withdrawn from the U.S. Senate floor in the midst of the Bush administration's \$87 billion request for Iraq. But Senate leaders vowed to return, perhaps in the omnibus federal spending bill that will come at the end of the month.

Bernice Powell Jackson is the Executive Minister for Justice and Witness Ministries for the United Church of Christ.

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Letters to the Editor:

Anti-Government Myth

I moved here from Nashville, Tenn. and have been trying to catch up on this PGE vs. PUD debate. Frankly, I'm shocked to see the deceptive "Citizens Against the Government Takeover" commercials on TV warning that voting yes on measures 21-51 and 52 will "add another layer of government." This scare-tactic rings loudly of the bogus "government is wasteful and private companies are efficient" line that we have been fed since the Reagan era.

Hello, people! I spent years working for a Fortune 50 company and personally watched millions of dollars wasted on poorly managed projects that bled on and on for years because no one was willing to take on the department head in charge with project. Why? Because he was related to the CEO and to question him would have been career-suicide! Private industry is no more organized and efficient than government — human nature is human nature, just think Enron!

Wake up, Portland! See through this anti-government myth and take back the electric resource that is rightfully yours!

Sarah Walton

Concerned About PUD

As a northeast Portland resident, I want to share with my neighbors why I'm concerned about Measures 26-51 and 26-52. These measures would form a people's utility district to take over PGE's and Pacific Power's reliable service in Multnomah County.

What voters may not know is that this proposal would hurt programs that we all count on—including affordable housing programs, low-income energy assistance, energy efficiency and renewable energy programs.

A takeover would damage social and environmental programs that are important to low-income, elderly and disabled residents of Multnomah County. Pacific Power and PGE contribute close to \$20 million a year for "public purposes," such as low-income energy assistance, weatherization, energy efficiency and affordable housing. With a new PUD, this money would be lost.

These programs are already struggling. This is the worst possible time to cut them by millions of dollars per year.

Unlike PGE and Pacific Power, which generate most of their own electricity, this new utility would have to buy all of its electricity from others. No one knows how much it would cost, or how high rates would go.

Even the Oregon Office of Energy has concluded that there is no way this new government utility can guarantee lower electric rates than what we are already paying.

Margaret Carter, State Senator



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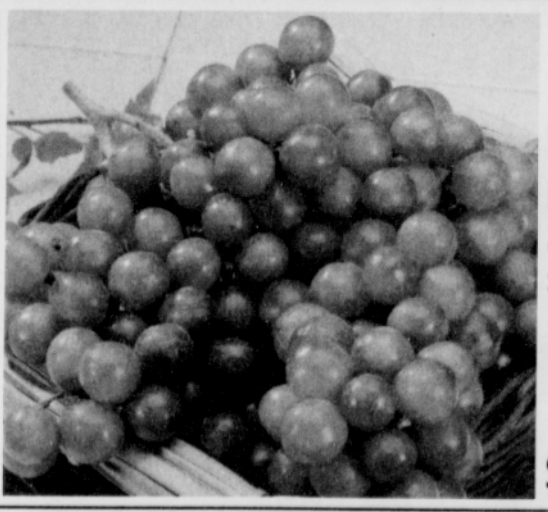
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