

# OPINION

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## Homeless Slighted by Both Parties

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

During the nightly parade of camera time at the national Democratic and Republican conventions this summer, there are many groups whose platforms will get national exposure and party attention. There is one group, however, that will not be sharing the stage: the homeless. Over the past year, the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty estimates that over 3 million men, woman and children were homeless and the demand for care at homeless shelters increased by 13 percent. With the reality of homelessness being only a missed paycheck, health crisis or unpaid bill away, this crisis is one that demands national attention and a national platform.

The pundits on both sides of the aisle should care about and address the homeless problem. Contrary to popular belief, homeless



people are not aimless, lazy people. According to a survey of 27 major American cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago and Washington, DC, 44 percent of the homeless work, 67 percent are single parent families and 50 percent are African Ameri-

*When at least 39 percent of homeless population is made up of children, the urgency of the homeless problem cannot be ignored.*

can. When 44 percent of the homeless population is made up of working people, the blame lays in the lack of a living wage, the increase in poverty, a lack of affordable housing and the inattention of the federal government to this growing

problem.

The current proposals from both major political parties and their Presidential candidates appear to fall short of meeting the needs of homeless Americans. President Bush has largely ignored the homeless problem, instead giving more attention to the needs of his wealthy, corporate patrons. The Bush economy has pushed people across several demographic groups into homelessness in numbers that have not been seen since the 1980s. Democratic candidate John Kerry's plan would address the middle class squeeze by creating good-paying jobs, cutting middle class taxes in order to raise middle class incomes, cut the deficit and investigate jobs in the new-tech, hi-tech areas. The

Democrats' plan addresses some of the factors of homelessness, but still fails to directly address the problem.

By and large, the homeless lack the presence of other election year catered-to groups. The wide spread political belief is that the homeless do not vote. When survival is a daily concern, that mindset may not be too far from the truth. Even in non-election years, the centrist view is that homeless advocacy is too liberal and, therefore, too risky for re-election purposes. The point is, however, that someone needs to speak for the homeless. When at least 39 percent of homeless population is made up of children, the urgency of the homeless problem cannot be ignored.

As our economy struggles to recover from nearly four years of business and job loss, national leaders must take notice and address

the needs of the homeless Americans affected by the wrecked economy. With homelessness affecting men and women; African Americans and Caucasians; veterans and non-veterans; urban and rural, the problem is obviously more serious than can be solved during national party convention good timing. The homeless problem can only be addressed by giving real time, effort and resources to establishing adequate income, affordable housing and viable social services. Until such time as Republicans and Democrats alike give real consideration to these economic, employment and social concerns, too many Americans will live with the worry of being homeless.

Judge Greg Mathis is Chairman of the Rainbow PUSH-Excel Board and a National Board Member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

## Defense of Marriage not Constitutional

*Act is bad even for opponents of same-sex marriage*

BY NANCY PELOSI  
HOUSE DEMOCRATIC LEADER

Editor's note: Pelosi made the following statements on the House floor in opposition of the Marriage Protection Act of 2004, which she said would strip jurisdiction from federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, preventing them from ruling on challenges to the federal Defense of Marriage Act. The bill was later approved by a vote of 233 to 194.

This bill will impact the very foundation of our government — it impedes the uniformity of federal law, it sets a dangerous precedent, and it does grave damage to the separation of powers.

I have been married for over 40 years. And I cannot, for the life of me, think how this legislation that is on the floor today, the so-called Marriage Protection Act, is any protection for my marriage. In fact, I think it is not a protection of the rights of Americans.

Every member of this body has taken a solemn oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. That is our oath of office.

All members should consider that this bill has far-reaching consequences for the separation of powers that has been the hallmark of our Constitution, our government, and our rights as American citizens. We must honor our oath of office and oppose this legislation.

This court stripping bill is not about reaffirming the Defense of Marriage Act, or even about gay marriage. The fundamental issue in this bill is whether we want to undermine the Supreme Court, the federal judiciary and our system of checks and balances.

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pedes the uniformity of federal law, it sets a dangerous precedent, and it does grave damage to the separation of powers.

When former Senator Barry Goldwater spoke against a court stripping bill in 1982, he warned his colleagues in the other body that it was a "frontal assault on the independence of the federal courts, and it is a dangerous blow to the foundations of a free society." We must heed that warning today.

This bill would prohibit federal courts, including the Supreme Court of the United States, from hearing cases related to the interpretation and the validity under the Constitution of the full faith and credit provision of the Defense of Marriage Act, as well as this court stripping bill.

If passed, it would constitute the first time in the over 200 years of our country's history that Congress has enacted legislation totally eliminating any federal court from considering the constitutionality of federal legislation. Only state courts would be able to decide questions related to this provision of a federal statute.

The irony of that is, if your state passed a law that allowed

gay marriages, and you wanted to challenge it in federal court, you would only be confined to challenging it in a state court in your state. So even those who would oppose gay marriage would not have recourse to the federal courts.

Today, millions of Americans are looking for work, millions more do not have access to quality health care since President Bush

and women in uniform in harm's way without the proper equipment, training, and intelligence to get the job done. We want them to be second to none, and we will make sure they have what they need. But we must take the time to do that. But instead, what are we doing?

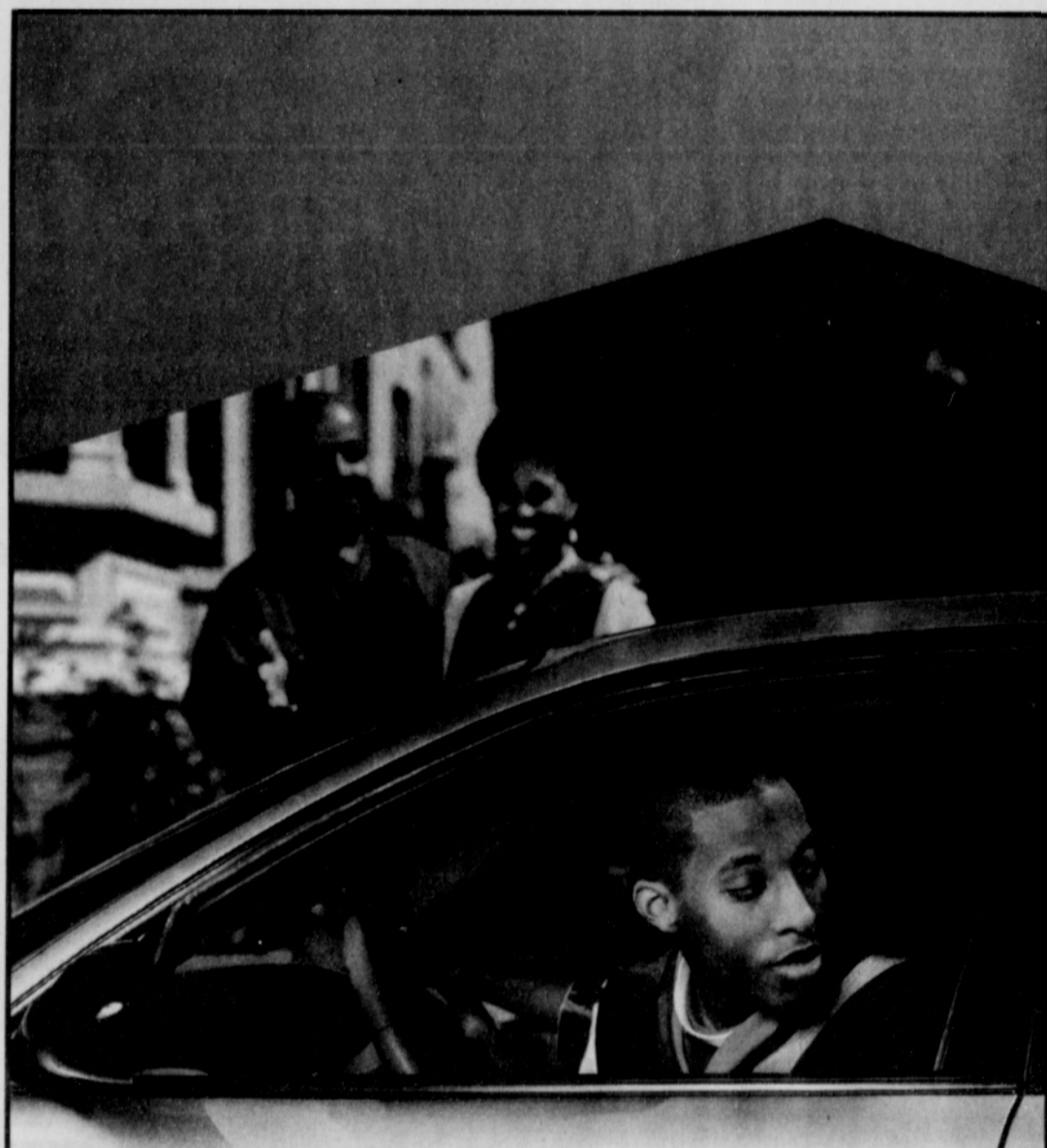
Instead, we are gathering here to talk about discrimination, to talk about undermining the Con-

*Marriage Protection Act undermines Supreme Court and our system of checks and balances.*

took office. Our children are not receiving the quality of education that they deserve, to have the opportunity that is the promise of our country. We are driving ourselves deeply into debt with the irresponsible and reckless economic policies of the Republicans here, giving our children obligations instead of opportunity. We have our men

stitution of the United States, to talk about dishonoring the oath of office that we take to protect and defend the Constitution. I agree with those who say this bill is 'as wrong as wrong can be.' In short, this bill is bad law and bad policy. That's why it will not have my support.

Nancy Pelosi is the House Democratic Leader.



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## A Family-Based Plan For Voting

*Register everyone eligible to change the presidency*

BY BEN JOHNSON DEPUTY CHAIRMAN  
OF THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL COMMITTEE

It is said that our families mean everything to us.

There's an added dimension for this election year. In the 2004 election, families could be the key to preventing America from waking up to the beginning of George W. Bush's second term.

Our families are featured as the focal point of the Democratic National Committee's new Family Voting Plan — a step-by-step process that encourages families to work together to ensure that every family member votes on Election Day.

We are all too familiar with the Election Day fiasco of 2000.

The stories are legendary.

Tens of thousands of people tried to vote in 2000, but those votes were never counted. The election rife had problems that remarkably seemed to be drawn like magnets to communities of color. Just 537 votes decided the last election.

If all the votes in those same communities had been counted, there's little doubt Al Gore would be in the middle of his re-election campaign.

That's now behind us, but there were valuable lessons learned that we can carry into the next election.

While there are still three months to go until Election Day, it is already clear that the 2004 election stands to be just as close as 2000, which means that each vote carries unprecedented weight. It also means our responsibility cannot end with the casting of individual votes.

With just six steps, the Family Voting Plan ([www.democrats.org/fvp](http://www.democrats.org/fvp)) provides a simple check list for families.



It starts with registering all voters. Verify polling places. Assist elderly family members with absentee ballots or early voting. Provide transportation for every family member who needs a ride. Make certain family members are familiar with any new voting machines. Create an aggressive Election Day effort to get your family to the

polls.

Taken as a whole, the plan helps us take care of our families. And it helps families take care of each other. The stakes are too high this election year to do anything less. Nearly three million jobs have been lost and more than 43 million Americans are without health

*If all the votes in those same communities had been counted, there's little doubt Al Gore would be in the middle of his re-election campaign.*

insurance.

If America is going to move forward, it's clear we will need a new direction and that new direction begins with your family.

Ben Johnson is Deputy Secretary of the Democratic National Committee. He served in the Carter White House as Director of Consumer Programs and served the full eight years of the Clinton Administration. Johnson is one of the highest-ranking African Americans in White House history, last serving as Assistant to the President and Director of the President's Initiative for One America.