

# OPINION

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## A Bitter Reality We Must Overcome

Day will come when we will be stronger for this defeat

BY U.S. REP. ELIJAH CUMMINGS

On the night of Nov. 2, most of us shared the disappointment that made it difficult for nearly half of America to sleep. Despite a hard-fought and historic effort, we fell short in our campaign to elect a President who would restore a measure of fairness and balance to the government of the United States.

The consequences of this defeat cannot be minimized — nor should they be. The next few years will be more difficult for tens of millions of Americans, including many people in our own communities.

We must do what we always have done. We must reach out to those in need, offering whatever help we can provide. We must encourage each other — and our neighbors — to hold onto the faith that better times and a better country are never beyond our reach.

We lost an important battle, a loss that will cost us dearly. I am convinced, however, that the day will come when we will be stronger for this defeat. Consider all that we accomplished.

The more than 13 million African American voters who cast our ballots on Election Day represented a 25 percent increase;

and our percentage of the overall vote also increased to more than 11 percent.

No other group of Americans matched the 89 percent Black vote for John Kerry and progressive change. Although a number of commentators have made much of the fact that the African American vote for President Bush increased to 11 percent nationwide, the more lasting political realities cut the other way.

It is no surprise to us that African Americans continue to balance

Congressional Black Caucus that I have been honored to lead for the last two years.

In the upcoming Congress, our numbers will increase from 39 to 43. This gain will be significant not only in the quantity but also in the quality of the representation that we can provide to our communities.

Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois, only the third Black Senator to be elected to the Congress since Reconstruction, will restore our presence in the Senate. Rep. Cynthia

struggle has never been a campaign for momentary power for power's sake alone. Like those great Americans on whose shoulders we now stand, we have been called by God and history to participate in a great movement.

We are both the beneficiaries and the trustees of the most important calling in life — the mission to create a more fair and humane country and a safer, more peace-filled world. This is the true, unalterable vision of our movement toward universal civil rights.

At this time when we must set our sights on creating a better future, I recall for you a lesson from our past. Dec. 10th of this year will mark the fortieth anniversary of that moment when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., stood before the world in Oslo, Norway, and accepted the Nobel Prize for Peace on behalf of all who struggle for civil rights.

Dr. King's words at that difficult time are worth remembering today. They remind us that we are a strong people, a people of abiding faith — and they encourage us to move forward toward the mission that we have been called to fulfill.

"When our days become dreary with low-hanging clouds and our nights become darker than a thousand midnights," Dr. King observed, "we will know that we are living in the creative turmoil of a genuine civilization struggling to be born."

*Elijah E. Cummings, D-Md., is chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus.*



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our support for progressive economic, foreign and military policies with a significant appreciation for more traditional social customs and religious beliefs. Likewise, it should be no surprise to anyone else that we remain the Democratic Party's most loyal constituency.

I am especially heartened by the knowledge that more than 21 million Americans under the age of 30 voted this year, 8 million of them for the first time — and that these younger voters supported Senator Kerry over President Bush by a margin of 54-45 percent.

Finally, although progressives lost strength in the Congress overall, this was not the result within the

McKinney of Georgia will be returning to her seat, joining a strong and principled class of 2005 that includes Reps. Emanuel Cleaver of Missouri, Al Green of Texas, and Gwen Moore of Wisconsin, the first African American to be elected to the Congress from her state.

It is true that we have lost a campaign at a critical moment in our history. This is a bitter reality that we must face and overcome.

Yet, as Americans of color, this election year has also evoked an emotion that has even greater power — a sense of ourselves that is the very foundation of our character as a people.

We do well to recall that our

contain excess protein, saturated fats and cholesterol and account for the epidemic of obesity, diabetes and heart disease. These early dietary flaws become lifelong addictions, contributing to an escalating public health crisis.

A number of national health advocacy groups are mobilizing to improve school food. Parents and others who care about this critical issue should work with their Parent Teacher Associations in demanding healthy school meals, snacks and vending machine items.

*Lionel Inman, Southeast Portland*

## Minority Teachers

Increase ranks with teacher incentives

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

It may take an entire village to raise a child, but it takes excellent teachers to educate and nurture a child.

A recent report by a coalition of school groups indicates that a lack of minority teachers is hurting minority students' chances for success in school. While the federal government focuses on increasing student standards and testing, perhaps a better public policy would be to minister to the source of students' achievement and failure: the teacher.

The problems in education cannot be solely laid at the feet of our children. Teachers suffer real budget and training constraints that frustrate their ability to lead, teach and inspire.

Although black and Hispanic students make up nearly 35 percent of America's public school student population, black and Hispanic teachers make up less than 10 percent of America's educators.

Ninety percent of the teachers that minority children learn from look differently than they do. Why does this matter? Because research shows that minority children excel at higher rates when taught by teachers from their ethnic group. When minority teachers teach minority children, the children face higher expectations. The teachers expect more, demand more and the children achieve more.

The current focus on increasing student performance will not succeed without additional resources that increase and enhance the nation's cache of minority teachers.

This means money. As we all know, teacher is a grossly under funded profession and a lot of times, promising minority candidates choose to enter into professions based upon financial considerations.

Providing school loan forgiveness, graduate study scholarships and housing financing plans are just a few methods the government could use to entice top quality minority candidates into the teaching profession. As part of their orientation, non-white teachers could undergo training to make them culturally sensitive to the needs of their minority students.

These suggestions are but a few of the possibilities our government could and should be doing to ensure that new teachers receive the proper incentives to do their



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best to educate, uplift and empower our children.

Rather than spending time and resources creating artificial hoops through which our children can jump, the federal government would be much better off bolstering the ranks of the teaching profession with qualified and dedicated minority teachers whose very presence would help to leave no child behind.

Indeed, it takes a village to raise a child, but it takes a teacher to raise a nation.

*Judge Greg Mathis is chairman of the Rainbow PUSH-Excel Board and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.*

## Improve School Lunches

Some 28 million children in 100,000 schools and childcare centers participate in the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's National School Lunch Program.

Unfortunately, the lunch fair is made up largely of USDA's surplus meat, milk and cheese commodities, which

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