OPINION

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Mandatory Sentences Hurt Minorities

Congress should respect judges'

discretion BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

After nearly 18 years, the Supreme Court has restored a judge's ability to use discretion in sentencing. Prior to this ruling, judges were

Republican lawmakers are al- individuals for specific crimes. ready attempting to override the court by crafting legislation that that courts will start to impose re-institutes mandatory sentenc- drastically different sentencing ing. One of the strengths this decisions for the same offense. country was founded upon is the This is a sound concern, howseparation of powers. Having the ever, this already happens. Even branches be equal allowed this with the "benefit" of mandatory country's framers ensure that no sentencing, the arbitrary senparticular branch would be able tencing laws often hardest imto single-handedly overrule the pact minority defendants. By other. It seems, however, that returning sentencing power to the Republican majority never the courts and away from Con-

sulted in unreasonably long sentences for black youths, in par- tence. ticular. The mandatory sentencing laws removed judicial discre- cision is a victory for common tion for even first time offenders. In one famous example out of court system. Michigan, a female drug courier received a life sentence without man of the Rainbow PUSHthe possibility of parole for being in a car with her boyfriend who board member of the Southern had over 650 grams of cocaine Christian Leadership Conferon him. The boyfriend absolved ence.

the female of any wrong doing and admitted that the drugs in question were his, but under

federal sentencing law, the judge was unable to consider the female's relative degree of guilt This is just one example of an exceedingly harsh sentence not fitting the crime.

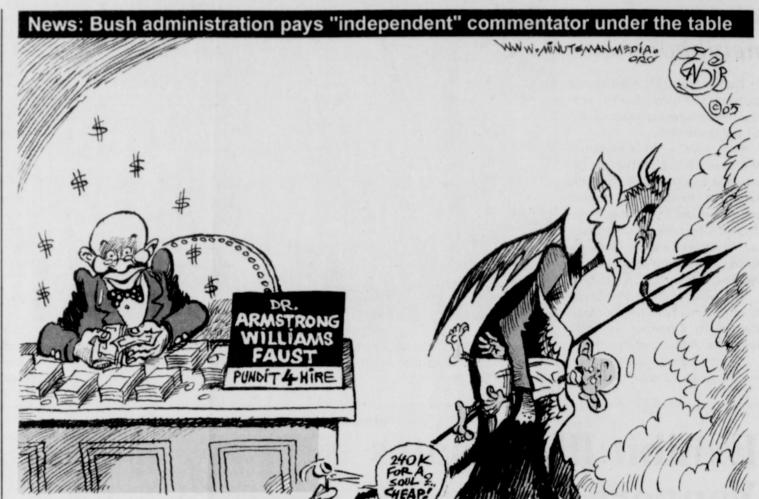
Blanket rules are a hindrance to

bound to apply across-the-board judges because, generally, there sentencing for certain offenses are no easy one-step solutions regardless of the circumstances. when it comes to sentencing

The risk, detractors say, is learned this simple civics lesson. gress, we can start to rectify Mandatory sentencing has re- this and, at least, give defendants the ability to appeal a sen-

> This latest Supreme Court desense, justice and the criminal

> Judge Greg Mathis is chair-Excel Board and a national



Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

What would Dr. King think of the world today had he lived? What would he have to say? What causes would he be speaking out for or against? Many ask that question every year as we approach his Jan. 15 birthday. The truth is we will never know because no human being stands still in time, but we all grow and mature just by

living. By reading Dr. King's sermons and writings in the last five years of his life, we know that he prioritized economic justice issues and working for peace in a world of war. These became his priorities, just as racial justice had been his prime motivator in the early days of his ministry.

What would Dr. King have to say about the terrible toll of the tsunami? I think he would have pean counterparts. spoken a word of consolation to the people of those nations and an that our federal government forassurance of the love of God, especially for those who had lost not only family, but all possessions.

But I also think he would have King would say we, the richest some even beginning a march at his challenged those of us who live so nation in the world, can do better. graveside. I don't profess to know

comfortably in America to understand that our sharing with the world cannot come only during times of crisis and catastrophe. I think he would have used this opportunity to help Americans understand that our federal government's foreign aid (excluding military spending) and our private charitable gifts com- mous sermon titled, "Silence is bined equal only 21 cents per day, Betrayal," at The Riverside Church

> I think Dr. King would say we, the richest nation in the world, can do better.

per person—far less than our Euro- and the high price being paid by the soldiers who were mostly Black and Many Americans falsely believe Hispanic and poor. Recently there have been some eign aid is 25 percent of our nation African-American clergy who have tried to expropriate Dr. King in their budget. Instead, it is less than one

the on-going war in Iraq? I have

said many times that I believe Dr.

King would have spoken out force-

fully against going into that war

his opposition to the war, just as he

did in the Vietnam War. In his fa-

in New York City,

one year before

his assassina-

tion, Dr. King

against the inher-

ent danger of try-

war, the spend-

ing of our na-

tional budget for

war instead of

against poverty

out

spoke

What would Dr. King say about what Dr. King's position on same sex marriage would have been, but I do believe that Dr. King would have supported the full humanity and the inclusion of all children and would have continued to voice of God in our society. Just as he supported Bayard Rustin, the labor unionist and gay man who was the genius behind the March on Washington and many of the strategies of the civil rights movement, I believe Dr. King would have reached out to the gay com-

> I know that he would have urged each and every American to work for justice and peace in our nation ing to end con- and the world. This year, as we flict with war, the celebrate Dr. King's birthday, let's all find a concrete way to work for such a world. Write a letter to your congresspersons and senators about the genocide in Darfur, work in Habitat for Humanity building projects, make sure your church is using fair trade coffee, tutor a child in need or teach an adult to read. If we want a world of peace with justice, then we must work for it. I know Dr. King would approve of that.

Bernice Powell Jackson is executive minister for the United fight against same sex marriage, Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries.

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Fix the Real Social Crisis

quarter of one percent. I think Dr.

BY TERRY MCAULIFFE

stretching the truth on Social Secu-

Bush and the Washington Republicans are trying to hide two facts. First, Social Security, while a challenge is not a crisis; it is solvent until at least 2052. Second, Wash-

As usual, President Bush is African-American men die sooner population. than the rest of the population isn't a Social Security problem; it is a health care problem.

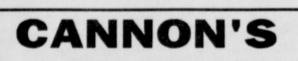
Under Bush, seven million African Americans don't have Security privatization plan. any health insurance, which might explain why African the Democratic National Comington Republicans don't want to American men have a lower life mittee.

address the real crisis: the fact that expectancy than the general

What is "inherently unfair" is for the President to ignore a health

care crisis and yet invoke it to try to muster support for his Social

Terry McAuliffe is chairman of





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Letter to the Editor Right Step for Reform

Unlike in 2000, when every senator stood silent, Sen. Barbara Boxer of California's courageous act to object to the counting of Ohio's electoral votes brought national attention to a crisis in our democracy and forced a much needed two hour debate on voting and elections in the U.S. Senate.

Thanks also goes to Rep. Stephanie Tubbs Jones and other congressional leaders who, in the face of a patronizing, hostile and disrespectful Republican majority, did our country a service by speaking out and demanding that we protect each citizen's right to vote.

Republican leadership has stood in the way of meaningful electoral reform, especially on the issue of an auditable paper trail for electronic voting, despite common sense and bi-partisan efforts supporting it. It's unconscionable. How is it that every ATM can give a secured receipt, but not the touch screen machines that capture and tally our votes? It's the integrity of our democracy that's at stake.

Joan Levine Northeast Portland