

# OPINION

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## Momentum for Justice

Supreme Court on right course



*The most basic of values is a respect for human life.*

BY GREG MATHIS

Major decisions made by the U.S. Supreme Court over the last three years give hope to our continuing struggle for justice. Two years ago the court upheld affirmative action when it ruled the University of Michigan is allowed to pursue diversity in its admissions policy. Last year, the court banned the execution of the mentally retarded and last week it banned the execution of juveniles.

The hope now is that in the near future the death penalty, which disproportionately affects blacks, will also be struck down by the high court.

The decision to outlaw the execution of juveniles was a surprise to many.

At a time when the political mood of the country leans toward conservatives who advocate for the death penalty, its relieving to see that the same court that jump started this conservative movement by selecting Bush as president five years ago, can still uphold the Constitution.

Based on the Eighth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which bans the use of cruel and unusual punishment in our justice system, the court voted 5 to 4 in favor of overturning a 1989 decision allowing juvenile executions.

The United States was one of only a few countries that allowed the death penalty for minors. The few other countries such as Iran, China, and Pakistan allow it only in rare circumstances. Most of the civilized world obviously knows that executing immature and underdeveloped teenagers is inhumane.

Studies have long indicated that the teenage brain is not equipped

to handle the life and death consequences of teenager's actions and does not become fully operational until adulthood. That's why we don't allow them the freedom of choice until age 21.

Of the 22 youngsters that have been executed since 1976 the majority of them have occurred in Texas, some under the watch of former governor, now president, George W. Bush. This is no doubt a setback for him and other advocates for the death penalty.

Hopefully, with the momentum of this decision we will get closer to banning the death penalty altogether, young and old. In recent years, it has been discovered through the use of DNA, that many of those who have been sentenced to death were actually innocent. That's reason enough to end the death penalty.

The Supreme Court's decisions interpreting and applying the Constitution should be based on community standards of the U.S. population. Certainly those standards are subject to change, based on our ever-changing values and norms.

It is now time to apply the cruel and unusual punishment clause of the constitution's Eight Amendment to outlaw the death penalty altogether.

The most basic of values is a respect for human life. It is hypocritical to fight for the preservation of life for the unborn and at the same time support executing the living.

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



## College Access Put in Jeopardy

### Programs like Upward Bound help low-income

BY ARNOLD L. MITCHEM

Nearly 5,300 Oregon high school and middle school students would lose their college opportunity programs under the Bush administration's proposed 2006 budget.

The cuts call for elimination of two popular and successful college access programs — Upward Bound and Talent Search. These programs help low-income students become the first in their families to attend college.

Participation in these programs is based on

family income.

Our high school and middle school students need mentoring and encouragement in preparing for and applying to college because their families have so few resources. Instead, their lifelines to college will be cut off if Congress lets this proposal stand.

Upward Bound and Talent Search serve more than 455,000 high school and middle school students, disabled students and veterans across the country. Millions of students have gone on to college and become productive, tax-paying citizens after completing these programs during the nearly 40 years of operation.

The \$460 million in nationwide federal funding for Upward Bound and Talent Search nationwide would be shifted to help pay for an expansion of President Bush's No Child Left

Behind program.

It is tragically shortsighted of the Bush administration to seek to end these programs in the name of No Child Left Behind. Standardized tests in high schools cannot be a reasonable substitute for one-on-one mentoring and rigorous instruction for students who have low aspirations and little support.

We hope that members of Congress, including the members of the Oregon delegation, will act to save Upward Bound and Talent Search because these programs are vital links to educational opportunity for thousands of first generation low-income students in Oregon and across the country.

*Arnold L. Mitchem is the president of the non-profit Council for Opportunity in Education.*

## Serious Hunger Setback: Recent gains may be lost

BY MICHAEL LEACHMAN

First, the good news: Oregon's hunger rate has improved. Though our rate is still high, we made it easier for families working in low-wage jobs to get food stamps.

Oregon changed its eligibility rules in 2000 so that a family of three could earn 43 percent more and still get the vital food stamp benefits. The

changes also allowed food stamp families to own a reliable car.

We've reduced hunger in large part because we got more federal food dollars into Oregon to help our working families. The added federal support also put more money into local economies.

Now for the bad news: President Bush wants to eliminate the provision that Oregon used to expand our food stamp program. If the president gets his way, Oregon will immediately have to take food stamps away from about 11,200 Oregon families working in low-wage jobs.

Another 4,500 Oregon families with elderly or disabled members could also lose access to food stamps. And an unknown number of Oregon families with a reliable car or more than \$2,000 in assets would also be cut off.

The president's proposal would be a serious setback for Oregon's campaign to reduce hunger.

Senators Gordon Smith and Ron Wyden lead the so-called Hunger Caucus in Congress. They may be able

*The president's budget takes food out of the cupboards of low-wage working families and hands the proceeds to extremely wealthy families.*

to restore the provision that allowed the expansion. Unfortunately, even if they succeed, other cuts the president seeks in key federal programs that invest in low-wage working families could undermine our effort to reduce hunger.

These programs include nutrition for newborns and young children, childcare assistance, rental housing assistance and other forms of investment in low-wage working families.

Is America really so broke that we can no longer afford to help children and their low-wage working parents eat three square meals a day? It

doesn't seem so; the president wants even more new tax breaks for millionaires.

His budget takes food out of the cupboards of low-wage working families and hands the proceeds to extremely wealthy families by increasing their deductions and exemptions.

Oregon should have the flexibility to choose a different approach. After all, what we've been doing has been working.

*Charles Sheketoff is the executive director of the Oregon Center for Public Policy.*

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