

Opinion articles do not necessarily reflect or represent the views of The Portland Observer

OPINION

Staggering Unemployment



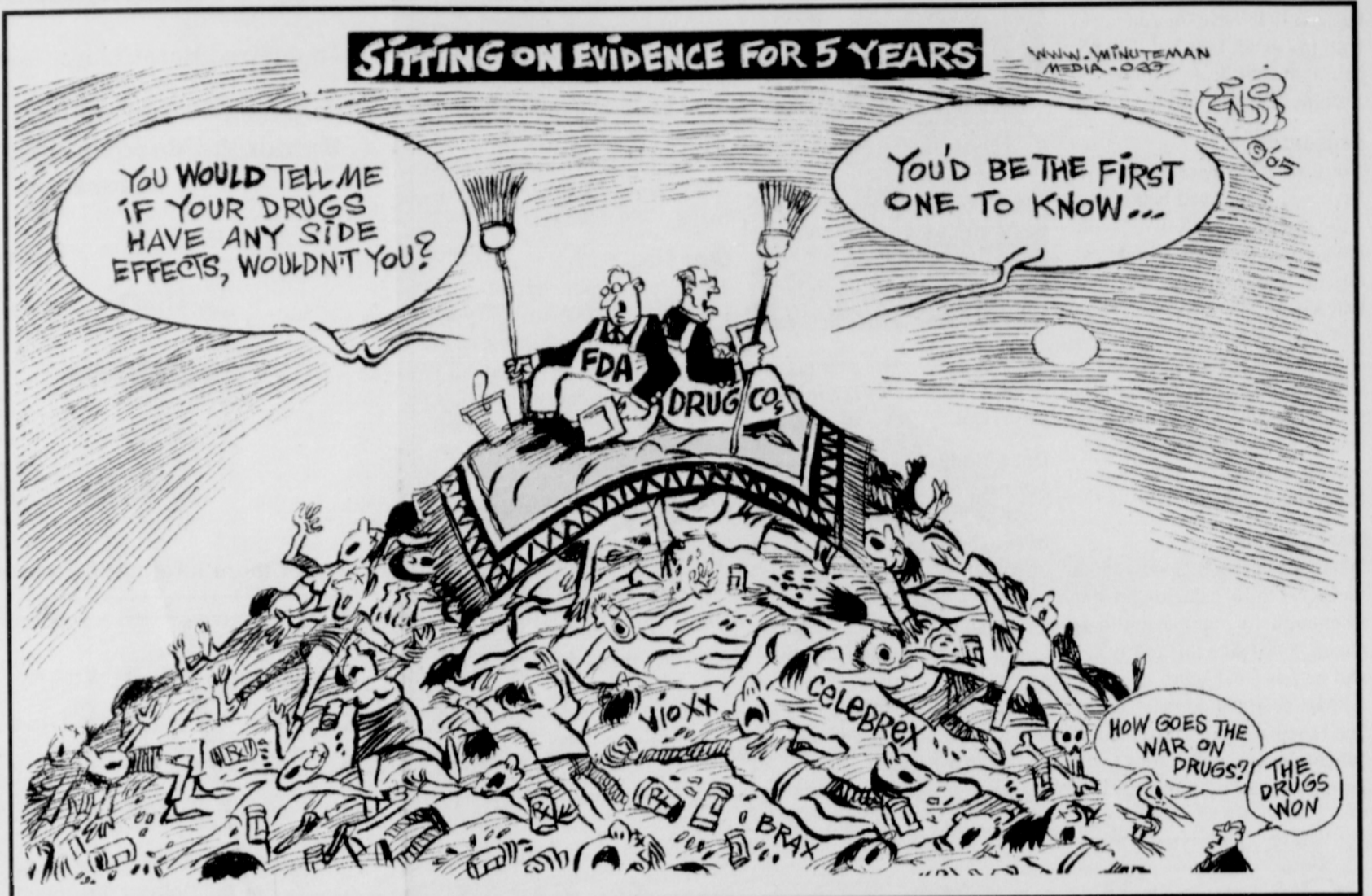
BY U.S. REP. MEL WATT

Unemployment numbers released last week show that African American unemployment has increased to a staggering 10.9 percent, once again widening the already dramatic gap that existed between White Americans and African Americans in jobs, economic opportunity and ability to survive.

"The rate of unemployment for African Americans is consistently more than double the rate for White Americans. This is simply unacceptable and must be dealt with. It can only be dealt with by an aggressive commitment to the Agenda outlined to the President by the Congressional Black Caucus in our meeting with him in January - a commitment to closing disparities that continue in every aspect of our lives.

We call on the President, once again, to show his personal commitment to closing these disparities and call on him to rally the country behind the persistent and unfinished business of closing these disparities.

Only then can our country realize its full potential and honor its commitment to provide equal opportunity for all. U.S. Rep. Mel Watt, D-N.C., is chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus.



Fighting for Economic Justice

Wage increase would have helped impoverished

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS



The minimum wage proposal recently voted down by the U.S. Senate could have helped millions of people move out of poverty.

The federal government measures the poverty levels at \$18,660 for a family of four, \$15,700 for a family of three and less for smaller and single households. If the minimum wage had been increased to \$7.25 an hour as Sen. Edward Kennedy proposed, it would have brought a family of three within a few hundred dollars of climbing above the poverty rate with a yearly salary slightly over \$15,000. It would certainly have lifted a family of two above the poverty rate.

The minimum wage increase also would have helped the so-called working poor, who may have two or three family members working at minimum wage jobs. The increase would have helped such families deal with unexpected emergencies, healthcare insurance or college tuitions.

Instead, the U.S. Senate took a different path and made it harder for the poor to eliminate debt

and rise out of poverty by voting in favor of a new law that limits bankruptcy.

Some argue that increasing the minimum wage would hurt the economy by cutting into corporate profits and thereby reducing economic growth. It may very well reduce the billions of profits being hoarded by the super-rich. However, most minimum wage increases in past years have excluded some small businesses with limited employees, thereby limiting the effects on small businesses, which by the way employ more people than big corporations when totaling all employment numbers.

Although the current fight to increase the minimum wage has been lost, we must not give up. We must fight for economic justice for the poor. The last minimum wage increase approved by congress occurred nearly nine years ago. Comparatively, Congress has voted to raise their salaries seven times since then. There is definitely something wrong with that picture.

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

Remembering 'Bloody Sunday'

Anniversary reminds us of need for voting rights

BY ANTHONY D. ROMERO

Forty years ago, television viewers saw 500 peaceful demonstrators in Selma, Ala., teargassed and beaten with billy clubs by police.

The marchers were protesting the murder of a young unarmed black man and the continued disenfranchisement of blacks in the South. The brutal, unprovoked attack of them sparked national outrage, and was a catalyst of the civil rights movement.

Just five months after "Bloody Sunday," Congress passed the Voting Rights Act, one of the most successful civil rights laws in our nation's history. It put an end to poll taxes, literacy tests, and other discriminatory barriers. It helped increase the number of black elected officials from 300 in 1964 to over 9,100 today. And, through its checks and balances on state policies, it continues to guarantee that

minority voters have their voices heard at the polls.

Now, portions of the law are up for renewal. On the anniversary of Bloody Sunday, we should remember the historic struggle of those who have sacrificed their lives for civil rights. We should take stock of all that the Voting Rights Act has accomplished. But we should also recognize, as President Johnson said, "the battle is not over."

A federal court ruled in 2004 that South Dakota discriminated against Native American voters through redistricting: Lines were drawn so that Native Americans were over-concentrated in a single district, in an illegal tactic called "packing," thereby diluting their strength at the polls. Recent redistricting schemes in Texas, Louisiana, Alabama and other states have also been challenged using the

Voting Rights Act. Clearly, the Voting Rights Act is still needed. However, in 2007, three crucial parts of the act will expire unless Congress votes to renew them.

The Voting Rights Act wasn't a quick fix, it was one part of a very long process. The act's mission - ensuring fairness in our political process and equal opportunity for minorities in American politics - is enduring.

President Reagan understood this, as he and a near unanimous Congress reauthorized the law 25 years ago with virtually no dissent. In fact, each time the law has been renewed, it has been ratified by a Republican president: Johnson, Ford, Reagan and George H.W. Bush. President Bush should make sure he follows in those footsteps.

Anthony D. Romero is the executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union.



Denyse O. Peterson

Caldwell's Colonial Chapel

20 N.E. 14th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97232
(503) 232-4111

The Pre-arrangement Concept

Dear Family Member:

Denyse Peterson represents funeral homes and cemeteries in the Portland Metropolitan area. Many families have a difficult time getting through all the associated decisions, questions, grief and financial responsibilities that follow when a loved one dies. Denyse's responsibility is to provide information. Pre-arranging lessens the burden before the time of death with challenges such as emotional overspending, indecision, haste and worry.

Our personal planning guide can be a great benefit to loved ones. Overall, pre-arranging will benefit families tremendously.

The pre-arrangement Dignity Memorial providers are honored to help families in our community with your funeral and burial needs.

Representing these fine funeral homes:

- Caldwell's Colonial Chapel
- Sunnyside Chapel & Memorial Gardens
- Lincoln Memorial Park & Funeral Home
- Hennessey, Goetsch & McGee Funeral Directors
- Gateway Little Chapel of the Chimes
- Lincoln-Willamette Funeral Directors
- Killingsworth Little Chapel of the Chimes
- Ross Hollywood Chapel
- Skyline Memorial Gardens & Funeral Home



For more information or to schedule an appointment, please call Denyse Peterson at (503) 232-4111.

Start at PCC Finish Anywhere!

Each year 5,000 students transfer their PCC credits to universities. You can too!

- Dual-enrollment partnerships with Portland State University, Oregon State University, and The Oregon Institute of Technology.
- Credits that transfer to almost any university in the nation.
- University-level freshman and sophomore classes.
- Classes from morning to night and Saturdays throughout the metro area and anytime online.
- Financial Aid available

Plus certificates and two-year degrees in 60 fields, including dental assisting, engineering technologies, automotive service and multimedia!

Spring term starts **28**

Register now at www.pcc.edu
503-977-4519

