

OPINION

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Criminal Justice System is Not Color Blind

Injustices chip away at black progression

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

When it comes to equality, African-Americans have collectively made some impressive gains: we hold executive level positions at corporations across the country and we benefit from more financial and educational opportunities than we ever have. Though the playing field is far from level, it's fair to say that we've experienced a slow and steady climb.

We haven't done nearly as well in the nation's courts.

"The State of Black America: Prescriptions for Change," a



report recently released by the National Urban League, shows the disparity between whites and blacks in the criminal justice system has actually gotten worse.

Blacks are three times more likely to be imprisoned after an

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arrest and a black person's average jail sentence is six months longer than a white's...for the same crime! White felons are more likely to be granted probation than blacks and they often serve shorter probation terms, while blacks tend to receive longer felony sentences than whites and are sentenced to death four times more often than whites.

There is no basis for this disparate treatment. Several studies show African-Americans do not

commit the majority of crimes and that most blacks are not criminals. Unfortunately, this data falls on deaf ears.

From arrest to sentencing, African-Americans are unjustly targeted and it affects us all, no matter how law-abiding we are. These statistics lead the general population to believe blacks commit the majority of offenses in this country, that crimes committed by blacks are somehow more heinous than those committed by whites and that

blacks somehow are less likely to be rehabilitated. These beliefs give way to fear and fear gives way to racial profiling and more arrests. As a result, black families and communities are weakened. It's a never-ending cycle. And we can't afford to let it continue.

The unequal treatment blacks receive in the criminal justice system is one of the weightiest social issues we currently face. The current state of affairs stands to chip away at the progress our

people have made over the last several decades.

Legislators must publicly acknowledge that there is a detrimental bias present in the court system, and then they must make a genuine effort to remove it. Like most battles for equality, this one promises to be difficult and filled with obstacles. We can do our part by making sure judges with a history of unbalanced sentencing aren't re-elected and by contacting our local lawmakers to protest arrests and convictions we know to be unfair. We owe it to our community to take an active part in this fight.

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

Walk the Walk by Supporting Combat Veterans

Health care needs too great

BY U.S. REP. CORRINE BROWN

I have served in the House of Representatives for over 12 years, and am a proud member of the Veterans Affairs committee. Right now, our troops are involved in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and our young men and women have suffered through many horrific events. However, our soldiers are not getting the care they need and deserve.

I am reminded of the words of President George Washington: "the willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional as to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were

treated and appreciated by their country."

Now, many people talk about protecting veterans and making sure they have the support they need while protecting this country's freedom in Iraq and Afghanistan. But I can truly tell you that the Republicans talk the talk, but don't walk the walk with our veterans.

At the same time, the Republicans passed a budget that calls for \$800 million in cuts to the VA over the next five years. Clearly, those in the leadership of the people's house are attempting to balance the budget on the backs of veteran's health care.



Let me go through a few programs that are being cut which greatly impact our nation:

Veterans health care; sufficient funding for new facilities for care; mental health services

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and long-term care as a part of the full continuum of care for veterans; more funding to eliminate the backlog of claims, rather than continually cutting staff and support personnel; and the seamless transition from military to civilian life needs to be a priority.

Now that President Bush has

signed the bankruptcy bill making it harder for people with debt to wipe clean their financial slates, many of our service members, especially the National Guard and reserve forces, could face terrible financial problems because they do not qualify for debt protection while on duty.

After Sept. 11, 2001, nearly

half a million reservists and guardsmen have been called to active duty, and some more than once. Hundreds of thousands of reservists and national guardsmen are currently activated in support of ongoing military operations. According to the National Guard, four out of 10 members of the National Guard and reserve forces lose income when they leave their civilian jobs for active duty.

Please call your local member of Congress and both of your senators' offices and urge them to support our veterans, not just in nice words, but by increasing funding for VA programs.

U.S. Rep. Corrine Brown, D-Fla. is a member of the Congressional Black Caucus.



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Exploiting God for Politics

The Congressional Black Caucus, composed of 43 men and women of faith of whom several are ministers or children of ministers, believe that it is biblically and theologically unacceptable to attempt to exploit God and religion to fortify political positions.

We also believe it is inappropriate behavior for elected officials to seek a political upper hand by declaring that those who do not support a particular political agenda are not people of faith or are against people of faith.



U.S. Rep. Melvin L. Watt

We, therefore, find it reprehensible that "Justice Sunday," hosted by the Family Research Council, attempted to do just that by portraying those who oppose judicial nominations as "anti-faith".

We find it equally appalling that Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn. would condone these vitriolic attacks by participating in the council's televised simulcast."

U.S. Rep. Melvin L. Watt, D-N.C. is chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus.

Unacceptable Cuts to Medicaid Dollars support Oregon Health Plan

BY JERRY COHEN

There's a battle being fought in Washington, D.C., over cutting federal funding for Medicaid. For Oregonians, Medicaid dollars support Oregon's long-term care system and the Oregon Health Plan.

Why should we care? The reason is simple. Cuts to Medicaid hurt Oregonians.

Maybe it's your grandmother able to remain at home in spite of a disabling condition. Or health care for your child's best friend's family unable to otherwise afford health insurance. Any cuts in Medicaid mean older Oregonians won't be able to afford life-saving treatments and their grandchildren with chronic illnesses like asthma, will go without the medicines and treatment they need.

Unfortunately, Congress is considering major cuts in Medicaid. The House of Representatives would reduce Medicaid

spending by \$20 billion over the next five years.

Oregon stands to lose as much as \$213 million in Medicaid funds in that period. For \$213 million, we can insure many children and low-income families, while maintaining Oregon's system of choice with independence and dignity for vulnerable Oregonians.

Oregonians widely support the Oregon Health Plan and Home and Community-based Care Programs for our most vulnerable citizens. As of 2003, Oregon had 561,000 people who did not have health insurance—a full 16 percent of the state population. Among those were 114,000 uninsured children. Meanwhile, thousands of older Oregonians wait until a crisis before accessing care services best provided in home-based settings.

Oregon's state leaders must pay close attention to what Congress is doing to Medicaid. The proposed cuts in Medicaid and other crucial programs geared to our most vulner-

able populations will increase pressure on Oregon to fill the gap. There's a term for what Congress is considering doing to Oregon and the other states: passing the buck.


Fortunately, Oregon's Senator Gordon Smith was the lead sponsor of an amendment that passed the Senate last month restoring money that had been cut from the program. And he is chief sponsor of a bill to create a bi-partisan commission to study cost efficiencies for Medicaid. Senator Smith deserves thanks for standing up to protect this important program.

AARP believes that Medicaid should be as efficient and effective as possible. Programs of that size can always be improved.

But, we also believe that changes in Medicaid should be made based on sound policy considerations, not as part of an on-the-fly budget process.

Jerry Cohen is the Oregon AARP director.

Wetlands and Wildlife



Grand opening adventure exploring the wilds of Smith and Bybee Wetlands Natural Area

11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Sunday, May 15

Take I-5 to exit 307. Go west on North Marine Drive for 2 miles to event parking. The event also is accessible via the 40-Mile Loop Trail, 2 miles west of the MAX Expo Center stop. Bicycle corral provided. Leave pets at home.

www.metro-region.org/parks


Visit the Metro web site for event information and details about the Peninsula Crossing Family Fun Pedal and the Bluff Ride.

Event partners: eNRG Kayaking, Weir's Cyclery and Metro

What's wild about it?

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- Painted turtle viewing and spring bird watching
- Wildlife-friendly outdoor art tours
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