

# OPINION

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## Sour Note 40 Years After Medicare: 45 million have no health coverage

BY HOLLY SKLAR

When Medicare and Medicaid were signed into law on July 30, 1965, former President

Harry Truman received the first Medicare card. He would be shocked that 40 years later, more than 45 million Americans have no health coverage, half of all personal bankruptcies are health-related and lack of universal insurance is increasingly hurting our economy as well as our health.

Truman had proposed national health insurance for all Americans in 1945. He said, "By preventing illness, by assuring access to needed community and personal health services...and by protecting our people against the loss caused by sickness, we shall strengthen our national health, our national defense and our productivity."

If Americans without health insurance were a nation, the population would be bigger than Canada - plus Michigan, Montana, New Hampshire and Vermont. Canada, like other industrialized nations besides ours, pro-

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In the words of Dr. Christopher Murray of the World Health Organization, "Basically, you die earlier and spend more time disabled if you're an American rather than a member of most other advanced countries."

The United States is just number 29 in the WHO healthy life expectancy ranking. We lag Canada by nearly three years and Japan by nearly six. The United States does worse than 36 countries in child mortality under age 5 - well behind South

Korea and Singapore.

Lack of health insurance is killing many more Americans than terrorism. Uninsured Americans get about half the medical care of those with insurance. They receive too little care, too late, get sicker and die sooner.

For example, uninsured women with breast cancer have a 30 percent to 50 percent higher risk of dying than insured women. Uninsured car crash victims receive less care in the hospital and have a 37 percent higher mortality rate than privately insured patients.

One out of three Americans below age 65 - 85 million people - lacked

private or public health insurance for all or part of 2003 to 2004. Millions more are underinsured.

Average family health insurance premiums will reach a projected \$14,545 in 2006, more than double the 2001 average. Much health spending is squandered on the mountainous red tape, profits and executive pay of private insurance and drug companies.

The National Coalition on Health Care, an alliance of about 100 corporations, pension funds, medical associations, insurers, unions, consumer and religious organizations, says, "Comprehensive health care reform is long overdue. Every year that reform is delayed,

tens of millions of Americans live in peril, without health insurance; millions are harmed, and hundreds of thousands die needlessly, because of sub-standard care."

The coalition calls for "health care coverage for all." It offers four different scenarios for universal coverage: employer and individual mandates and subsidies; expanding Medicare and other public health insurance; creating a new public program modeled on the Federal Employee Health Benefits Plan; and establishing a universal single payer, publicly financed program.

The first three scenarios would net \$320 billion to \$370 billion in savings over the first 10 years; the fourth scenario would save \$1.1 trillion. Like untreated cancer, the health care crisis is spreading throughout our families and economy. It's time for health care for all.

Holly Sklar is co-author of "Raise the Floor: Wages and Policies That Work for All Of Us."

## Democrats Must Fight for Justice

### Oppose Supreme Court nominee

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

The Democratic Party has come to expect the black vote to automatically belong to them and has done very little to earn that support. Sure, the obligatory promises are made during campaign season but, more and more, it is very difficult to get certain members of the party to use their political muscle to fight on our behalf.

The upcoming confirmation hearing of Supreme Court nominee John G. Roberts is no exception: the latest buzz in Washington has Democrats backing down from a major



those that have supported the party without question for decades.

While serving as special assistant to the attorney general during the Reagan Administration, Roberts supported the attack on minority voting rights by working to block an amendment that would require those complaining about biased voting laws to show

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— Judge Greg Mathis

that a law only had a discriminatory effect as opposed to proving it was intentional. Even the late Sen. Strom Thurmond, a well-known segregationist, disagreed with Roberts and voted for the amendment. As Deputy Solicitor General, Roberts penned a brief that argued Roe v. Wade, the decision that overturned all laws that restricted or banned abortions, was "wrongly decided."

cannot tuck their tails and let his nomination pass easily. With Democrats backing off, conservative groups that previously expected to spend millions supporting Roberts' nomination can now use those funds to support campaigns that seek to erode rights we've fought decades to obtain.

As the Democrats look to safeguard their funds, they are allow-

ing the conservative opposition to preserve theirs as well. Some Democrats say fighting a loser's battle weakens their chances for preventing a more conservative, thus more threatening, nomination in the future. I say a strong battle waged now will put the White House on notice that the Democratic Party stands for the rights of the people.

In June, the Senate apologized for failing to outlaw lynching. From the 1800s to the 1960s, thousands of blacks were dragged through the streets, beaten, tortured and hung by white lynch mobs. With this apology, led by key members of the Democratic Party, the Senate took a sincere step in demonstrating that they were, in some way, interested in justice. Now it's time for the Senate to show a little more backbone and prove they are willing to fight for justice now and avoid the need for an apology later.

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

## Painful Loss at State

### Partisanship dooms attempts to help schools

BY DAVID WYNDE AND BOBBIE REGAN

The Oregon Legislature adjourned without having acted on significant measures to help our Oregon schools. Partisanship took priority over policy and our school children are the losers.

The Legislature passed a \$5.24 budget for K-12 schools for the next two years - that falls far short of the level needed to maintain current service levels. In Portland Public Schools, that hit alone costs us the equivalent of 100 teachers. Furthermore, this level of funding does not begin to address the shortfall caused for Multnomah County school districts when the local income tax goes away in 2006-07.

Despite a number of promises and proposals, the Governor and Legislature made almost no progress on several issues that could make a difference to school districts across the state, such as controlling costs for health care and retirement, looking at more creative funding mechanisms or loos-

ening restrictions on local communities' ability to

support their own schools. Partisan politics also doomed proposals from Gov. Ted Kulongoski and House Speaker Karen Minnis that promised at long last to restore some stability to school funding in Oregon.

And finally, the Legislature scuttled a plan that would have allowed Portland Public Schools to continue to collect \$15 million a year in existing property taxes, at no cost to any other school district.

Fifteen million dollars would fund Portland public schools for a full three weeks or pay for about 200 additional teachers. That financial lifeline for our 48,000 students was lost in the meat grinder of the final days of the legislative session, victim of political deal making and deal-breaking by legislators who will nonetheless likely claim in their next campaign that education is their top priority.

David Wynde and Bobbie Regan are co-chairs of the Portland School Board.

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*Letter to the Editor*

## Strengthen Local Schools

Most of Portland's middle schools now fail to meet the standards of the federal No Child Left Behind law. Local residents who believe children shouldn't have to transfer to a school outside their neighborhood to get a good public education can help by volunteering as a tutor or providing other support for schools, PTAs and youth programs. Get involved with community organizations working on school issues such as Sisters in Action for Power, the Neighborhood Schools Alliance or the Urban League of Portland. Urge the school district to strengthen "under-performing" schools rather than draining their students and resources to other schools and work cooperatively and proactively with parents and the community to improve student learning. Also, lobby state legislators to require corporations to pay their fair share of taxes to help provide adequate school funding, and contact federal lawmakers to reform NCLB.

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The Portland Observer Established 1970  
USPS 959-680  
4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., Portland, OR 97211

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EDITOR: Michael Leighton  
REPORTER: Katherine Blackmore  
DISTRIBUTION MANAGER: Mark Washington  
CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Paul Neufeldt  
OFFICE MANAGER: Kathy Linder

Send address changes to Portland Observer, PO Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208

Subscriptions are \$60.00 per year  
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