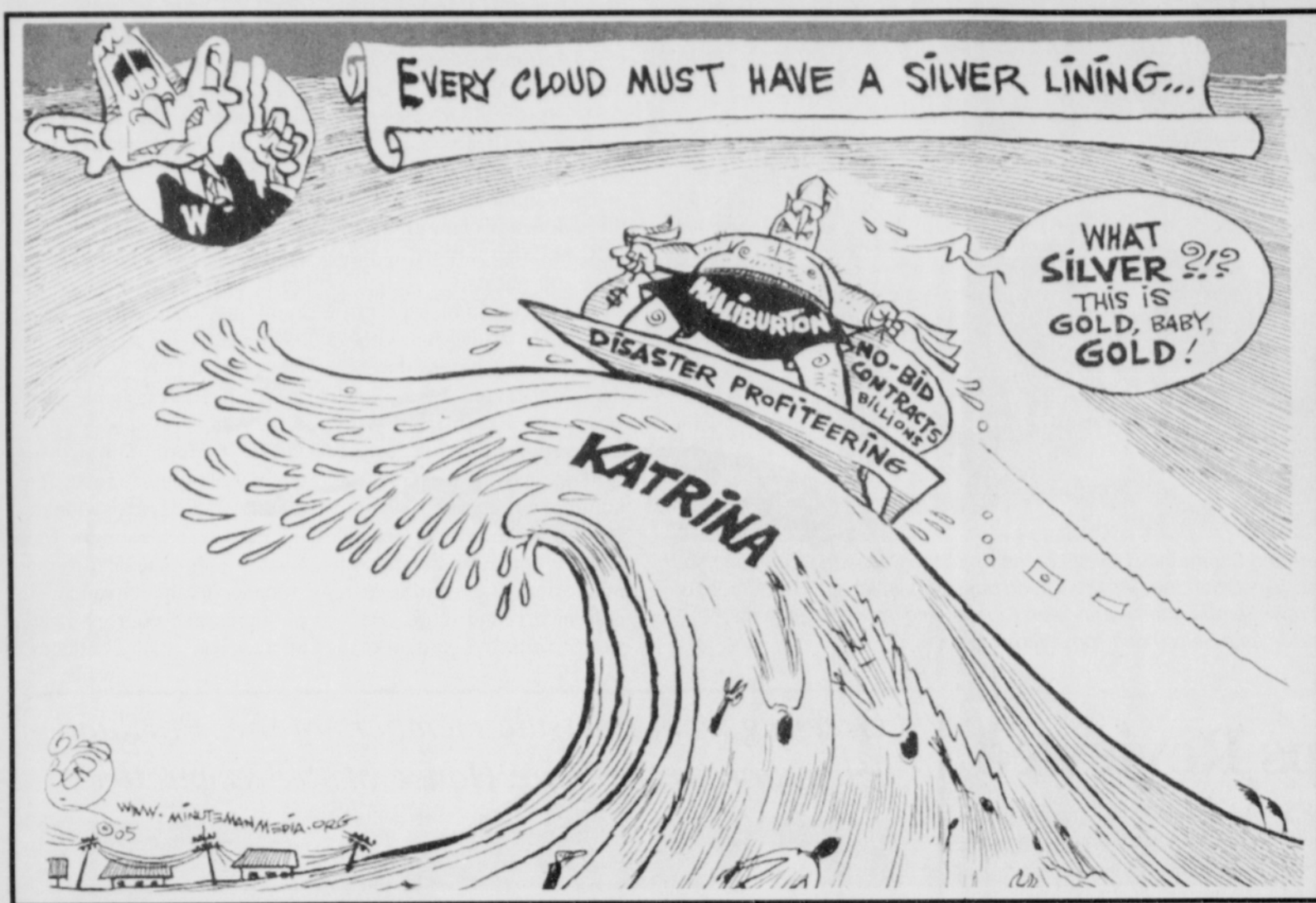


OPINION

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Diversity at its Best

I was driving home from work when a most unique situation happened. I had approached the intersection of Northeast Martin Luther King Boulevard and Lombard when my eye caught a suburban blocking traffic.

Inside the truck was an Asian man trying to move the vehicle by himself. Suddenly, three young Hispanic men appeared and tried to push the suburban out of the street. The vehicle was on an incline and barely moved. Then an African American man stopped to help. When I stopped, he told me to go around! I replied, "No, I am here to help!" I'm sure he was puzzled that me, a small petite Caucasian woman wearing jeans and flip flop sandals was going to make any difference with this current situation.

As a culturally diverse group with no limitations or reservations we worked diligently to move this massive truck from harms way. Now that is what I call diversity! We were an odd bunch, working together. Not many things were said, because we were all there on a mission, with the same purpose to help a fellow person in need.

I left the scene in awe knowing that somehow, the world is changing and it was satisfying to me to know that we can count on those around us to help us not based on color, sex, or creed, but on the basic human need that we all need each other and we are all here to help each other.

This experience left me feeling calm and peaceful and was definitely the grand finale to a perfect day!

Brenda Richards
North Portland

Making Poverty A Priority Bush can change misguided, unjust policies

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

One of the unexpected side effects of Hurricane Katrina is that the storm opened up a national conversation on poverty. Katrina ripped the blinders of denial off on the chronic, quiet, invisible tsunami of poverty that afflicts 37 million Americans, including 13 million children. People were forced to see what poverty looked like on the clear pictures on their television screens: families who didn't have enough money to own a car or have a credit card or enough cash to pay for another way out of the



hurricane's path, families left stranded without food, water, or shelter when the storm came. The pictures of Hurricane Katrina's poor victims were hard to ignore. They put a vivid and desperate face on what is really a constant, daily crisis for millions of people in our rich nation. All over the country, poor families and children are being left behind as the benefits of a steadily growing economy fail to trickle down.

The day after Hurricane Katrina hit, the U.S. Census Bureau released the latest data on American poverty showing that in 2004, poverty increased in our rich country for the fourth year in a row. The number of American children living in poverty has grown by 12.8 percent over the last four years, and is now over 13 million. This means 1.5 million more children were poor in 2004 than in 2000.

As these numbers were being released, was our government responding by announcing a federal emergency management plan to deal with child and family poverty?

Just the opposite: The Bush Administration and Congress were proposing additional tax cuts for the wealthiest and budget cuts in programs that serve low-income children and families. The persistent and growing high level of child poverty reflects conscious, misguided and unjust choices. How can the Bush Administration and Congress give enormous tax breaks to the wealthiest Americans who have benefited most from the economic recovery while seeking to undermine the guarantees and cut the budgets for Medicaid, food stamps, and other programs that assist poor children who continue to be left behind?

More than 7 out of every 10 poor children in 2004 had at least one employed parent. Working hard and playing by the rules is not

enough to lift families out of poverty. Even if a parent with one child works full time at the federal minimum wage, which hasn't been raised since 1997, the family still lives in poverty. Poverty affects all kinds of families and child poverty has risen significantly among all racial groups. Extreme child poverty, defined as living with an annual income below \$7,610 for a family of three, increased by a terrible 20 percent between 2000 and 2004 and now affects almost 5.6 million children.

Far less wealthy industrialized countries have committed to end child poverty, while the United States is sliding backwards. We can do better. We must demand that our leaders do better.

In an address to the nation from New Orleans 17 days after the storm

hit, President Bush said, "Within the Gulf region are some of the most beautiful and historic places in America. As all of us saw on television, there is also some deep, persistent poverty in this region as well. And that poverty has roots in a history of racial discrimination, which cut off generations from the opportunity of America. We have a duty to confront this poverty with bold action. So let us restore all that we have cherished from yesterday, and let us rise above the legacy of inequality."

President Bush is still correct to say that poverty is wrong and unworthy of America's promise. Now is his opportunity to translate that assertion into action.

Marian Wright Edelman is chief executive officer and founder of the Children's Defense Fund.

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