

OPINION

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Child Tax Credits Don't Always Help

Poorest families aren't benefiting

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

When it was passed four years ago, the federal Child Tax Credit joined the Earned Income Tax Credit as a key source of income support for poor working families and their children.

Publicized as a way to "put money back into the hands of those who need it most," the Child Tax Credit has become an important part of what is considered the largest federal anti-poverty program. However, the poorest of America's families, most of them black and Hispanic, aren't benefiting.

In the simplest of terms, the CTC reduces a family's tax burden or increases the amount of a filer's tax refund check. To receive the credit, a worker has to earn more than \$10,750 a year. Single parents with annual incomes of up to \$75,000 and married parents with combined incomes up to \$110,000 are allowed to take the maximum deduction of \$1,000.

Unfortunately, many American children, especially children of color, aren't eligible to receive the CTC. A study recently released by the Tax

Policy Center reveals that more than 50-percent of black families earn less than the \$10,750 required to qualify for the credit.

Black families aren't the only ones that are missing out on this benefit: 47-percent of Hispanic families don't qualify either. The study shows that over 19-million American families - nearly 75-percent of them are working families - regardless of race, are too poor to receive the full benefit.

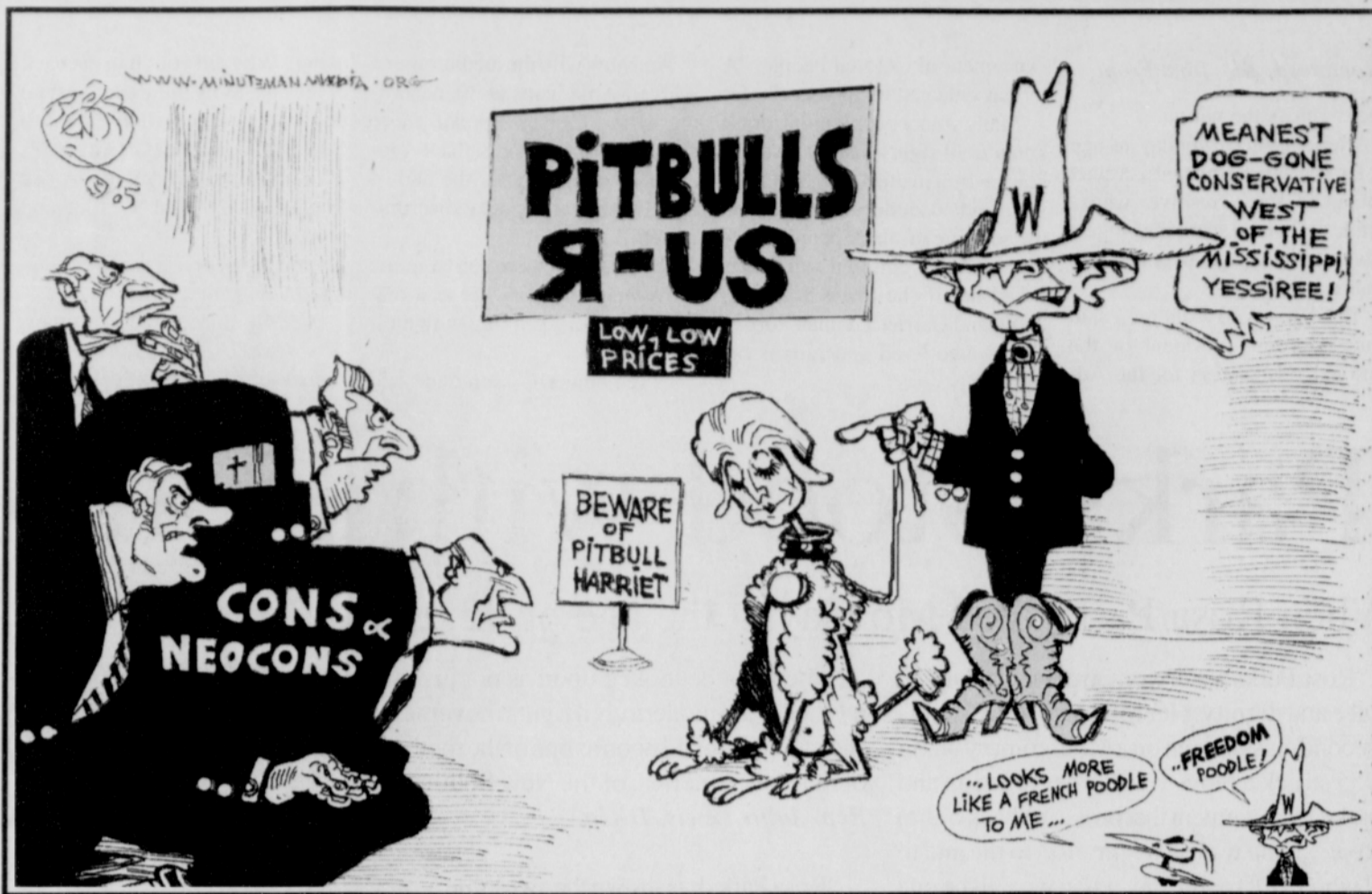
In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, a disaster that opened mainstream America's eyes to the class and racial disparities in this country, President Bush promised to "uplift" the poor.

If the president wants to stay true to his word, he can begin by lowering the annual income limits for the CTC, opening the door for more families to get much needed financial relief. Such a change would make a significant difference in the lives of many poor families across this country and be a real step towards combating poverty.

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



Judge Greg Mathis



Voter ID Reforms Increase Disparities

Add barriers to the ballot box

BY RYAN HAYGOOD

As thousands celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act Aug. 6, the media rebroadcast black and white images of nonviolent black Americans being tear-gassed and clubbed on "Bloody Sunday." For many, such marches for the right to vote are faded memories of a bygone era. That was, until one month later, when television

again focused the nation's attention on another tragedy: Hurricane Katrina.

What we saw in New Orleans was the result of more than just broken levees. We saw the intersection of race and class, laid bare for all to see how such factors often determine life or death.

Today, exploitation of a growing fear of alleged voter fraud threatens to hinder access to the ballot box by requiring voters to present a photo ID. Many of our nation's most vulnerable - the poor, elderly, and minorities - may not have the means to acquire such identification.

The National Commission on Federal Election reform, co-chaired by former President Jimmy Carter and James Baker, recently recommended federal legislation requiring all voters to present a "Real ID" card in order to vote. To obtain this type of card, documentary proof would be required of an individual's full legal name, date of birth, Social Security number, primary address and citizenship.

Unfortunately, the commission's

"Real ID" recommendation is more draconian than any ID requirement adopted in any state to date - including Georgia's new widely criticized law, which President Carter,

New Orleans did not have access to a car and thus are less likely to possess a driver's license. Hundreds of thousands displaced by Katrina may never recover their



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- Ryan Haygood

ironically, has condemned as "discriminatory."

While the anti-fraud benefits of photo ID measures are suspect, there is strong evidence that such requirements will reduce political participation by otherwise eligible rural, elderly, disabled, poor and racial minority voters, who are less likely to have photo identification or the money or means to acquire one.

Like the warnings about the capacity of New Orleans' levees to withstand a major hurricane, a photo ID requirement will predictably increase the ranks of the disfranchised.

Many who were left behind in

identity papers left behind or obtain new records from government offices and hospitals whose records were destroyed. These citizens, and many like them across the country, will be politically disfranchised by the commission's ID proposal.

Four decades after passage of the Voting Rights Act, the Hurricane Katrina experience reminds us how necessary the legislation still is to protect our nation's minorities and poor from voting laws that ignore the impact of race and class and create new barriers to the ballot.

Ryan Haygood is assistant counsel at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

The Great Textbook Robbery

Fighting back

BY JIM HIGHTOWER

Students, already beleaguered by skyrocketing tuition and fees, now face sticker shock when purchasing required texts. A congressional study finds that students today are averaging \$900 per semester for books.

A watchdog group called CALPIRG has issued a report called "Ripoff 101," documenting that the giant publishers are raising prices of college texts at a rate three times higher than the prices of general books.

CALPIRG finds three main rea-

sons for the inflated costs. First, the publishers issue new, higher-priced editions every three years or so, even though there's little substantive change in the material. Second, at least half of the books are now sold "bundled" with unnecessary CD-ROMs and flashy workbooks that drastically bloat the price - even though two-thirds of college faculty say they "rarely" or "never" use these add-ons. Third, publishers jack up the price simply because they can.

Students are a captive market. Professors say, "Buy this book," and there's little choice but to pay the ripoff price. Also, like drug companies, publishers have been

charging Americans more than they charge consumers overseas. On average, the same books cost 20 percent more here than in England, for example. In many cases, the overcharge is much greater - a calculus textbook, for example, sells for \$132 here, but only \$62 in Britain.

The good news is that students, some faculty, and a few lawmakers are fighting the gouging. To learn what steps you can take, go to this web site: www.maketextbooksaffordable.com.

Jim Hightower is the best-selling author of "Thieves In High Places: They've Stolen Our Country And It's Time To Take It Back."

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Letters to the Editor

Everyone Deserves Chance

Oregonians should oppose any further cuts in federal services for the poor and middle classes of this great nation. The current proposal before Congress would potentially cut \$35 to \$50 billion from vital services.

Among these cuts would be slashing the Guaranteed Student Loan program. I personally have benefited from this program as was able to finish my post graduate degree only because these low interest loans were available to off set the enormously high cost of higher education.

I was not seeking a free ride, but rather a chance to expand my horizons and provide the education necessary to benefit the society and a nation that has given me so much. Others now deserve the same chance.

I will not be silent in the face of a fiscally irresponsible budget that will slash programs for the poorer and middle classes in order to allow the upper classes to retain or increase their wealth. Enough is enough!

The Rev. Dennis J. Parker, Southwest Portland

School Inequity Truths

Byrd's opinion piece on the real issues facing school reformers (Portland Observer, Oct. 12) was excellent. Her examples of inequity in Portland Public Schools bring into focus the intrinsic mindset of some in teaching and school administration.

Discrimination can be pinpointed and brought to light. Racism, however, is more elusive. As a term to describe motivation it is near death from the exhaustion of overuse. The boy cried "wolf" so many times that when one came along no one listened to him, with dire consequences to the boy and maybe even the wolf.

Well meaning people often cannot perceive prejudiced attitudes within themselves or our society any more than a goldfish in a bowl knows he or she is a fish. One remedy would be to listen.

Sheila Brown, Northeast Portland