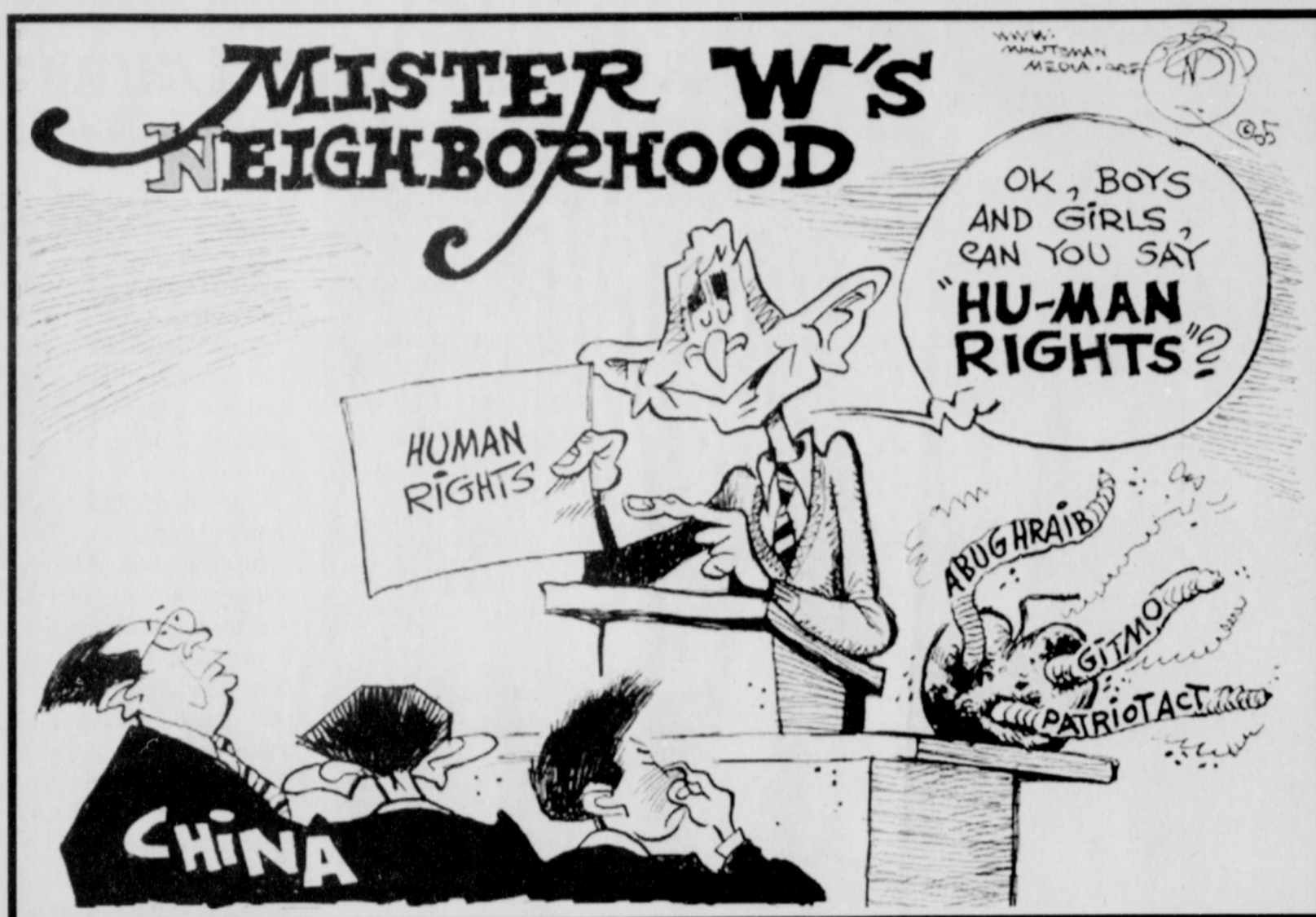


OPINION

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Budget Hurts Poor

Cuts will end up costing more in long run

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

The United States budget is more than just an accounting tool, designed to help the country focus its spending. It's more a reflection of the government's priorities, showing American citizens—and the world—just what segments of society the government cares about. The U.S. House of Representatives just passed, albeit narrowly, a \$50 billion budget-cutting bill that clearly illustrates what and whom those leaders are concerned with. As is most often the case in this country, poor and low-income Americans did not make the list.

The House voted 217 to 215 to approve the bill, which would deny food stamps to more than 200,000 low-income people each month and cut basic food aid by nearly \$700 million over five years. In addition, federal funding for child support enforcement efforts would be eliminated and states would be able to impose new co-payment and premium fees on Medicaid beneficiaries, while reducing the services the program provides. The bill also included provisions for an increase in student loan interest rates and fees.

These cuts are supposed to trim the country's deficit and save over \$50 billion over the next five years. The long-range effects of the cuts, however, will end up costing the government, and society, much more in the long run.

Letter to the Editor

No Apology?

The "mushroom cloud" was Bush's pretext for going to war. Soon we learned it was all 'sexed-up' to use that British term for it. Presidential aide Scooter Libby has now been indicted and by all accounts, Karl Rove is not far behind.

Does the President and this Republican administration have no shame? No apology? Only billions for the mega-rich, divisive moves (anyone remember the gay marriage constitutional amendment?), a ruined economy, a destroyed international reputation (U.S. = torture in a lot of the world, now.)

Shame on them. Bush needs to stop destroying our country and go back to Crawford.

A. Roy
Southwest Portland

Not the Right Vision for America

We can avoid these spending cuts

BY U.S. REP. ROBERT C. SCOTT

Instead of reducing the deficit, the Republican so-called "deficit reduction plan" actually increases the deficit. The plan cuts federal spending by about \$50 billion dollars and also cuts taxes by nearly \$70 billion dollars, resulting in a net increase in the deficit of \$20 billion dollars.

The spending cuts affect some of the most important programs in the federal government, such as Medicaid, food stamps, child support enforcement, childcare, foster care and college student financial aid.

The supporters of the plan are saying that these spending cuts are needed to accommodate a

financial emergency brought on by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, but the fact is the programs being cut are the very same ones most needed to assist hurricane victims.

So, cuts in vital programs will hurt hurricane victims and others in need and these cuts are especially egregious when they are part of a plan that includes tax cuts for the wealthy. For example, two tax cuts that go into effect next year, involving the personal exemption and the standard deduction, will in the future cost \$20 billion a year and 97 percent of that will go to people with annual incomes over \$200,000.

The Republican so-called deficit reduction plan is not the right vision for America. We can do better. We can avoid these spending cuts and provide assistance to hurricane victims, simply by delaying the tax cuts for the wealthy until we can afford them.

The Congressional Black Cau-

cus' budgetary priorities focus on uplifting the least of our society. In addition, the black caucus has a comprehensive bill to assist hurricane survivors and to rebuild the Gulf Coast region. We also need to remove any barriers that would prevent families from receiving the basic services they need to put their lives back together.

The American dream is achieved



The Congressional Black Caucus' budgetary priorities focus on uplifting the least of our society.

by providing opportunities for all, not by cutting taxes for the wealthy, while cutting services for those in need.

Congressman Bobby Scott is a member of the Congressional Black Caucus and a Democratic from Virginia.



The health and welfare of Americans should be the government's top priority.

The National Center for Children in Poverty predicts that the reduction in social programs will lead to increases in the number of people who are un- or underinsured, living in unsafe or unstable housing or who are homeless and families that don't know where their next meal is coming from. With the House's plan, more and more families and children will be pushed deeper into poverty. This is a direct contradiction of President Bush's promise to help 'uplift the poor,' made after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina shed some much needed light on the state of poverty in this country.

The House could have easily saved the same \$50 billion by lowering the prices Medicaid pays for prescription drugs or reducing the payments made to managed care plans. The House could have cancelled two tax cuts, scheduled to begin January 1, designed specifically for wealthy people.

According to the Brookings Tax Policy Center, a nonpartisan think tank, these new tax cuts will be added on to existing cuts that provide tax breaks of just over \$100,000 a piece to individuals earning over \$1 million a year.

If legislators fail to deliver a plan that puts the needs of America's neediest citizens over corporate interests, then we must do our part and vote them out of office come election time. The health and welfare of Americans should be the government's top priority; our vote is our strongest weapon in ensuring that it is.

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

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For more information contact:
Healthy Birth Initiative
5329 NE Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Portland, Oregon 97211
503-988-3387 x22242

Holiday Help With Medicare

Help a friend or relative with new drug plan

BY CLAUDIA GRIMM

If you have a friend or relative with Medicare, one of the best gifts you can offer this holiday season is help with Medicare's new prescription drug benefit.

Many people will save money and improve their health with this coverage. However, they must select a drug plan from dozens that are available from private insurers, and this will require some homework.

All seniors and those with disabilities who have no drug coverage will want to at least consider joining a drug plan to save money now or to guard against future drug costs.

On the other hand, people with existing drug coverage through an employer, a union or a government agency, may want to stay with the existing plan if the drug benefits are at least as good as Medicare's. Contact your friend or loved one's benefits administrator for this information.

People who already have drug coverage through a Medicare Health (Advantage) Plan should contact their health plan before making any changes.

Although enrollment is under way, people have until May 15 to select a prescription drug plan without facing a late penalty. This leaves plenty of time for homework. Those who sign up for a plan by Dec. 31 will have benefits starting Jan. 1. Otherwise, coverage will start the month after enrollment in a drug plan. Future annual enrollment periods will allow people to change plans.

If you start your holiday homework now, your friend or relative may be able to receive benefits by New Year's Day.

Here's how to get started:

Gather information. This includes you Medicare card, any other insurance card, list of drugs and dosages and name of their preferred pharmacy. The best way to get this is to go with your friend or relative to the pharmacy and request a print-out of drug purchases for the past six months.

See if the person you're assisting qualifies for extra help paying for this benefit

People who meet income/as-

set tests qualify for extra help paying for the drug benefit. Contact the Social Security Administration: 1-800-325-0778 or fill out an application for extra help at: www.socialsecurity.gov.

Compare plans. If you have access to a computer, Medicare's drug plan finder tool at www.medicare.gov will compare plans for you. Click on "Compare Medicare Prescription Drug Plans." Enter information on the prescriptions and pharmacy of choice. The tool will rank the plans by price.

Or, call 1-800-Medicare at 800-633-4227 and ask for help. Call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There will be fewer calls from people in Eastern and Central time zones after 9 p.m.

Another resource is Senior Health Insurance Benefits Assistance at 1-800-722-4134. SHIBA is a volunteer organization; you won't necessarily be able to get a volunteer on the phone immediately. Call in advance for a personal appointment. Make sure you understand what to bring to the meeting.

Claudia Grimm is the coordinator for the State of Oregon's Senior Health Insurance Benefits Assistance program.

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

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, PUBLISHER: Charles H. Washington
EDITOR: Michael Leighton
DISTRIBUTION MANAGER: Mark Washington
CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Paul Neufeldt
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Send address changes to Portland Observer, PO Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208

Subscriptions are \$60.00 per year
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