

BLACK HISTORY MONTH and the American Experience

OPINION

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Tutoring Program Needs Reality Check

Few eligible students enroll

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

When President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act into law, he made drastic changes to the public education system by requiring, among other things, failing schools to offer parents and students a choice: free tutoring or the chance to transfer to a new, better performing school.

It's been four years and while the jury is still out on whether or not the law has improved the quality of education, one thing is certain: only a small percentage of the students available for the

tutoring programs are taking advantage.

According to the Department of Education, less than 12-percent of the nearly two million children that are eligible for free tutoring actually enrolls. Education experts around the country say schools have to do a better job of promoting and explaining the tutoring services. Getting the word out is a start. But, to really improve the quality of education in this country, we have to rethink the entire idea of school and revamp the system to reflect the changing needs of the



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modern family.

The current public school system, with children starting school around 9 a.m. and departing around 3 p.m., is based on an antiquated notion that has gone the way of June Cleaver and Leave it to Beaver. This set up was fine during an era when mothers didn't work outside of the home and

were there when their children were dismissed from school at the end of the day.

But in modern reality, where there are more and more single mothers - and fathers - working a variety of shifts to make ends meet, this schedule sets many families and, ultimately, their children, up for failure. Parents have

to decide between making sure their child gets a ride home with the neighbor's kids or participating in an extracurricular activity.

Knowing that free tutoring is available to help their struggling child will only help a parent so much: tutoring sessions must be designed with the parent's schedule in mind. Providing tutoring and other after-school programs at the school will ensure parents won't have to worry about additional childcare or transportation. Small changes like this will go a long way in making sure parents take advantage of the options offered

to them.

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While improving teacher quality and raising performance standards is critical, it is not enough. More of our resources have to go into rethinking and, ultimately, recreating the public school system as we know it. If we don't pay the costs now, society will pay a greater price in the long run.

Judge Greg Mathis is national vice president of Rainbow PUSH and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

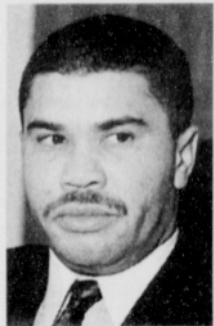
End the War and Bring Troops Home

We have done all that we can do

BY U.S. REP. WILLIAM LACY CLAY

Three years ago, I warned President Bush that the invasion and occupation of Iraq would be a tragic mistake. I never believed the Administration's spin about weapons of mass destruction. I never believed the nonsense about Saddam Hussein's alleged links to Al Qaeda and the September 11 attacks. And, I certainly didn't believe that Iraqi oil revenues would pay for this unnecessary war.

So, I voted against the resolution to authorize the use of force. And now, here we are three years later. The president still has no real plan to



win and no credible plan to get out.

U.S. taxpayers have spent \$300 billion in Iraq and the meter is still running. That money isn't even included in the massive budget deficit that will exceed \$400 billion for fiscal year 2007.

But, there is also a much greater cost, one that we can never recover. As of today, according to the Department of Defense, 2,373 U.S. soldiers have been killed in Iraq and over 16,000 have been wounded. And, the International Red Cross estimates that at least 32,000 innocent Iraqi civilians have been killed.

Our troops are magnificent. I salute their courage, their bravery and their great sacrifice.

But we have done all that we can do in Iraq and it is time to bring them home.

I want to address my thoughts especially to the young people of this country. More than three decades ago, young Americans were the first voices to demand an end to the lies about Vietnam. Because they loved their country, they asked their government to finally tell the truth. Because they loved their country, they demanded an end to the senseless violence.

I hope today, young Americans will once again rise up and use their voices to send that message to the president and to the Republican leadership who started this war based on a false premise.

Congressman William Lacy Clay is a member of the Congressional Black Caucus from Missouri.

Bush's IRS Goes After Poor Folks

'Them that's got is them that gets'

BY JIM HIGHTOWER

You've gotta love the consistency of the White House. When it rams through its multibillion-dollar tax giveaways, it's the super-rich and corporations that gain.

But when they unleash their IRS to look into tax cheating, they don't probe the tax shelters of millionaires or the multibillion-dollar offshore tax havens of corporate finaglers - instead, they go after the working poor who're entitled to tax credits of only a few hundred bucks each.

With Bush & Co., them that's got is them that gets... and everybody else should watch out! That's the hard lesson learned by some 1.6 million low-income workers who have not only had their tax refunds frozen in the past five years, but also have had their tax filings officially labeled "fraudulent" by the IRS.

This crackdown on the poor has allowed Bush to claim that, by golly, he's tough on tax fraud. But the IRS's own in-house taxpayer advocate, Nina Olson, says - wait a minute - she

and her staff analyzed the returns of these accused poor folks and found that two-thirds of them were actually entitled to the tax credit they sought... or entitled to even more money. Another 14 percent were due at least a partial refund, and of the remaining 20 percent, almost none had committed fraud, but instead had simply been confused by the complicated tax forms and made honest errors.

By the way, the average income of these supposed tax deadbeats was only \$13,000. The great majority were working parents who were using the earned-income tax credit, which was first advocated by the laissez-faire guru Milton Friedman and first implemented by Ronnie Reagan. But now these good folks are being browbeat by the Bush administration for crass political gain.

If you're a corporate tax cheat, the president and his congressional henchmen look the other way - but if you're a working stiff, you're presumed to be a fraud... and the IRS comes down on you.

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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