

# OPINION

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## Wealth Gap Widens Under Bush Tax Cuts

### Level the playing field

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

New data shows that the concentration of wealth among the richest Americans has grown significantly over the last several years; the growth is directly related to President Bush's tax cuts, which provided large tax breaks for the rich. Additionally, business owners of color, most of them small business owners, have received only minor breaks under Bush's tax cuts.

Most tax breaks for businesses have gone to those who are wealthy and white. Bush's

never-ending push for tax cuts seem to all but guarantee that the nation's rich will only grow more wealth, while the poor and middle class are left to struggle. America has a long legacy of creating obstacles that prevent people of color from building wealth comparable to that of whites and these tax cuts only give us more of the same.

According to a Congressional Budget Office analysis of the latest income tax data, the top one percent of households owned more than 57 percent of corporate wealth, up from 53.4 percent the year before. In 2003, the income in the top one per-



*As the wealthy continue to prosper, data shows that the personal wealth of families of color has fallen.*

cent of households ranged from \$237,000 to several billion dollars. Two new tax cuts, known as "PEP" and "Pease," that almost exclusively benefit high-income households recently went into effect. These wealthy families already save an average of \$103,000 in taxes, thanks to Bush's previous cuts. These tax cuts ensure that the very rich will keep more of their money, thus increasing their bot-

tom line and their access to the social structures that help grow and maintain wealth: high-quality education and capital to launch and develop businesses among them.

As the wealthy continue to prosper, data shows that the personal wealth of families of color has fallen. Incomes have risen for some but, in the long run, it is wealth, not annual salary, which will have a real im-

act on the quality of life for not only you, but also for your children. Wealth includes investments in stocks and pension plans, equity in property and other assets that can be used to pay for things like education or retirement.

According to government figures, black families have only 10 cents in wealth for every dollar white families have. Other data shows that less than half of black households own their homes, while 75 percent of white households do. Home equity is the leading source of wealth for most Americans.

Economic equality has become one of the key civil rights issues of this decade; the disparities highlighted by Hurricane

Katrina only further illuminated the disparity between the have and have nots. Government policies that continue to widen that gap only serve to force people into a permanent underclass, a segment of society that is becoming harder and harder to climb out of. It's beyond time for our government to begin thinking about the needs of the 'common' man and to stop catering to the wealthy few. If America is to truly live up to its ideals, the playing field must finally be leveled.

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

### An Open Letter To The Community: Our Health Care Mission

*Editor's note: The following letter is from Nurse Practitioner Mariah A. Taylor, the founder of the North Portland Community Health Clinic, a medical office providing free or low-cost health care to children in our community for 26 years:*

Thanks Be to God and to you the supporters and real owners of this community based, grass roots, non-profit health clinic. I appreciate your support and prayers during the storm, which hit the clinic in January and continues. As you may know, the clinic exists because of you. It is not a mere mission, but is ministry driven. This ministry is ordained by God and will not be stopped until He says so.

I have literally been held as hostage in my home and locked out of the clinic since Jan. 12 due to a process initiated by the clinic's board chairman Bud Bylsma and the board of directors. To have an extra key to the clinic made would initiate a charge of trespassing; to return to provide health care might be a direct violation and charge of burglary. The mediation process has not produced the desired result of being able to return. I rejected the ultimatum of "several more months more off." It was said that "for health reasons" I should take the time off, but I have no health issues.

If I were of a different gender and ethnicity, the outcome and handling process would have been different. Being a strong, African American female leader produces challenges unique to the respect of such. I believe and declare like Rosa Parks, "I'm not getting off the bus," and since I've been fighting since I was four pounds and two ounces, guess what? God wants to take this clinic to the next level, from great to greater! I will return, against all odds.

God has the last say so and God, not the board of directors, orders my footsteps. Being a winner vs. a loser, a victor instead of a victim is what I am declaring. To God Be all the glory, praise, and honor. We are the winners in the storm and will be stronger as a result of weathering it together.

Thank you for your support and prayers. I can be reached at 503-240-1824 for further questions and comments.  
-- Mariah A. Taylor

## Slipping Through the Cracks

### Dropouts leave communities far behind

BY JAN RESSEGER

The standards movement in public education, including the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*, has been offered up as the way to close achievement gaps by raising academic expectations to confront what President Bush calls "the soft bigotry of low expectations."

During the past 15 years many people of power and influence worried that American students are not learning enough in school. It is a lesser known, and for me, more worrisome fact that during this same period the high school dropout rate has grown alarmingly.

According to the Justice Department, two-thirds of prison inmates are dropouts. High school dropouts average \$9,245 less per year in earnings than peers who have earned a high school diploma.

Researchers at Johns Hopkins University have discovered that if one compares the number of students who enter a high school's ninth grade to the number who graduate four years later, there are 2,000 big city high schools that fail to graduate 40 to 50 percent of their students in four years. These schools are overwhelmingly African American, Latino

and poor, and their number has grown by 75 percent since 1993.

Students who drop out are likely to be adolescents who cannot see a connection to a bright future. For these students, school seems less meaningful over time. As they enter high school, many students make choices that lead to dropping out. Perhaps lacking the reading skills to handle high school work, many ninth graders begin 'cutting' school. If nobody works actively to intervene, they continue to cut school, and without enough credits they cannot be promoted to tenth

promoted. Statistics demonstrate that a student who has been held back twice (even in elementary school) has a significantly diminished chance of graduating from high school.

High stakes graduation tests also contribute to dropping out. Even when students are given several chances to pass, some give up. In several states, school administrators under pressure to raise scores under the *No Child Left Behind Act* have been caught "pushing out" low-scoring students to increase their school's overall score averages.

Most of us have accepted the rhetoric of the standards movement without thinking much about it unless we know a child at risk. The standards movement rests on the notion of increasing the value of the diploma. We need to ask ourselves whether we value the credential at the expense of each student's educational experience. What if we paid more attention to creating educational communities built around trusting relationships and creative curricula along with high expectations?

It is time to worry about the hard bigotry of sending many children from poor communities into adulthood without the opportunities created by completing their high school education.

Jan Resseger is the minister for public education and witness for the United Church of Christ.



*Often dropouts report that nobody — parent, teacher or counselor — tried to keep them in school.*

grade. Because dropping out is highly correlated with being stuck in ninth grade, educators need to intervene in middle school and ninth grade, both academically and socially. Often dropouts report that nobody — parent, teacher or counselor — tried to keep them in school. When they slipped through the cracks, nobody seemed to notice.

Many school districts have eliminated social promotion by insisting that students pass standardized tests in order to be

### Letter to the Editor

### Disbelief at Budget Priorities

I am staring in shocked disbelief at President Bush's proposed budget for 2007. It cuts billions in education programs and Medicare subsidies for the poor while giving tax cuts to the very rich.

Despite the promise the president made four months ago to "rebuild New Orleans" and the Gulf Coast, his budget proposal falls short of the funds required to properly rebuild New Orleans.

Republicans in Congress know the budget is insane. They need to step up and protect the interests of the poor and middle class majority of this country and reject President Bush's ludicrous proposal.

Matthew Cox, Southeast Portland

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