

OPINION

Opinion articles do not necessarily reflect or represent the views of The Portland Observer

Removed from the Mainstream *Don't abandon black men*

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

Ten years ago, the federal government committed itself to lifting women out of poverty and reducing the number of families dependent on welfare. Over \$50 billion in public and private funds have been invested in programs designed to prepare low-income women for sustainable employment.

While this push to reform the public welfare system drew criticism — much of it deserved — many poor women appear to be doing better than they were a decade ago. The same cannot be said for black men. While the nation was focused on uplifting poor women, brothers fell behind.

We're familiar with the troubles that plague our men — lack of jobs,

lure of the street life, a prison industrial complex dedicated to feeding on our youth — but, according to a recently released report, black men are worse off than we previously thought. The study revealed that half of all black men living in the inner city fail to finish high school. Dropping out, more often than not, leads to prison — among dropouts in their late 20s, 34-percent have spent time in prison. By their mid-30s, 60-percent of black men who dropped out of high school have served time.

The study goes on to list other heartbreaking facts — record-setting incarceration and high unemployment rates, low high school completion numbers and even lower college graduation figures...the list



While the nation was focused on uplifting poor women, brothers fell behind.

goes on and on.

Despite the progress made by other segments of American society, black women included, the black male reality has become more and more removed from the reality of mainstream America. This disconnect only serves to damage our already fragile communities: too

many sisters are raising their children alone and, as more black women realize their "American dream" by graduating from college and becoming homeowners, the gap between our men and our women will only widen. With fewer positive male role models to look up to, our boys will fall victim to the

streets. It's a dangerous cycle.

This country must begin to invest in black men, the same way it invested in low-income women. If black men are to thrive, the government must put more money towards educating our men, rather than incarcerating them.

Lawmakers must support training programs — job and life skills training — that will provide our men with the tools they need to become productive citizens. Inner city high schools should develop retention programs that specifically target at-risk teens; keeping our boys in school is the first step to curbing these disturbing trends. Community organizations should provide after-school tutoring and mentoring and actively recruit troubled teens

to sign-up. Additionally, the criminal justice system that appears to destroy black men must be reformed.

As African-Americans, we have a duty to our people; when one of us is doing well, we must reach back and help another. We must begin to take personal responsibility for the men in our lives and ensure they stay on the right track. It's going to take a lot of work to bring black men back to where they need — and deserve — to be. But, if we fully commit ourselves to the task, we can lift our brothers up.

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

Successful Lives Depend on All the Facts

'Abstinence until marriage' not enough

BY ANN L. HANSON

Today in our country and elsewhere around the world, many battles are being waged. There are battles over terrorism, poverty, imperialism, human rights — the list goes on and on. Many fail to recognize a battle over what type of sexuality education should be taught in public schools. This issue has been around for years — but its importance has never been greater.

It is important to differentiate between what we mean by "personal values" (often rooted in one's



Adults clinging to a 'just say no' sexuality education may be putting their children at risk.

deeply held religious beliefs) and "moral values" or "societal values" that most people share like honesty, responsibility, human dignity, and compassion.

In a family setting, personal sexual values should be taught. However, it is not healthy in our democratic society to have the personal sexual values of any one group — whether that group is one of the many variations of Christianity, Judaism, Islam and other reli-

gious or a non-religious group — taught as universal truth. Instead, commonly held values we hold as a society (honesty, responsibility, self worth, human dignity, and compassion) do seem appropriate for incorporation into public school sexuality education.

Over the past ten years, our government has spent more than a billion dollars funding "abstinence-only-until-marriage" sexuality education. In order to receive fed-

eral funds, a program needs to follow very restrictive guidelines as to what can be taught. Information about contraception focuses on failure rates. No information can be shared about sexual orientation.

As much as many adults would like to think differently, many youth are engaging in sexual activities that result in unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Reputable studies show that children receiving comprehensive sexuality education — including abstinence — are far more likely to protect themselves from negative consequences when they become sexually active. And their attitudes about sexuality will be far more positive than those who

have received education that often is based on fear and shame.

How can we, as adults, model the values of honesty, responsibility, self worth, human dignity, and compassion to children if we withhold information they need in order to make healthy decisions? Adults clinging to a "just say no" sexuality education may be putting their children at risk.

What do our children want and need? The book, Faith Matters, edited by Rev. Steve Clapp, shares the results of a study of almost 6,000 religious youth representing a wide range of denominations. Those youth who had received full information on the prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease were not any more likely or less likely than other youth to

have been sexually active — but none of them reported pregnancy or a sexually transmitted disease.

Those youth who did not receive that information were not as fortunate. The youth in the study were virtually unanimous in saying that they needed more information on sexuality and that they yearned for adults in their lives who could be more open and honest with them.

As adults who love children, let's listen to what they are telling us. It makes a difference what type of education they receive. Their lives may literally depend on it.

Ann L. Hanson is minister for children and families and human sexual advocacy in the Witness for Justice and Peace ministry for the United Church of Christ.

Blinded by the Tax 'Kicker'

State revenue system needs reform

BY SEN. AVEL GORDLY

Oregon possesses many unique qualities that are the envy of other states, but the tax rebate program enacted in 1979 known as "the kicker" is not one of them. Oregon remains the only state with such a law on the books.

This law would be more appropriately named after futility's namesake Sisyphus, who, blinded, spends eternity pushing a massive boulder to the top of a mountain only to have it tumble back to the bottom where he must start over again.

Oregon's unique kicker law requires the state economist to predict the future within a two percent margin for error despite the fact that our

unique state revenue system is uniquely unpredictable. We are blind like Sisyphus.



Oregon's revenue system is the most volatile in the nation, yet the kicker law requires the state to estimate its future budget as if income tax revenue is stable enough to be predicted two years into the future. The task — like Sisyphus' — is futile.

The kicker law does not reflect actual need, neither at the time the prediction of tax revenues is made nor at the time the future arrives and the real numbers become known. By then, it is too late to adjust budgets.

The "carrot" that has made the kicker law popular is the promise that taxpayers and corporations might receive a rebate if state revenues exceed Sisyphus' best guess by more

than two percent.

But those rebates cannot be predicted either, and the "stick" of budget uncertainty haunts Oregon like — like Sisyphus' mountain, unmovable in every sense of the word, impassive in the face of extraordinary human suffering and in the face of opportunities to invest in Oregon's education continuum: Pre-Kindergarten, K-12, community colleges and the university system. The entire system is underinvested.

I urge Oregonians to recognize the structural barriers to stability and adequacy that Oregon's revenue system and the kicker law impose on Oregon's economic potential and our children's futures. We need to work to reform and restructure our revenue system so that it meets 21st century needs.

Sen. Avel Gordly represents northeast and southeast Portland in the Oregon Legislature.

Letters to the Editor

Censure First Step

It's about time that somebody stepped up and said what's right. It is not about being popular or worrying about stepping on other people's toes. It's about sending a message to President Bush and his supporters that it is not okay to break the law and continue working like nothing happened.

A clear message must be sent. Censuring is the first step to sending that message.

Nathan Wenk
Northwest Portland

War Doctrine Disaster

The Bush doctrine of pre-emptive wars has been a disaster in Iraq — making America and the world less safe.

Instead of a public relations campaign, the president needs to come up with an exit strategy with a timeline to bring our troops home.

Unfortunately, U.S. troop presence helps fuel the insurgency. Iraq will best be able to achieve stability when U.S. troops leave.

Congress has an important responsibility to stand up to the president and insist on an exit strategy. Unfortunately the Republicans running Congress won't stand up to President Bush.

Matthew Cox
Southeast Portland

NEW SEASONS MARKET

Pharmacy

AT ARBOR LODGE

Yes! We are a regular pharmacy!

- ✓ We fill prescriptions — including antibiotics, high blood pressure medications, anti-depressants, birth control, and more.
- ✓ We have knowledgeable, friendly pharmacists who have the time to share information.
- ✓ Our prices are competitive. We accept most insurance plans and are adding others as requested.
- ✓ We specialize in custom compounding.

YOUR LOCALLY OWNED, NEIGHBORHOOD PHARMACY AT ARBOR LODGE

N INTERSTATE AVENUE & PORTLAND BLVD
503.467.4848 • WWW.NEWSEASONSMARKET.COM
MON-FRI 9am-7pm • SAT 9am-6pm • SUN 10am-4pm



Meet your Pharmacists, Melinda Butler and Todd Martin.



New pharmacy customers! Transfer a prescription & get a \$10 gift card (one gift per customer, please)



Portland Children's Museum

LOTTERY NOW OPEN

OPAL PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL: K-5

A unique Portland Public Charter School of the Portland Children's Museum

- NO TUITION - Kindergarten thru Grade 5
- LOCATED at the Portland Children's Museum in Washington Park, across from the Oregon Zoo
- TRANSPORT OPTIONS include public transport, car pools, and self-transport

An elementary public school that supports quality academics by introducing the arts and sciences as languages of communication and tools of the imagination. Approaches that inspire creativity and the wonder of learning.

NEW! TUITION-BASED OPAL PRESCHOOL: Age 4 by December 1

MORNING PROGRAM 8:30-11:30, five days a week: \$400/month
AFTERNOON PROGRAM 1:00-4:00, four days a week: \$325/month

Applications for the charter school lottery or the new preschool are available at www.portlandcm2.org/opal.htm, at the front desk of the Portland Children's Museum, or by calling 503.471.9917. All applications must be postmarked by 5 PM Friday, March 31, 2006.