

OPINION

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Siege from Within

The assault on our government

BY JIM HIGHTOWER

While George W, the congress, and the media have us all looking south to what they call the "invasion" of America by impoverished illegal immigrants, or looking east to what they call an "endless threat" to America from hordes of fanatical Islamic terrorists - there's another, very real, but very quiet, siege taking place on our people's government... from within.

Far from being a movement of desperate poor people, this assault on democracy is being mounted by extremely wealthy and powerful guys in pinstripe suits. Their's is a corporate assault on our public resources, public institutions, public functions - and the very idea of the common good. They fly the flag of "privatization," and their goal is to take over our public sector, essentially eliminating it and substituting corporate governance.

In an important book titled, "The Fox In the Hen House," Si Kahn and Elizabeth Minnich document the startling extent to

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which this takeover has already happened. Corporate lobbyists, corporate-funded think tanks, and corporate-owned politicians have been pushing privatization (which is nothing but a euphemism for corporatization) for decades, with Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton willingly turning over public purposes, assets, and control to these private, anti-democratic, profit-seeking interests.

As Kahn and Minnich show, the privatizers hit the mother lode with the BushCheney regime. With their extremist, anti-government ideology, the administration is gleefully selling out the public good by selling off whole chunks of our government. We know about their push to privatize Social Security and schools - but few are aware of the massive turnover of power to corporations in such areas as the military, our parks, prisons and social programs.

To help keep our democracy from being devoured by the corporate foxes, check Kahn and Minnich's website: www.thefoxinthehenhouse.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."



High Stake Tests Unfair to Students

School dropouts on the increase

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

Graduation typically generates so much excitement and pride in students, parents and teachers. That's the way it should be. Unfortunately, many young people across the country weren't able to take part in the recent commencement ceremonies going on



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around them. And it wasn't because they weren't bright enough to complete their courses. These students won't be receiving their diplomas because of a controversial and biased approach to education: high stakes testing. Designed to hold schools ac-

countable, high stakes testing only serves to hold students back and dilute the quality of education they receive. It's an unfair practice that disproportionately affects low-income students of color. And it should be changed.

For years, in some form or another, school systems across the country have routinely used standardized tests. But, with the 2002 passage of No Child Left Behind, President Bush's sweeping education reform bill, the tests went from being an assessment of student progress to, in many cases, being the deciding factor in whether or not they'll graduate.

For students in underfunded, i.e. poor, school districts, passing these tests is next to impossible. They are stuck in overcrowded classrooms, with inadequate textbooks and, possibly, have teachers that are uncertified in the subjects they are teaching. Add to that any personal issues they may be dealing with—poor test taking skills, trouble at home, etc.—and the odds are stacked against them.

Many of those affected by this biased system are black. Data from California shows that only 63-percent of African-American—and 68-percent of Hispanics - students passed the state's graduation exam.

while 90-percent of white students passed. The picture around the rest of the country is not much different. As high stakes tests increase in popularity, the dropout rate increases.

Many students feel it's simply not worth their time to struggle through their courses only to have their future determined by a few hours of testing.

According to a study released last year, many educators admit to having actually stopped teaching subject areas that weren't going to be on the standardized tests. Instead, they "teach to the test" and focus on the material and formats of those exams. Critical thinking skills aren't used and real learning doesn't take place.

Study after study has shown that American students leave high school unprepared to compete in a fast-changing global economy; whether they go on to college or go straight into the workforce, these students are destined to struggle.

It is impractical to base a student's future on one element of the educational experience.

We owe it to our students to provide them with a fair, unbiased educational system. School reform is needed, but high stakes tests aren't the way to change schools for the better. Legislators need to address this before we begin to lose more of our students.

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

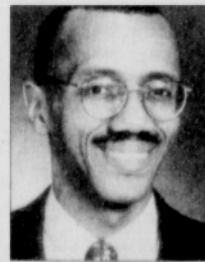
Solution to Schools Crisis Declare an emergency

BY PHILLIP JACKSON

In the United States, 55 percent of young black men do not graduate from high school according to a study by the Schott Foundation for Public Education.

Dropping out of high school sentences black males to menial jobs, street-corner hustling, illicit activities, fathering children out of wedlock, drugs, gangs, prison, and death - activities that destroy our communities.

Whether it is to establish a career or start a family, these students need a high school diploma and a college degree to succeed in the 21st century. The lack of a quality education leads to the destruction of the black family and causes the social and economic fabric of the black community to unravel. This



unnatural disaster and national disgrace has received little response from the U.S. government or the black community and is largely ignored by the media, foundations,

faith-based organizations and other institutions.

The Black Star Project strongly encourages government, community groups and school districts across the country to declare this the emergency that it is and work in concert to

remedy this situation.

The answer is simple: Get into action with workable solutions. We can no longer afford to blame others for our problems and wait for others to give us solutions. We must act now while this problem is still solvable because in a few years it will not be.

For information on the "10 Solutions" compiled by The Black Star Project, please call 312-842-3527 or visit www.blackstarproject.org.

Phillip Jackson of Chicago is executive director of the Black Star Project.

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