

OPINION

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New Orleans One Year after Hurricane

Poorer for letting problems fester

BY U.S. SEN. BARACK OBAMA

A few weeks ago, I had the chance to travel to New Orleans and take stock of the rebuilding effort. There were signs of hope - I saw it in the Habitat volunteers who built new homes for people in need and the small business owners who spoke of a more prosperous New Orleans. But, there were also signs that if we don't redouble our efforts to help this city, this city will not be saved.



There are two kinds of rebuilding needed. There is the physical kind - homes to build and rubble to clear, roads to pave and businesses to grow, levees to fortify and storm preparations to make.

But there is also a community to rebuild. There is trust to build and prejudice to clear away, there is compassion to grow and a sense of empathy to fortify.

It is this community that all of us have a responsibility to help rebuild in the months to come.

As we approach the one year anniversary of this terrible disaster, we need to remember how each of us felt when we saw our brothers and sisters stranded on a roof or floating through the streets.

We must remember that the poverty that existed in the 9th Ward long before Katrina still exists in the neighborhoods of Detroit, on the South Side of Chicago, in rural Mississippi and on the streets of Compton.

We have to recommit ourselves to the notion that as long as we let these problems fester, we are all poorer as a people. In remembering all these things, we will not only succeed in rebuilding a city, but an entire nation that is true to our highest ideals.

Sen. Barack Obama is a Democrat from Illinois and a member of the Congressional Black Caucus.

Welfare Reform Needs Reforming

Put more emphasis on education, training

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

This month marks the 10th anniversary of the federal welfare reform act, signed by then-President Bill Clinton.

Already, Republicans are spinning the numbers, using the research to show the success of reform. Welfare caseloads dropped dramatically, more people moved into the workforce, people did not resort to crime to feed their families as the Democrats predicted. Sure, the picture looks rosy, but it's not complete.

The reality is that most of those that left welfare now work in low-paying, unskilled jobs because reform didn't put enough emphasis on education and vocational training. Though we've successfully trimmed down the welfare rolls, we've increased the number of working poor in this country. Now we must turn our attention to these men and women and give them the tools they need to lift themselves

out of poverty.

It's no secret that, without marketable skills a worker won't go very far in the job market. Unfortunately, former welfare recipients are experiencing that



provisions for job training, the act didn't emphasize it. As such, many former welfare recipients lack the skills that could lead to higher paying jobs, health benefits and career advancement.

Research conducted by the Urban Institute, a nonpartisan social and economic policy research organization, shows that most of those who moved from welfare to work didn't make enough to pay their rent

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firsthand. Current research shows that people who moved from welfare to work often struggle to keep a steady job, making it difficult to stay afloat financially. The welfare reform act - officially known as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 - stressed work and, while there were some

at least once during the year; 25-percent also report problems affording food. Most of those leaving the welfare rolls were women with children; many of these women report having been fired from their jobs because they took time off to stay home with a sick child.

The goal of wanting a self-sufficient

population is a noble one. But the 1996 act fell short of that dream. Congress reauthorized the act, but the necessary provisions - ones that would push for job training, provide women with quality childcare - weren't added. While getting a job is important, too much emphasis is placed on simply finding work and not enough is placed on finding sustainable work. Perhaps a new bill should be introduced; one that considers the needs of America's working poor. This bill could increase employment support for people coming out of prison; get high school dropouts into programs that would help them develop job skills and create programs that truly help bridge the gap between welfare and work.

For America to truly work, we have to make sure that all of our people can do for themselves. Education and training is the only way to make that happen.

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

A Sick War on Marijuana Enforcement is inhumane

BY JIM HIGHTOWER

Excuse me for a moment while I vent about the mind-boggling stupidity of the autocratic, bureaucratic, right-wing, Neanderthal numbskulls who keep pushing an insane, inane, and inhumane holy war against marijuana - which is after all, a weed.

The most embarrassing thing for these holy warriors is that the weed is winning!

They've been at this war since 1937, spending billions and billions of our tax dollars, militarizing our borders, and stomping on our Bill of Rights. They've used phone taps, garbage searches, jack-booted raids, and draconian prison terms to... well, to do

what? To nab peaceful, mellow tokers who aren't bothering anyone, that's what.

Despite 60 years of spending our money, they've failed: 85 percent of Americans say marijuana is easy to obtain today, a third of our population says they've tried it, nearly 15 million people partake of it at least monthly -- and more high school students now smoke marijuana than cigarettes!

Meanwhile, the holy warriors have become more fanatical and thuggish than ever.

A marijuana arrest is made every 41 seconds in America - nine out of 10 of them for mere possession. In 2004, 772,000 Americans were arrested on marijuana charges - more than for all violent crimes combined. And 40,000 Americans are in prison today for this victimless crime - more than the entire prison populations of eight European countries.

Even sicker, the sanctimonious weed warriors have made it a crime for thousands of seriously sick people to get the medical benefits of using small amounts of doctor-prescribed marijuana. For information call 202-462-5747.

Jim Hightower is the author of "Thieves In High Places: They've Stolen Our Country And It's Time To Take It Back."

A Pledge to Rescue Our Youth

BY MAYA ANGELOU

Young women, young men of color, we add our voices to the voices of your ancestors who speak to you over ancient seas and across impossible mountain tops.



Come up from the gloom of national neglect, you have already been paid for.

Come out of the shadow of irrational prejudice, you owe no racial debt to history.

The blood of our bodies and the prayers of our souls have bought you a future free from shame and bright beyond the telling of it.

We pledge ourselves and our resources to seek for you clean and well furnished schools, safe and non-threatening streets, employment which makes use of your talents, but does not degrade your dignity.

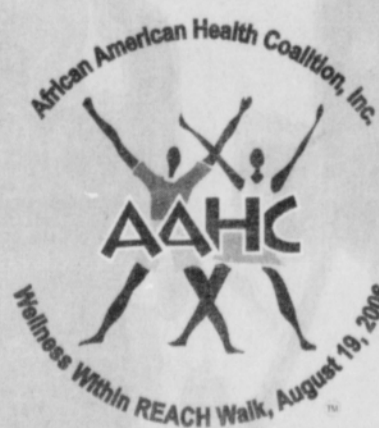
You are the best we have.

You are all we have.

You are what we have become.

We pledge you our whole hearts from this day forward.

Maya Angelou, one of the great voices of contemporary literature, presented the pledge above as part of national Call to Action to Secure Our Youth at the 2006 Essence Music Festival.



Join Mayor Tom Potter & State Senator Avel Gordly for the 4th Annual Wellness Within REACH Walk!

Saturday, Aug. 19th at 9:00 AM in Dawson Park (at N. Vancouver & Stanton)

Music, food, & fun!

\$20 registration, children under 10 free!

Contact the AAHC to register at 503.413.1850 or www.aahc-portland.org



REACH 2010 Social and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health A Program of the African American Health Coalition, Inc. Sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)