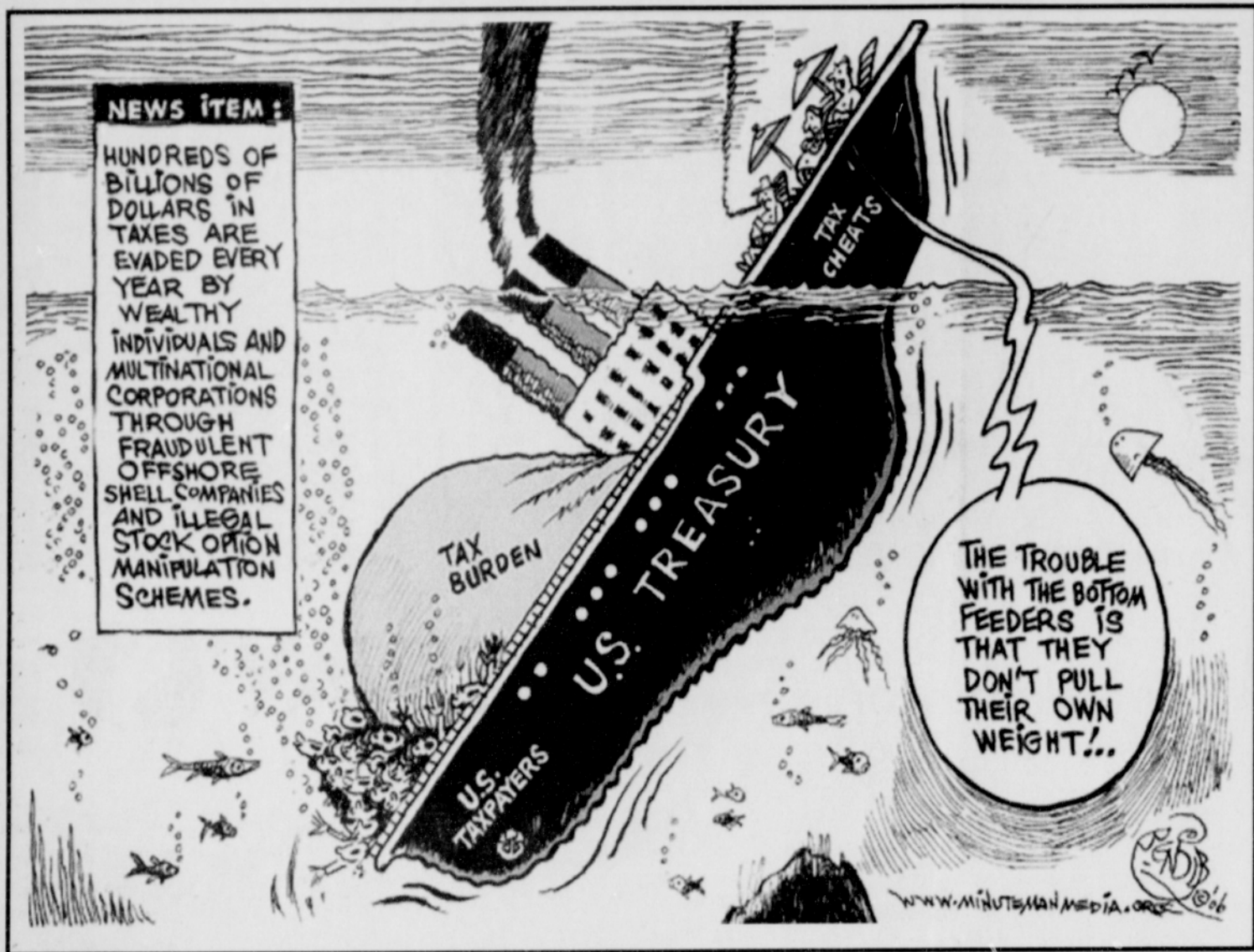


OPINION

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Increasing Our Political, Economic Power

Unity needed among people of color

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

In America, basically, any nonwhite person is classified as minority. And not simply because of their numbers — though that plays a part — but also because they often lack economic and political power. That can soon change.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Hispanic and Asian populations will triple over the next 50 years while African Americans will contribute an additional 30 million people to the overall U.S. population. If these predictions come to pass, people of color will be the majority. This can lead to increased political and economic power, if we play our cards right.

Across this country various ethnic groups are falling victim to political manipulation and fighting with each other for the few crumbs that are tossed their way. If all of these ethnic groups banned together, we'd see a

huge difference in the way resources were distributed across this country — children of color would have access to a good education, prisons would not be overrun with black and Latino

men and urban areas would not be so impoverished. Instead, the powers that be have us all convinced that Latinos are a threat to our very existence, that Asians are using poor people to grow rich... the list of stereotypes and lies goes on and on. This type of divide and conquer maneuvering has served to repress people across the globe for generations. It is time that we break free from it. Fighting amongst minorities only solidifies the elite's power.

One key issue a Black, Brown and Yellow coalition could help resolve is affirmative action. The conservative leanings of

the current Supreme Court have put this long-debated practice at risk. Those looking to do away with affirmative action use fear tactics and argue that unqualified minorities are getting hired

or accepted into schools over more qualified whites. The reality is that white women, long considered a minority because they lacked the political muscle and earning power of their male counterparts, have benefited from the practice more than any other group. The number of white women attending and completing college rose substantially when universities began implementing their legally mandated affirmative action programs.

Nevertheless, affirmative action as we know it is in danger because the majority in power is determined to keep the status

quo. Unity amongst people of color could dramatically change the course of America and buck the status quo. In Chicago, a unified black and Latino base elected the city's first black mayor in the 1980s. More recently, Antonio Villaraigosa rode a similar wave of unity when he became Los Angeles' first Hispanic mayor. Without the collective power of the two ethnic groups, neither men would have been elected and their progressive ideas would not have helped moved those cities forward.

People of color don't have to wait until 2050, the year our numbers are expected to eclipse those of whites, to come together. We can begin that work now.

It's time we stop looking at our differences and time to begin noticing what we have in common — concern for our children, our communities and our futures.

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

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Partial Funding is Step in Right Direction

SUN schools get a life boat

BY DIANE LINN

County Commissioners voted unanimously last week to restore \$384,841 to the county's nationally-lauded SUN schools program. These funds will

keep all county-funded SUN schools open through Jan. 31. This was an important step in the right direction. The original cuts of \$1.7 million have now been reduced.

I want to thank the thousands of Multnomah County residents — including parents, students, teachers, nonprofits, superintendents and community leaders — who testified, wrote letters, sent emails or spoke with commissioners in recent months. Together, we have been clear about the measurable benefits SUN provides to our children and their families.

But our work is far from over. We cannot forget that \$1.3 million in cuts to SUN will still occur this year, causing real harm to our SUN Schools, our non-profit agency partners and our Department of School and

Community Partnerships. Nor can we forget that three commissioners have signaled their willingness to cut an additional \$2.4 million from SUN next year — including the program's work to close the academic achievement gap among youth of

color. For the remainder of my term as chair, and even after I leave office in January, I will continue to join this community in the fight to restore, retain and even expand SUN school services to low income or at-risk children and families. I will work closely with Chair-elect Ted Wheeler on the long term task force to explore and recommend improvements to SUN.

This community needs to stay engaged on this issue, as well. Together, we must be vigilant and continue our advocacy on behalf of one of the nation's premiere prevention programs for youth. We are not finished yet. Our children are counting on us.

Diane Linn is chair of the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners.



Letters to the Editor

Fear Mongering

It is now evident that the decision-makers in the Bush Administration were sleeping in class when basic lessons of civil courtesy were taught in elementary school. The story about the boy who cried "wolf" made an impact on most of us. We learned to be reserved in our use of alarm.

President Bush and his entourage of fear-mongers are profoundly lacking in that civil skill and courtesy. They'll cry wolf at the slightest signal that their posturing is being exposed for what it is: fear mongering.

None of the Bush Administration's response to 9/11 or terrorism in general has generated truth about our safety. Instead, this administration has contributed directly to heightened hostilities and negative attitudes around the world about our country.

It remains sadly, profoundly true, that the first casualty of war is truth itself.

Republican political attacks during the recent airlines terror threat are outrageous. Vice President Cheney's ludicrous outbursts are shameful.

I am not proud of our country these days.

John M. Fischer
North Portland

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