

# OPINION

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



BY MARC H. MORIAL

## Congress' Direct Threat to Voting Rights

### Voter ID plan is not fair or equal

Just two months after overwhelmingly passing the Voting Rights Act Reauthorization of 2006, the U.S. House of Representatives recently reversed its commitment to ensuring the right to vote for all.

Under legislation passed recently, they want U.S. citizens to show proof of their citizenship to vote and then show photo I.D. when they cast their ballots. Introduced by Illinois Republican Rep. Henry Hyde, the bill, entitled the Federal Election Integrity Act of 2006 (H.R. 4844), passed the House by a vote of 228 to 195.

In the process, lawmakers are threatening to disenfranchise thousands of elderly, poor and minority Americans by burdening them with costly and inconvenient requirements. Only a quarter of eligible voters have passports, which cost \$97 to obtain, and naturalization papers used to prove citizenship cost \$210 to be replaced. An estimated 6 to 12 percent of voters do not have government-issued photo identification, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation.

People of color, people with disabilities, the elderly, young, and people who live in poverty are among the groups least likely to have documents proving their citizenship.

In certain parts of the United States, elderly African Americans and many Native Americans were born at home, under the care of midwives, and do not possess birth certificates.

According to a University of Wisconsin study from June, 2005, 23 percent of persons aged 65 and older in that state did not have driver's licenses or photo identification.

It also found that less than half of African American men in Milwaukee County had valid driver's licenses.

H.R. 4844, while appealing on the surface, poses one of the greatest threats to fair and equal voting rights today. We should be focusing on encouraging full participation of our citizenry, not finding new ways to hinder the precious right to vote.

While it would be great if all citizens had documents such as a passport or a birth certificate readily available, the truth is that many do not, which means that they would have to pay for them in order to vote.

Four states – Georgia, Missouri, Indiana and Arizona – have enacted laws requiring photo ID to vote. In two of those states, federal courts have struck them down as unconstitutional. In 2005, a federal judge in Georgia characterized the requirement as a poll tax. I can't agree more: It's a 21st Century poll tax.

The bill's proponents maintain they're trying to crack down on voting fraud. But I would say they are perpetuating the greatest fraud of all. They're trying to prevent eligible Americans from exercising their most sacred and important civil right.

Falsely claiming citizenship and voting fraudulently have long been federal offenses.

According to the Brennan Center for Justice, Americans are as likely to commit election fraud as they are getting killed by lightning.

Since Oct. of 2002, a total of 86 U.S. residents have been convicted of federal election fraud, while nearly 197,000,000 ballots have been cast

in general elections. In Ohio, a statewide survey found four instances of ineligible persons voting or attempting to vote in 2002 and 2004, out of 9,078,728 votes cast – a rate of

0.00004%. Cathy Cox, the secretary of state for Georgia, has admitted that she could not recall one docu-

mented case of voter impersonation at the polls during her nine years as the state's top election official. It is obvious that our current laws against voting fraud work when properly enforced.

Even if voters have valid ID, many eligible voters will be turned away because H.R. 4844 would place an inordinate

amount of discretion in the hands of overworked and sometimes poorly trained poll workers. Deciding whether a voter matches or does not match the photo in an ID card – which can be many years old – is a very subjective process and prone to mistakes.

What U.S. House members want to demand of Americans is far more than what is required of them to run for office. All most congressional candidates have to do when declaring their candidacy is sign a pledge that they are U.S. citizens – much like what voters sign when registering to vote.

Shouldn't Congress be a little more worried about the state of

electronic voting machines? It seems to me that they're the cause of more voting irregularities than individual voting fraud.

With midterm elections approaching, I can only surmise that House lawmakers are trying to improve their political prospects with constituents concerned with illegal immigration. Instead of producing viable immigration reform, the U.S. House decided to try to crack down on the few illegal aliens who might be voting in federal elections. Now that's not what I consider government efficiency.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

*We should be focusing on encouraging full participation of our citizenry, not finding new ways to hinder the precious right to vote.*



## Reducing Violence in Our Schools Should Be Priority

### Prevention is money spent wisely

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

Federal funding for a program designed to help American schools pay for and implement strategies to prevent school violence has declined significantly over the past five years. President Bush wants to eliminate the program altogether.

A research study published last year tells a different story: In 2002, the year the study was conducted, there were 17 murders and 5 suicides among children at school. In 2003, about five percent of stu-



dents reported they skipped school because they were afraid of possible violence.

In 2001, school violence prevention programs received more than \$430 million; next year, the same programs will receive only \$310

*Effective on-campus anger management and conflict resolution programs could reduce violence in schools, saving precious young lives.*

million. Bush's people have said the programs were ineffective. Under the current funding system, more than half of the country's school districts receive \$10,000 or less per year. That's much too little to make a difference.

Effective on-campus anger management and conflict resolution programs could reduce violence in

schools, saving precious young lives. Hate crimes and gangs are a part of everyday life in many American schools. Close to 12 percent of students reported that someone used hate-related words against them at school and 21 percent of public and private students said street gangs had a presence at their schools.

Students aren't the only ones subject to violence on school grounds. Research shows that there are close to 65,000 violent offenses committed against teachers at school. Our nation's educators should be able to focus their en-

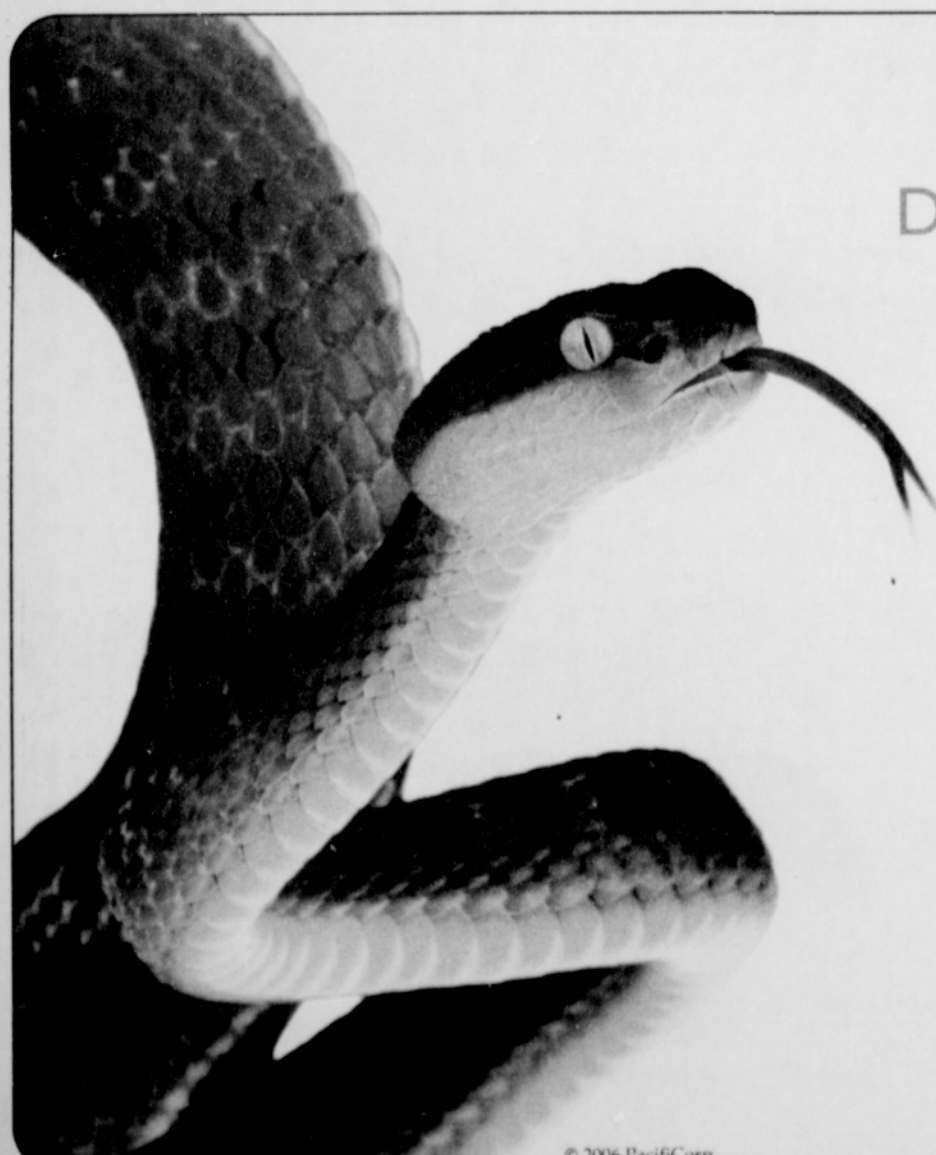
ergy on preparing our kids to succeed in a competitive society, not worrying about their personal safety.

According to the FBI, there were more than one million violent crimes reported in 2005, an increase from the previous year. With America having the largest prison population in the industrialized world, it makes sense this country would want to prevent crime among young people.

Doing so would reduce the prison population, increase the college attendance rates and, ultimately, save the nation billions of dollars.

Instead, we continue to spend money on new prisons and we continue to squander resources on a war that does not appear to have an end in sight. Congress has managed to keep the school violence program going despite the president's push to bury it. By maintaining the program and increasing funding, Congress can show the president that America's priorities should focus on its future.

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



## Downed lines are always dangerous

You can look to us to deliver the reliable, low-cost electricity you use every day. And to get it to you safely. Please keep in mind: a downed power line may look harmless, but it can still be charged with thousands of volts of electricity – enough to kill or seriously injure.

If you see a downed line:

- Stay away. Don't go near or touch a fallen line or anything it's touching.
- Keep everyone, including pets, out of the area.
- Call us immediately at 1-888-221-7070 or call 911.

For more safety tips and information, please visit [pacificpower.net](http://pacificpower.net).

Your safety matters to us.

**PACIFIC POWER**

The Portland Observer

USPS 959-680 Established 1970

4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., Portland, OR 97211

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, PUBLISHER:  
Charles H. Washington

EDITOR: Michael Leighton

PUBLIC RELATIONS: Mark Washington

CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Paul Neufeldt

OFFICE MANAGER: Kathy Linder

REPORTER: Sarah Blount

The Portland Observer welcomes freelance submissions. Manuscripts and photographs should be clearly labeled and will be returned if accompanied by a self-addressed envelope. All created design display ads become the sole property of the newspaper and cannot be used in other publications or personal usage without the written consent of the general manager, unless the client has purchased the composition of such ad. © 1996 THE PORTLAND OBSERVER. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED.

The Portland Observer-Oregon's Oldest Multicultural Publication is a member of the National Newspaper Association-Founded in 1885, and The National Advertising Representative Amalgamated Publishers, Inc., New York, NY, and The West Coast Black Publishers Association • Serving Portland and Vancouver.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to  
Portland Observer PO Box 3137  
Portland, OR 97208  
Periodical Postage paid in Portland, OR  
Subscriptions are \$60.00 per year

503-288-0033  
FAX 503-288-0115  
[news@portlandobserver.com](mailto:news@portlandobserver.com)  
[subscriptions@portlandobserver.com](mailto:subscriptions@portlandobserver.com)  
[ads@portlandobserver.com](mailto:ads@portlandobserver.com)  
[classifeds@portlandobserver.com](mailto:classifeds@portlandobserver.com)