

OPINION

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Failed Leadership Kills Troops

No sacrifices from families of the elites

BY JIM HIGHTOWER

Let's be blunt. It's no longer the Sunni insurgents, Shiite militias or al Qaeda bombers killing our troops in Iraq. Washington is killing them.

President George W. Bush -- still clinging to his disgraced neocon fantasies -- and the congressional leaders of both parties unwilling to use their budgetary and oversight authority -- are the ones who have 150,000 American men and women trapped in Iraq's civil war.

The troops are doing all they can, yet they have been betrayed by a White House and Congress that has no strategy to make "victory" possible and is unwilling either to provide the massive troop strength it would take to secure that country or to bring our troops home.

So, our men and women are locked in a gruesome shooting gallery by U.S. politicians who apparently intend to keep them there for the year and a half or so left in Mr. Bush's term. Hundreds of them will die, thousands

will be horribly maimed and all will suffer trauma. They are not victims of the "enemy," but of America's own failed "leaders." It is immoral to do this to them, but there they are.

Meanwhile, Bush keeps saying that his war is essential to America's own security and is the "challenge of our generation." But he is obviously lying to us. If it were true, all Americans would be enlisted in the cause. If it were true, we'd have half a million troops in Iraq, or more.

But that would mean that the families of the elites would have to be called to duty -- and this is politically unacceptable to Washington. As one Bush supporter, Sen. Jeff Sessions, put it: "We have a limited number of men and women we can send to Iraq." In other words, don't call on his family or friends to make any sacrifices for this "essential" war.

They are killing Americans in a war they know they can't win -- and a war their families won't join. This is a dishonorable sham and only We the People can stop it. Protest more. Protest louder.

Jim Hightower is a columnist and author.



Candidates 'Skate' over Major Issues

Forum was more 'sizzle' than steak

BY WILLIAM REED

How successful was Tavis Smiley's All American Presidential Forum toward



helping black Americans determine which of the Democratic candidates to vote for and support in the primaries?

Few of the establishment-oriented blacks gathered to question the candidates took notice of former Sen. Mike Gravel saying: "An area areas that enrages me the most is the war on drugs this country has been putting forth the last generation. We have 2.3 million human beings in jail and 70 percent are African Americans. I hope my colleagues will join me in standing up and saying 'We'll do away with that.' If I'm president, I'll do away with a war on drugs that does nothing but savage our inner cities and put children at risk."

"When will we learn that the issue of drugs is a public health issue? Addiction is a public health

issue and not a criminal issue where we throw people in jail and criminalize them. If there's one group of people in this country that needs

and Republican politicians skate over the human and economic devastation African American communities are experiencing from failed drug policies and unjust laws?

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to face up to that problem and we have had to face up to it, that is the African American community."

Gravel pressed the point that the war on drugs is a persisting source of devastation among blacks and should end immediately.

Instead of the forum's attendees grinning about pictures they took with the "celebrity" candidates, more should have been discussing what Gravel said about the problems for African American communities that stem from the ongoing criminalization of drugs. The War on Drugs has wrought havoc on African Americans -- wasted lives, wrecked families and troubled children.

For those who were not paying attention, Gravel said: "We are losing an entire generation on young

men and women to prisons. Our nation's ineffective and wasteful wars on drugs' plays a major role in this. We must place a greater empha-

sis on rehabilitation and prevention. We must de-criminalize minor drug offenses and increase the availability and visibility of substance abuse treatment and prevention."

The costs of the War on Drugs are incalculable, as are the adverse social, economic and political consequences of weakened communities, diminished opportunities for economic mobility, and extensive disenfranchisement.

Bottom-line the forum showed that there's not a dime's worth of difference among the establishment candidates; and the African Americans in the Howard audience, as well as the post-event media "echo chamber," accepted more sizzle than steak from candidates. How can African American analysts and voters continue letting Democratic

and Republican politicians skate over the human and economic devastation African American communities are experiencing from failed drug policies and unjust laws?

Blacks need to stop politicians' spending of \$50 billion-a-year on what is essentially a war on us. We need to cease the insane incarcerations and use that money for treatments on our sides of town.

Somewhere toward the top of the Black Agenda should be some steps to repeal mandatory sentencing laws and 'three strikes' laws that send people away for life on non-violent and minor felonies.

The presidential popularity poll leaders got out of town before publicly declaring whether they "stood with" Gravel on "doing away" with the nation's drug policies and associated practices. But before casting a primary vote foolishly, a question black voters should ask of any candidate: "If elected, what would you do about mandatory sentencing laws and rehabilitation programs?"

William Reed is president and chief executive officer of Black Press International and publisher of the "Who's Who in Black Corporate America Register."

'Sicko' Indicts Health Care Industry

Puts human face on crisis

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

I am not in the habit of doing movie reviews but I recommend everyone see Michael Moore's documentary "Sicko" about our health care system, which leaves 45 million Americans uninsured, including 9 million children.

The film shows how corporate interests guided by profits rather than by an interest in preventing and curing health problems victim-



ize sick people and taxpayers.

"Sicko" puts human faces on our national health care crisis. A grieving mother whose 2-year-old daughter had a high fever, was gripped by a seizure and rushed to the nearest hospital, but was turned away because the hospital wasn't in her HMO's network. The mother was told the child had to be moved and that any care provided by the receiving hospital would not be covered. Leaving that hospital denied the child vital emergency care. She slipped into a coma and died on the way to the HMO facility.

There's the middle-aged couple, both professionals with health insurance, who were bankrupted when their insurance company stopped providing health coverage after her bout with cancer and his heart attacks. They were forced to sell their home and move into their daughter's storage room. We see a 22-year-old single mother and cancer survivor from Michigan who drives to Canada and poses as the common law wife of a friend to get free clinical care in that country. And we experience disoriented, indigent patients pushed out of hospitals, put in taxis and dumped, still in their clinical gowns, on the streets of Los Angeles' Skid Row.

Moore exposes how far some insurance companies go to avoid paying for medical costs and the voluminous list of ailments insurance companies call "pre-existing conditions" to deny treatment, cancel policies or demand repayment for already received medical ser-

vices. He presents doctors and other employees of insurance companies and HMOs promoted and given bonuses based on the number of medical procedures denied sick people. In one case, a young woman with cancer was denied medical treatment because she once had a yeast infection, which the company claimed was a pre-existing condition.

Moore takes us to Britain and France, which have had universal health care since the 1940s. No child or adult would be denied care in those countries because they had a pre-existing condition or because necessary care was "too expensive."

When he asks patients how much they are being charged for the care they receive, they laugh and say there is no charge because everybody is included in the National Health Service.

France, in addition to universal health care, maintains a 24-hour medical care service staffed by doctors who make house calls. When is the last time any of us had a doctor come to our home? "Sicko" explores some of the myths about health care in other industrialized democracies, including supposed long waits for care and underpaid doctors.

One of the most dramatic segments of the film involves three first responders to the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center who are

suffering from severe respiratory diseases and a host of other ailments from exposure to dust and debris at Ground Zero. Moore took them to the U.S. military base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to get the same free, top-notch health care that the U.S. military claims it is providing to "enemy combatants." After he failed to enter the base, he took them to a Havana hospital where they received extensive free diagnostic tests, treatment and medication for which they paid nominal sums.

In none of the countries Moore visited are children denied care or provided a lesser standard of care

If other countries can guarantee health care to all of their citizens, why can't ours?

for lack of health insurance or money, as is too often the case in the United States.

I hope "Sicko" pricks our consciences and catalyzes a robust national debate about our broken health care system. The film asks timely questions our political leaders need to answer.

If other countries can guarantee health care to all of their citizens, why can't ours? If Canada, European nations and Cuba can take the profit motive out of caring for people, why can't we? Why are there 9 million uninsured children in America?

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.

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