

OPINION

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Put Women's Equality Back in the Debate

Election season perfect opportunity

BY MARTHA BURK

Last Sunday was Women's Equality Day and aside from commemorations by a few female leaders on Capitol Hill, it was hardly noticed. But it marks one of the most important days of the last century for women -- the day the final state ratified the 19th Amendment in 1920 -- and women were granted the vote.

That year also marked what suffragists of the time thought would soon be another constitutional milestone, the Equal Rights Amendment. With their newfound franchise, women believed they could convince legislators to put women on equal footing in the Constitution with men (white men from the beginning, black men since passage of the 14th Amendment in 1868).

But it was not to be. Here we are, 87 years later -- a lifetime in anyone's book -- and women still haven't achieved equal

constitutional status.

First introduced in Congress in 1923, the ERA was not passed and sent to the states for ratification until 1972, with an artificial time limit of only seven years for approval by the states. In that brief time it was ratified by 35 states, but was stopped three states short by millions of corporate dollars backing Phyllis Schlafly's anti-woman storm troopers, who feared unisex toilets more than they valued freedom from discrimination.

Most U.S. citizens don't remember that fight, and many believe the ERA was ratified. The reality is that the legal rights women currently enjoy are not rooted in the Constitution, but in a series of statutes like the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, executive orders like affirmative action, and various rules interpreting laws such as Title IX, guaranteeing equal educational opportunity. Because we don't have an ERA, depending on their origin, all of these can be revoked in the dead of night

by any simple majority of Congress, bureaucrats in a hostile administration, or the president himself.

George W. Bush and company know this very well. They have been systematically eroding the gains women have made since they took office. They have weakened Title IX through rule changes. A

public schools are allowed for the first time since 1972.

With the appointments of John Roberts and Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court, the assaults on women's employment rights and legal abortions have begun in earnest. Wasting no time, the Court has already upheld the first

ity Amendment by its chief sponsor, Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y., the ERA is the essence of brevity: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." That's the whole thing. A simple concept that had the blessing of both political parties until the Republicans struck it from their platform in 1980 and the Democrats followed suit in 2004.

It's high time the ERA was put back in the center of public debate, and this long election season is the perfect opportunity.

Women are now the majority of the electorate, and can control any election. Close to 80 percent of the public, both female and male, favor an Equal Rights Amendment. Candidates of both parties for the Congress and the presidency ought to be listening.

Martha Burk is the director for the Corporate Accountability Project for the National Council of Women's Organizations.

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major one now allows schools to force girls, but not boys, to prove they are interested in participating in sports before they are given the chance to play, and so-called "separate but equal" single sex

federal abortion ban since Roe v. Wade, and severely limited women's right to sue in cases where they've experienced pay discrimination.

Recently renamed the Women's Equal-



Rebranding the War

Marketing plan papers over the mess

BY JIM HIGHTOWER

When corporations get caught doing something nasty, they don't really reform -- they simply "rebrand." This involves hiring a bevy of PR consultants to paper over the mess with a new, fuzzy-feeling corporate image.

So, thought the corporate-minded White House, why not apply this same concept to the mess in Iraq? Thus, the Pentagon paid \$400,000 of our tax money to the Rand Corporation to try creating a new "brand identity" for Bush's warmongering, recasting his military operations in a more positive light for the people of Iraq, Afghanistan, and other places of invasion and occupation.

Rand has produced a 211-page study titled, "Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation." To win the hearts and minds of local civilians (a phrase you might recall from the Vietnam War), the study says that the "show of force" brand that Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld loved so much when they rushed into Iraq might have been a bit counter-

productive.

The report suggests that something more consumer-friendly would be better received by the locals. He suggests a perky "We will help you" brand. Indeed, he calls for the Pentagon to do a better job of understanding its consumer.

Of course, when you're breaking down people's doors, calling in air strikes that kill civilians, machine-gunning families at checkpoints, and such -- well, maybe the Iraqis don't see themselves as "consumers" of our military.

Still, the study is onto something, noting that the enemy knows that "doing good works is a classic approach to winning friends and influencing people." Yes, but that requires a fundamental change in the administration's actions -- not a mere marketing spiff-up.

Instead of enlisting Madison Avenue, the Bush administration need to call in a couple of good kindergarten teachers to teach them that behavior is more important than image.

Jim Hightower is a radio commentator, writer, public speaker and author.

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Support Community Health Care Centers

Health without regard of ability to pay

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

More than 40 million Americans are uninsured and cannot afford basic health care services. The majority of them are black or Latino and are children or seniors. Because they lack the resources, many of these families and individuals have to often decide between paying the gas bill and seeing the doctor about a nagging cough or other ailment.

It's unfortunate that, in a country so full of resources, so many of our residents have to make such choices.

There are options, though; options that benefit the uninsured, doctors and ultimately, the tax payer.

Community health centers are one of the most effective options available to uninsured and low-income patients. It's time more folks knew about and utilized them and it's time more doctors committed their time and talents to building up such services.

Community health centers provide health care regardless of a patient's ability to pay. These centers serve over 14 million uninsured and low-income patients who otherwise might not receive treatment for their high blood pressure or diabetes, vaccinations or other medical services.

Recent studies have shown that

hospitals over charge the uninsured to make up for the millions of dollars they lose each year in unpaid medical bills. As a result, an

insured or poor patient may receive a bill three times higher than the one an insured patient receives, even when the illness and treatment are the same.

Given this disturbing fact, it is clear that health care centers ultimately protect low-income patients from the

and underserved communities. They also provide scholarships and loan repayments for graduates who work in poor communities.

More doctors and nurses should consider working with the NHSC, either full-time or part-time or on a volunteer basis, to ensure these health care centers can continue to grow. The NHSC provides a perfect opportunity for medical professionals of color to give back to their communities.

Community organizations can

It's time more doctors committed their time and talents to building up such services.

squeeze of corporate hospitals. Despite the many benefits to the community, health care centers don't reach far or wide enough. This must change.

Less than a third of those who need free medical services actually seek treatment at community health centers. Though the number of patients at the centers has increased by 200 percent since 2000 -- a good thing; the increase shows word about the centers is spreading -- there are millions more who go untreated each year.

Demand for the services the health care centers offer is much greater than the number of doctors available to provide them. The National Health Service Corporation recruits doctors and other health care professionals to work in poor

work with the community health centers to help spread the word about their services on a grassroots level, distributing flyers and other materials on behalf of the centers. Churches can point their congregations to the centers in their neighborhood.

The current healthcare system does not work for every American. Until universal healthcare is made available to each and every one of us, community health centers are needed to ensure even the poorest American can get the medical treatment they need and deserve.

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