

OPINION

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Make a Difference

Participate in the debate for our future

BY M. LINDA JARAMILLO

With the turning of the calendar year to 2008, I am reminded of how important this year will be in the United States.

As citizens in a state that is a major international power broker, we must recognize that what is important to the U. S. is important to the world. I must admit that I am very anxious about this election year, because I am convinced that it is a pivotal time in history. We must pay attention to the flurry of election messages that are already upon us.

In speech after speech presidential candidates tell us all about how he or she is the best person to lead the nation during the next four years. But what we hear more is how their opponents are wrong for the job.

What we need is to determine what we need in a leader to change our chaotic course in domestic and international policies. It is then that we can determine whom we are for rather than whom we are against. This year, let's cast a vote in favor rather than one in opposition.

I admit that we raise issue after issue about the injustices that we oppose. We repeatedly call attention to the many social problems that prevail in our nation and around the world. We regularly expose the serious impact that public policies have on persons who are marginalized in our society.

While we will continue to do so because such issues must be raised,

we must propose what justice would look like if it existed. Otherwise, we fall into the habit of always complaining without offering solutions and hope.

What I'm afraid is that we may have lost sight of how to imagine. We may not know what justice really looks like because we have not seen it for so long. Maybe we have become so accustomed to living with the status quo, that we've forgotten how to dream about a better world. Maybe we don't dare hope because we're afraid to be disappointed. I propose that we paint the picture that we want to see, the one that says what we're for rather than what we're against.

There are so many issues that need our attention this year.

We can see what is needed to change our course toward environmental destruction. We will listen to the stories of those facing extreme poverty

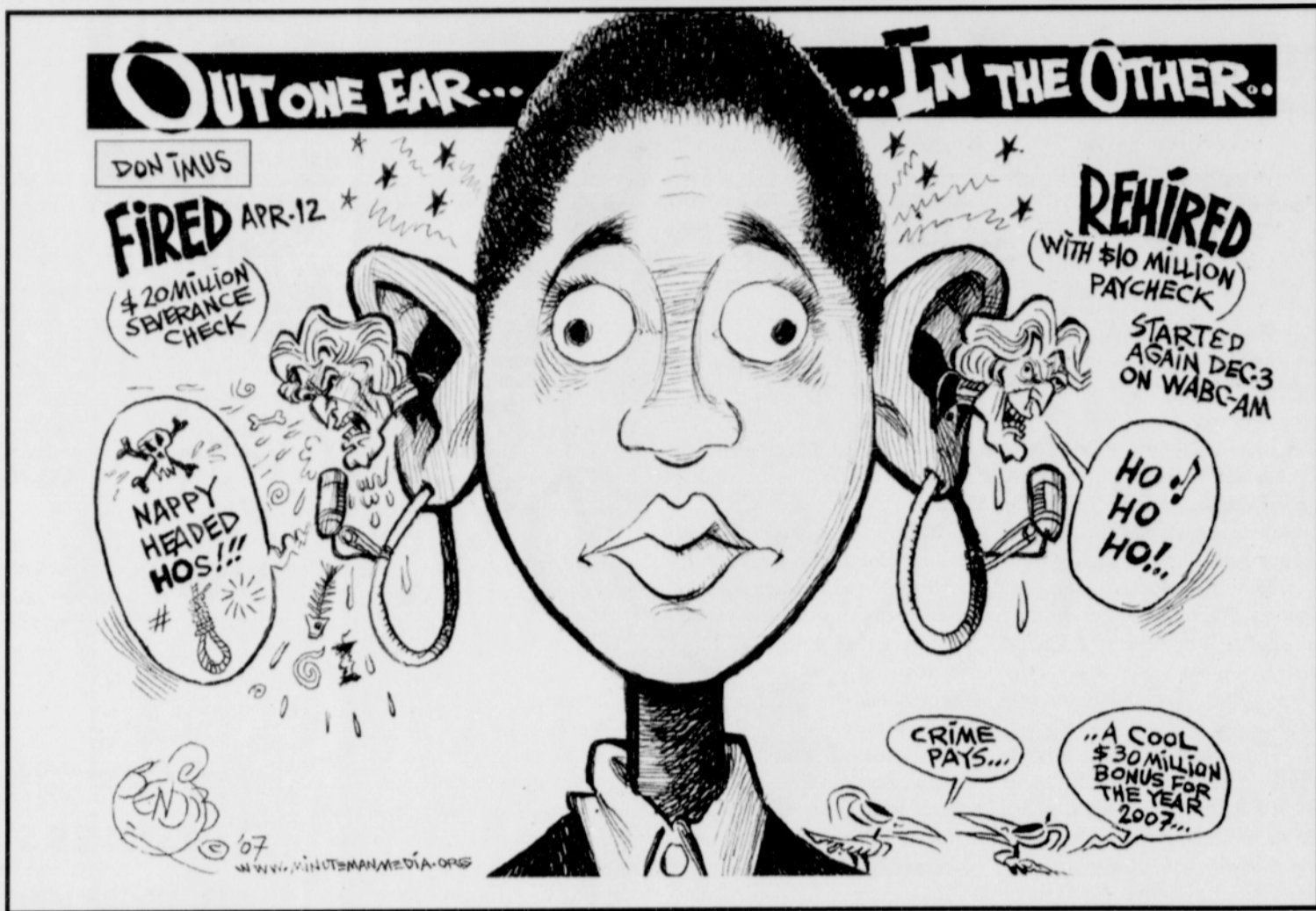
in the richest nation in the world and recreate a sense of hope and productivity in our communities. We will find ways to negotiate with world partners and rebuild our relationships around the world to achieve peace. We will see that our vote does matter at local, state, and national levels.

This year we must participate in the public debate about the future.

Engaging in the democratic process is not a dream, it is not in our imagination. It is real. This year, 2008, is the year to make a difference. This year, let's not cast an opposing vote; let's cast a vote in favor of our children and their children.

M. Linda Jaramillo is executive minister for Justice Ministries for the United Church of Christ.

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Building Opportunity for Our Young People

By improving health and education

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

In a number of America's upper-income communities, parents like generations before them, pre-register their children at birth for blue-chip nursery schools in hopes of placing them on the path to Ivy League and other top-tier universities. By contrast, millions of black and Latino children from poor families with no or few stimulating pre-kindergarten



opportunities never make it onto the college track.

With multiple strikes against them - low birth weight, poor single parents, absent fathers, perhaps substance abuse - many begin life already on the prison track.

A good education in America is a major determinant of what kind of life a child will have when s/he grows up. A bad education is often a sentence to social and economic death. Education determines future income and social status as well as a child's range of future options and quality of life. Sadly, too many children in economically depressed minority communities are stuck in failing schools.

A child's experiences in the dawn of life establish the foundation that will prepare him or her to learn at school. Children in America's poorest communities who lack stable parenting, quality child care and who receive little stimulation in their early years will lag behind when they start kindergarten. When they enter first grade, it's likely to be at a poorly funded, overcrowded, understaffed and low-achieving school.

Consequently, too many schools are likely to be staffed by teachers and administrators who have low expectations for chil-

dren from marginalized families who they may label as "dumb" or "bad." Currently, 88 percent of black children and 85 percent of Latino children in fourth grade can't read at grade level. This is when minority children with poor preschool preparation begin to be sorted out.

The lack of health and mental health care among low-income children is also an important factor in a child's educational devel-

counseling or psychological therapy, too many educators dispense "zero tolerance" discipline - usually in the form of suspensions or expulsions.

There are things we can do. Congress and states must fully fund quality Head Start, Early Head Start, child care and preschool programs that target the neediest children between the ages of three and five to provide comprehensive education, health,

Too many schools are likely to be staffed by teachers and administrators who have low expectations for children from marginalized families.

opment. A child's misbehavior may be a reflection of an unaddressed learning disability or mental or emotional disorder.

Regrettably, too few schools have the staff capable of recognizing the behavior of a disturbed or disabled child for what it is, and if they do, are unable to provide treatment. More often, these children are seen as "disruptive," and instead of offering them

nutrition and social services. And we can all encourage the children in our lives and celebrate their academic achievements.

Finally, educators who do not love and respect the children they are entrusted with preparing for the future should go do something else.

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

Letter to the Editor

Good Read

I read your newspaper while visiting my mom-in-law at the Irvington Village on Northeast

Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. I like the variety of articles and the lead article about gay rights (New Year Advances Gay Rights, Dec. 26).

I'm not gay myself, a Christian, but I think committed gay couples

are just fine in God's eyes. Keep up the good work and thanks for the paper. I enjoyed reading it.

Harlan Simantel
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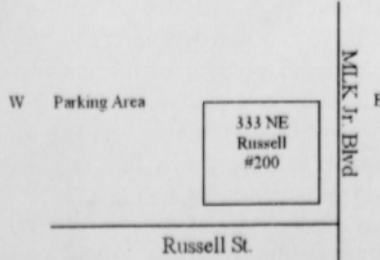
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Featured Artist: Jefferson Dancers, Linda Hombuckle, Janice Scroggins, NW Gospel Community Choir, Eugene Blackmon and Chosen Generation, Janice Flowers-Hopkins, Battle Ground High School Jazz Band, DaNell Dayman & Royalty, Gospel Music Workshop of America, Highland Christian Church Choir, Gospel Crew (U of O), Goldie Irby, Danny Osborne & Time Sound Ensemble, Martin Luther King, Jr. Performing Arts Ensemble, Jefferson High Gospel Ensemble, Kukatowon (Woodlawn Elementary School), Boise Elementary Choir, Aaron Meyer, Vancouver Ave. First Baptist Church, Marion Reid

Special Features: Life Time Achievement Awards, A Showcase of Artistic Displays, Dreamer Village/Vender Bazaar

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