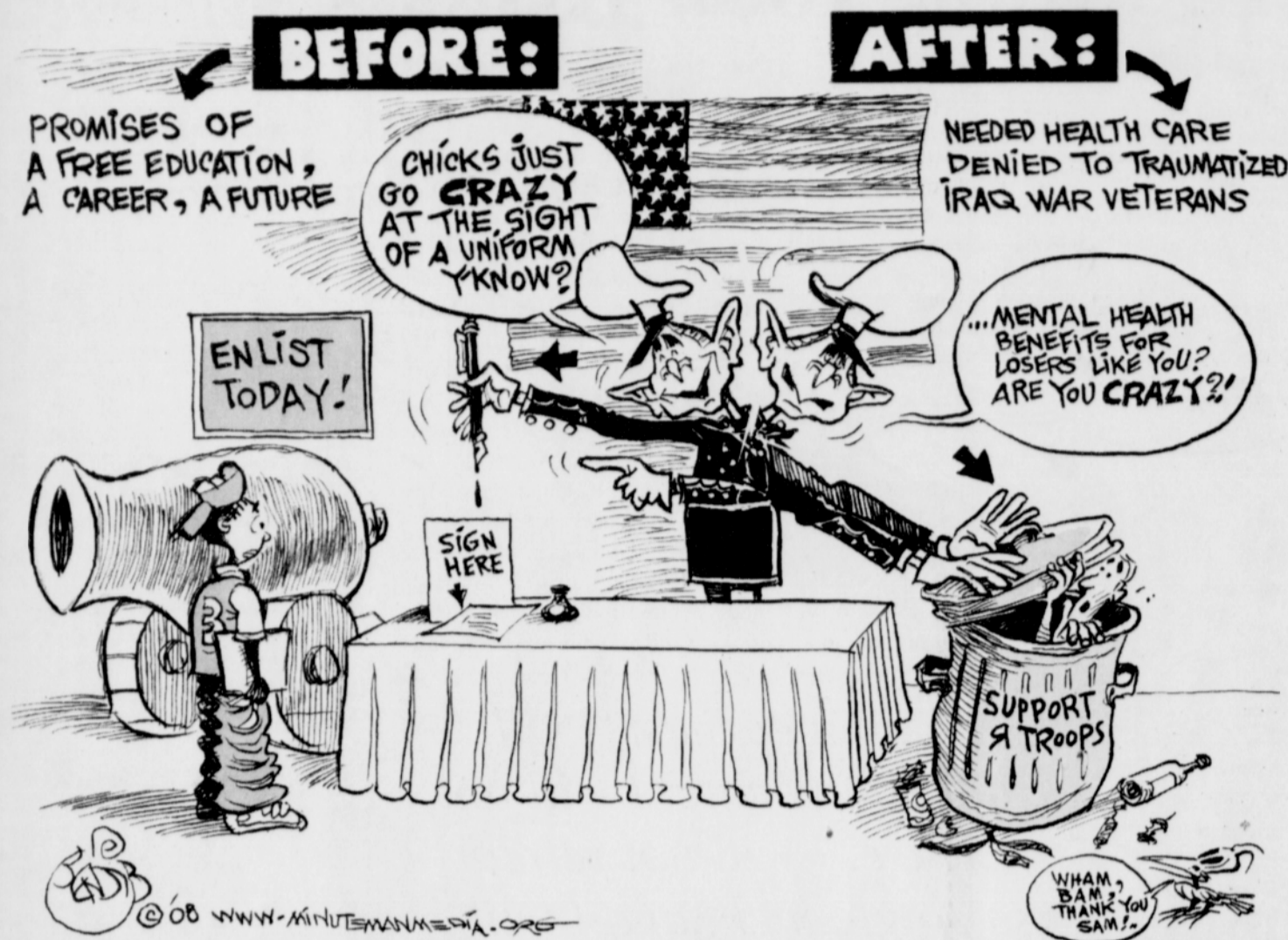


OPINION

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Voters Should Pick Next President

A warning to the super-delegates

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

The Democratic Party has two superstar candidates - Senators Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton - battling it out for that party's presidential nomination.



because they violated party rules by holding their primary elections before Feb. 5.

Clinton campaigned in both states, and won, de-

spite knowing the delegates' votes wouldn't count. If Clinton is successful in getting the more than 350 delegates reinstated, it gives her an unfair advantage over Obama who didn't campaign in the states, focusing his attention on the states that were not on probation.

Most agree that Obama and Clinton differ very little on the issues. But Obama has injected a breath of fresh air into party politics, promising change. Clinton has an impressive political record, but her behind the scenes deal making shows she would be politics as usual.

Obama is gaining ground, proving he appeals to voters of all races and ages. But Clinton

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Billionaires Up, America Down

Wealth inequality has roared back

BY HOLLY SKLAR

When it comes to producing billionaires, America is doing great.

Until 2005, multimillionaires could still make the "Forbes" list of the 400 richest Americans. In 2006, the "Forbes 400" went billionaires only.

A billion dollars is a lot of dough. Queen Elizabeth II, British monarch for five decades, would have to add another \$400 million to her \$600 million fortune to reach \$1 billion. The average "Forbes 400" member has \$3.8 billion.

When the "Forbes 400" began in 1982, it was dominated by oil and manufacturing fortunes. Today, Forbes says nearly half of the 45 new members made their fortune in hedge funds and private equity.

The 25th anniversary of the "Forbes 400" isn't party time for America. We have a record 482 billionaires - and a record 47 million people without any health insurance. Since 2000, we have added 184 billionaires - and 5 million more people living below the poverty line.

The official poverty threshold for one person was a ridiculously low \$10,294 in 2006. That won't get you two pounds of caviar (\$9,800) and 25 cigars (\$730) on the Forbes Cost of Living Extremely Well Index. The \$20,614 family-of-four poverty threshold is lower than the cost of three months of home flower arrangements (\$24,525). Wealth is being redistributed from poorer to richer.

Between 1983 and 2004, the average wealth of the top one percent of households grew by 78 percent, reports Edward Wolff, professor of economics at New York University. The bottom 40 percent lost 59 percent.

In 1982, when the "Forbes 400" had just 13 billionaires, the highest-paid CEO made \$108 million and the average full-time worker made \$34,199, adjusted for inflation. Last year, the highest-paid hedge fund manager hauled in \$1.7 billion, the highest-paid CEO made \$647 million, and the average worker made \$34,861, with vanishing health and

pension coverage.

The "Forbes 400" is even more of a rich men's club than when it began. The number of women has dropped from 75 in 1982 to 35 today.

The 400 richest Americans have a conservatively estimated \$1.54 trillion in combined wealth. That

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amount is more than 11 percent of our \$13.8 trillion Gross Domestic Product (GDP) -- the total annual value of goods and services produced by our nation of 303 million people. In 1982, "Forbes 400" wealth measured less than 3 percent of U.S. GDP.

And the rich, notes "Fortune" magazine, "give away a smaller share of their income than the rest of us." Thanks to mega-tax cuts, the rich can afford more mega-

yachts, accessorized with helicopters and mini-submarines. Meanwhile, the infrastructure of bridges, levees, mass transit, parks and other public assets inherited from earlier generations of taxpayers crumble from neglect, and the holes in the safety net are growing.

The top one percent of households - average income \$1.5 million - will save a collective \$79.5 billion on their 2008 taxes, reports Citizens for Tax Justice.

That's more than the combined budgets of the Transportation Department, Small Business Administration, Environmental Protection Agency and Consumer Product Safety Commission.

It's time for Congress to roll back tax cuts for the wealthy and close the loophole letting billionaire hedge-fund speculators pay taxes at a lower rate than their secretaries.

Inequality has roared back to 1920s levels. It was bad for our nation then. It's bad for our nation now.

Holly Sklar is coauthor of "Raise the Floor: Wages and Policies That Work for All of Us."

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is using her years of political experience and clout to gain the support of so-called super-delegates who could change the course of this very tight race.

Super-delegates include Democratic governors, members of Congress, retired congressional leaders and all of the Democratic National Committee members.

As voters we have to utilize our power to reach out to these elected officials and demand that their votes reflect the interests of their constituents.

If the super-delegates vote based on their political alliances rather than Obama's strong showing, the Democratic nomination may turn into another defeat and put us under the thumb of the Republican Party for another four years.

Several super-delegates have supported Clinton - her husband, former president Bill Clinton is one - and political leaders say she is working night and day to secure the support of others.

Clinton is also working to restore convention delegates from Michigan and Florida. The Democratic Party eliminated delegates from those two states

youthful, fresh appeal, in this visual society, is unstoppable. Clinton is widely hated by the Republican Party and its leaders would stop at nothing to see her defeated.

But can Obama beat Clinton? Yes, if the super-delegates vote the will of the people.

The Democrats must be careful to keep the spirit of their newly active young and African-American voters. If they find that their vote ultimately doesn't matter, then the disillusion of many voters would lead to low voter turnout for the general election. Historically, low voter turnout has resulted in a win for the Republicans.

As a voter, you do have power. Call or write your congress person, your U.S. senators and your governor.

Ask that, when they support a candidate, they base their decisions not on political deals, but on the needs and wishes of their constituents. Your voice does matter. It is time to use it.

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