

OPINION

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War Leaves America Behind Time for a shift of priorities

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS



Iraq needs to be rebuilt. That's the message the supporters of the war repeatedly use to support our country's continuing presence in the middle eastern nation.

To be fair, it is unethical for one country to invade another and then exit, leaving a nation, and its people, ravaged by war, forced to pick up the pieces on their own. However, the U.S. has no real plan for exiting Iraq. The war, and the rebuilding process, will likely continue for some time.

Meanwhile, American cities are crumbling. And our government

It is incomprehensible for the U.S. to spend an estimated \$275 million per day in Iraq when America is literally falling apart. When asked, none of the Democratic political candidates can really explain how they'll find the money to rebuild America.

Sen. Obama says he'll end the war in Iraq; the money saved can be used on infrastructure repairs and upgrades. Sen. Clinton says she'll save money by running a more efficient government; the savings will be diverted to a national rebuilding project. Neither answer is exactly on point: a real

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Talk Radio Needs to Clean Up Act

We cannot stand aside

BY MARC H. MORIAL

Almost one year after radio shock jock Don Imus sent shockwaves through the African-American community with his offensive and inflammatory remarks regarding the Rutgers University ladies basketball team, it's as if a repeat of history is upon us, in an election year in which an African-American candidate has a serious chance of winning the White House.

Back in January, Golf Channel's Kelly Tilghman seriously botched an attempt at humor when she suggested that younger golf players might want to lynch Tiger Woods in a back alley in hopes of spicing up the tour.

The comment drew little ill will, at least publicly, from Woods, who reportedly considers the broadcaster a friend, but it prompted her employer to go into full damage control mode and suspend her for a few weeks.

The controversy precipitated yet another numbskull decision in the media, the display of a noose on the cover of Golfweek. There again, quick action rightly resulted - the sacking of the editor responsible.

But, believe it or not, it seems that the world of sports journalism seems to be aspiring to a higher standard in its response to embar-



rassing and offensive gaffes on air than the world of talk radio.

Earlier in February, radio commentator Laura Ingraham put her foot fully in her mouth and down her throat in her criticism of President

George W. Bush's invitation of the Rev. Al Sharpton to the White House's recent Black History Month event. On her national syndicated radio program on Talk Radio Network, she said she had

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hoped that "they nailed down all the valuables."

Then, Fox News personality and radio talk show host Bill O'Reilly just had to invoke the phrase "lynching mob" in reference to Michelle Obama's comments regarding the United States on his syndicated radio show.

On MSNBC's "Countdown," Washington Post columnist Eugene Robinson expressed disgust over O'Reilly's comment. "There's certainly nothing at all funny or remotely appropriate about the use of a lynching reference about

Michelle Obama," he said. "It's I'm speechless."

As President Bush pointed out so eloquently during the Black History Month event, the noose represents "more than a tool of murder but a tool of intimidation" to generations of African-Americans. Nooses not only robbed some of their lives but many of their peace of mind.

"As a civil society, we must understand that noose displays and lynching jokes are deeply offensive. They are wrong. And they

have no place in America today," he said.

Neither O'Reilly nor Ingraham has been reprimanded by their respective employers even though the Fox News personality did offer a half-hearted apology.

At least Ingraham didn't drop the I-word but her suggestion that Sharpton, a former presidential candidate and respected member of the African-American community and beyond, is a petty thief reeks of race-baiting and negative stereotyping of African-Americans and black men in particular.

But it's hardly the first time either has ventured into questionable and offensive territory. How can we forget O'Reilly's less-than-informed comments regarding a dinner he shared last year with Sharpton at Sylvia's in Harlem? O'Reilly expressed surprise over how similar Sylvia's was to other restaurants in New York restaurants. "There wasn't one person in Sylvia's who was screaming, 'M-Fer, I want more iced tea,'" he said.

As the Washington Post's Robinson sadly observed on MSNBC, "All you can goby is his words and his actions. And he keeps saying these things that sound pretty damn racist to me."

Has talk radio learned anything from Imus' decline and fall? Of course not, because it didn't take Imus too terribly long to get a new gig.

Our nation's media outlets should not provide a platform for racial hostility and hateful speech now or in the future. What kind of message are we sending to our children, our nation and our world?

In such a historic election year, we cannot stand aside and allow individuals use the airwaves as an outlet for insensitive and misguided commentary. If you hear something that offends you, speak up.

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

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doesn't have the funds, or a strategy, for repairing them. It is time for the U.S. to pull out of Iraq, responsibly but quickly. The money we are spending on this pointless, un-winnable war is wasting money that can be used to rebuild our own country.

Our nation's roads, bridges, sewers and water systems are in need of a major overhaul. An underground steam pipe bursts in New York, a bridge collapses in Minneapolis...across the country, we are seeing examples of an infrastructure that is aging faster than we can attend to it.

A federal commission recently calculated what it will cost to repair and upgrade the nation's roads and highways: \$225 billion a year for the next 50 years. Add sewers and water systems to the mix and that number increases tremendously.

solution is needed. The federal commission suggests some of the needed funds come from an increase in the federal gas tax.

America is preparing herself to soon welcome a new president and, hopefully, a shift in governmental funding priorities. With this shift in priorities, should also come a viable plan for rebuilding our nation.

The presidential candidates should be asked to outline a clear strategy for fixing our roads and water systems and, if elected, should be held accountable.

For too long, we've let elected officials break their promises to voters. And we've suffered as a result.

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

Letter to the Editor

Can We Talk About Gun Violence?

We owe our children a solution

BY SANDY SORENSEN

My older brother was a student at Northern Illinois University many years ago. When I heard the news about the tragic shooting at an NIU lecture hall, I could not help but think, "what if..."

What if my brother had been in that lecture hall when someone burst onto the stage with a cache of weapons and began firing at students? How many family members and friends have had to ask not just "what if" but "why?"

Why was my loved one in the path of a bullet? Why is gun violence just another accepted danger in our daily lives? How can it be possible that gun violence is an ever-present reality for our children?

It is no easy task to try to talk about preventing gun violence on Capitol Hill. Indeed, it is no easy task to talk about preventing gun violence in city councils and statehouses across the country.

Powerful and well-financed voices oppose measures to reduce the level of gun violence and accidental deaths from guns. Despite the succession of high-profile tragedies, and the chronic,

less visible, but no less devastating epidemic of gun violence in our homes and communities, the U.S. Congress has essentially voted "absent" on common sense measures to address gun violence.

Legislation to close the gun show loophole that allows people to buy weapons from unlicensed sellers with no questions asked continues to languish in Congress. Legislative provisions addressing the importation of high-capacity firearms ammunition clips, juvenile possession of semi-automatic weapons and child safety locks have made little headway in the halls of Congress and state legislatures.

What leads us as a society to opt for powerlessness in the face of gun violence?

Every year, 30,000 Americans are killed with firearms and more than 70,000 are treated for firearms injuries. Certainly it will take far more than legislation alone to end the terrible toll of gun violence.

Surely we owe our children more than business as usual.

Sandy Sorensen is a team leader with Justice Ministries in the United Church of Christ.