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OPINION

U S Citizens Need Financial Bail Out, Too

Government's not just for corporations

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

In an unprecedented move, the Federal Reserve Bank recently approved a loan of up to \$30 billion to financial institution JPMorgan Chase for the purchase of struggling investment house Bear Sterns. This is believed to be the largest government advance on record to a single company.



As the economy remains stagnant, more and more Americans are losing their jobs and struggling to keep their homes. The only support the average citizen has received is a lackluster economic 'stimulus' package that would put, on average, \$600 back into their hands. That certainly isn't enough to keep the bank from foreclosing on a home. Exactly who is the government looking out for?

By bailing out Sterns, the Fed

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has, potentially, stopped a total collapse of the country's financial market. Nicely done. But who will rescue the millions of Americans struggling in this slowed-down economy?

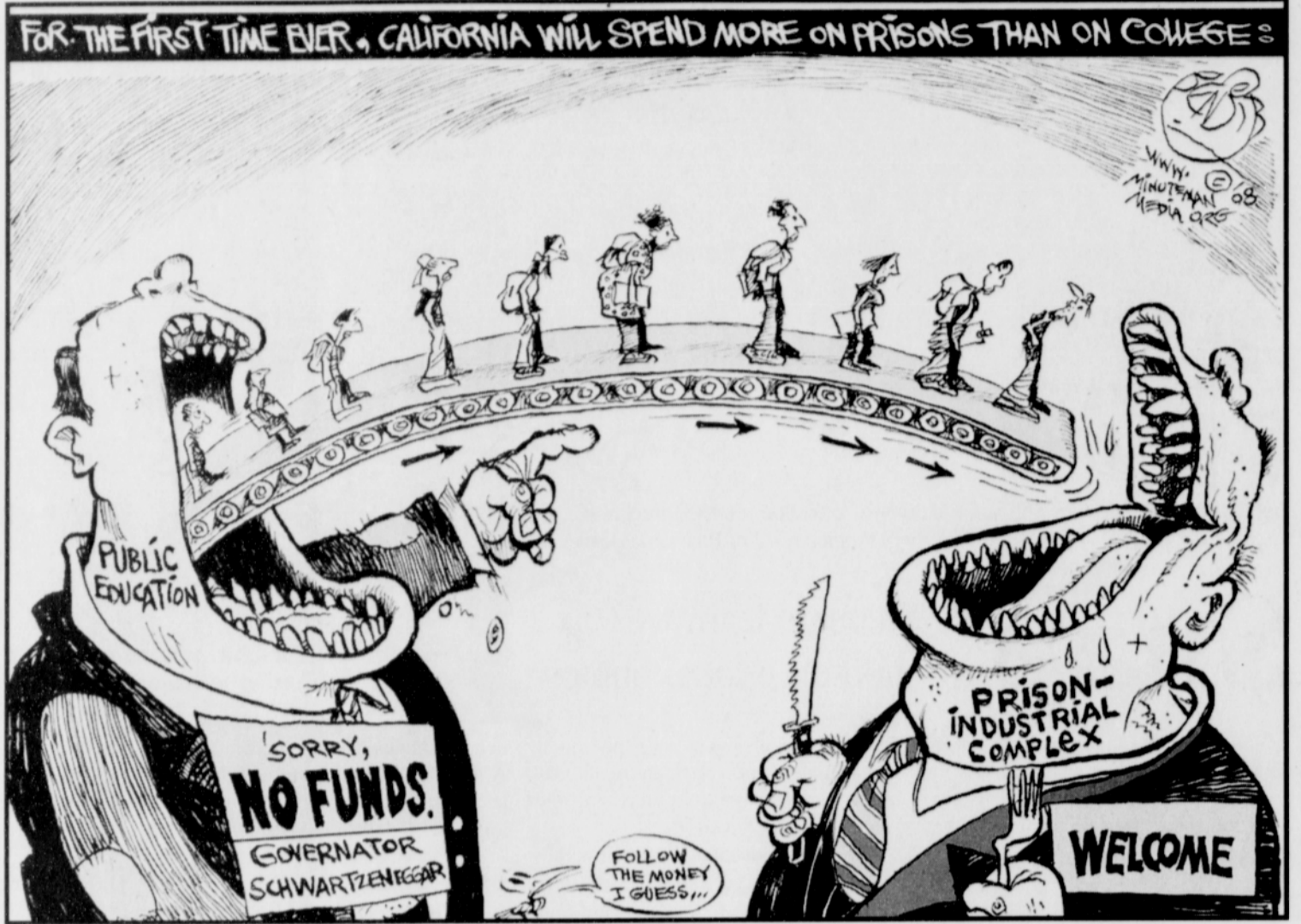
All signs are pointing to a recession. The question is not if it will happen, but when and how long it will last. We're already seeing signs: the real estate market has stalled, the home foreclosure rate is up 57 percent from 2007 and the unemployment rate sits at just under 5 percent overall. For blacks, that number jumps to 8.3 percent.

Historically, national recessions take black America from bad to worse. Even when the economy is on high, the African-American unemployment rate is disproportionately higher than that of whites. Some analysts predict that a recession would kick the overall unemployment rate up more than six percent in the next year. For African Americans, that number would be expected to skyrocket to 11 percent.

To be fair, the Fed needed to step in to save Sterns; its collapse could have set off a chain of events that would have negatively impacted the financial market and, ultimately, you. However, saving big business should not be this government's only goal.

In the coming weeks and months, the federal government must quickly work to develop and implement 'bail out' plans that serve the average American. Foreclosure protection plans that benefit the homeowner, not just the loan company, are a good place to start.

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



Umm, Maybe I'll Pass on the Hamburger

Food-safety system needs fixing

BY STEVE SUPPAN

In late February, the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture recalled 143 million pounds of frozen beef from Hallmark/Westland Meat Company in California—the largest beef recall in U.S. history.

The recall came after the Humane Society posted a graphic video of cattle abuse at the plant, a supplier to more than 100,000 school lunch and child care programs in 36 states.

The abuse included beating and shocking animals with electric prods to force them to stand for the brief time that USDA inspectors were in the plant to certify them as "healthy" for slaughter.

The USDA is now investigating to determine whether Westland meat is contaminated by pathogens, including salmonella, E.coli 0157:H7 and BSE (madcow), that occur more frequently in animals unable to walk.

The Westland incident, unfortunately, is emblematic of a food-safety system cracking at its foundation.

Last year, more than 30 million pounds of ground beef were pulled off the market in 20 recalls because of possible E. coli contamination.

As the industry has consolidated, larger plants process more cows than ever before. In the case of ground beef, one sick cow can contaminate thousands of pounds of hamburger. Older dairy cattle, more prone to disease, are often used for ground beef. Contamination in a single plant can affect consumers all over the country.

While contamination outbreaks have increased, our food safety inspection system has declined.

In a nutshell, the current system has not invested in an adequate number of inspectors and has not equipped those inspectors with state-of-the-art technology.

But perhaps most importantly, the USDA relies on the meat and

elsewhere.

But for this approach to have any chance of success, the USDA needs not only more inspectors and better technology, but more knowledge of possible risks. In December, the Office of the Inspector General reported that the USDA's Food Safety Inspection Service had neither sufficient data nor enough food safety assessments of slaughterhouses and meat processors to implement a risk-based inspection program.

Parents shouldn't have to worry about the meat their children are eating in school.

The horrors revealed in the Humane Society video and the anxiety of parents must not become widespread and recurrent features of our food-supply system.

Steve Suppan is a policy analyst at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, an organization that promotes "resilient family farms, rural communities and ecosystems."

To remedy these systemic vulnerabilities, the USDA wants to implement a "risk-based" system. The agency would send inspectors to plants where management believes contamination is most likely to occur, and reduces inspections

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What Would 'Universal' Be Like?

It's not 'socialized medicine'

BY MARTHA BURK

I live in New Mexico, where every other person is running for political office, thanks to the fruit-basket-like turnover created by the retirement of Republican Sen. Pete Domenici, who's been aging in place on Capitol Hill since 1973.

The debate between Republican aspirants for the Senate -- both current members of the U.S. House -- is already heating up. In their first encounter, they predictably tried to "outconservative" each other.

Heather Wilson, representing urban Albuquerque, labeled herself a "commonsense" conservative. She attacked Steve Pearce, a downstater with more rural constituents, for his



vote against expanding children's health insurance. Pearce countered that he is the "true" conservative, and said giving poor kids insurance would be "Hillary Care Lite... the beginning of socialized medicine."

W-a-a-i-t a minute. Socialized medicine? With that remark, Pearce shows he's clueless about medical care, and so are a lot of other candidates. Not to mention conservative Rush Limbaugh clones who are out of control in the blogosphere, raving about the government controlling your private medical decisions.

Maybe they need a little lesson on what "socialized medicine" is -- and is not. And maybe they'd be surprised to learn that the United States already has one form of socialized medicine. But I'm jumping ahead.

Many people, including Pearce, evidently equate "universal coverage," which Hillary Clinton does advocate, with the dreaded "socialized medicine." Universal coverage means just that -- everyone would have health insurance. Some would have it through employers, some through privately purchased plans, and some through government-subsidized programs if they're too poor to foot the full bill.

Universal coverage does not mean the government would provide healthcare as a "welfare" or "entitlement" benefit to everyone, regardless of income or employment status.

Though having insurance would be mandatory, type of coverage would be up to the individual.

Choice of doctors and hospitals under universal coverage would remain much as it is now -- controlled by the type of plan the individual is covered under -- and in no small part dictated by insurance companies. In some scenarios, insurance companies would be required to cover pre-existing conditions, stopping the practice of "cherry-picking" only the healthiest patients for inclusion in their plans.

Another term we hear a lot about is "single payer." Single payer means a system of healthcare that provides universal and comprehen-

sive coverage, with the government as the insurer issuing the payments. Everyone's healthcare would be paid for out of one publicly administered trust fund (paid for by taxes on both individuals and businesses) which would replace our current multi-payer insurance company system and its premiums.

In single payer, the government would not be the primary provider of healthcare. It would just be the primary payer. There would still be freedom to choose doctors and other healthcare professionals, facilities, and services.

Doctors would remain in private practice and be paid on a fee-for-service basis from government funds, just as they're paid now by insurance companies. The government would not own or manage

nel work for the government and draw their salaries from the government. This is the model used in the U.S. Veterans Administration and the armed services, where the government owns the hospitals, and medical professionals are government employees. It works pretty well for vets, but red-hot rhetoric notwithstanding, none of the candidates -- nor either political party -- advocates socializing the entire medical system of the United States.

So the next time you hear a candidate hurling "socialized medicine" around like a flame-thrower, ask them if they have any idea what they're talking about.

Martha Burk is author of "Your Money and Your Life: What's at stake for women in 2008 and beyond."

"The State of Hip Hop: Hip Hop's Influence on Society"

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Marc Lamont Hill, Ph.D., assistant professor of Urban Education at Temple University, is one of the youngest members of the growing body of "Hip-Hop Intellectuals" in the country. His work, which covers topics such as hip-hop culture, politics, sexuality, education, and religion, has appeared in numerous journals, magazines, books, and anthologies. He has lectured widely and provides regular commentary for media outlets like the Washington Post, New York Times, Essence magazine, NPR, CNN, MSNBC, CourtTV, and Fox News. Hill is the author of the forthcoming book Beats, Rhymes, and Classroom Life: Hip-Hop, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Identity, and is co-editor of Media, Learning, and Sites of Possibility. In 2005, Ebony magazine named him one of America's top 30 Black leaders under 30 years old.

This event is sponsored by Reed College Black Men's Group (BMG)