

OPINION

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Second Chance Act Only the Beginning

Fixing a damaged prison system

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

The United States prison system has long focused on punishment: lengthy sentences and 'hard' time; very little attention has been placed on rehabilitation. But things are changing.

President Bush, with nearly unanimous Democratic and Republican support, just passed the Second Chance Act of 2007, a law that would fund services and programs for ex-offenders. While more remains to be done, the Act is a first step in ensuring those individuals who pay their debt to society have a fair chance at a fresh



This country incarcerates more individuals than any other; more than every 1 in 100 Americans is in prison or jail. And nearly half of them are black.

While we address the root causes of the disproportionate incarceration rates, African Americans should applaud the country's shift in thinking. A national focus on re-entry could help our men and women, once released, stay home, reconnect with their families and rebuild their lives.

We should realize, however, that the Act is not a miracle cure. The federal government needs to spend more on education, particularly in impoverished areas. For years, the U.S. has spent more money to incarcerate than it has to educate. A solid education can help

keep people out of prison.

The country also needs to create a widespread plan that creates jobs for the millions of Americans who have prison records. All the training in the

world won't make much of a difference if there are no jobs available.

Offering tax credits to businesses that hire ex-offenders is one solution. A national public-works project, similar to the one that employed men right after World War II, is another. Men and women, skilled and unskilled, could repair America's aging cities.

Incarceration without rehabilitation does not work. America is finally realizing this and is taking baby steps in the right direction. But it will take time, creative solutions, adequate funding and a strong commitment to reverse the damage a prison system focused solely on punishment has caused.

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

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start upon release.

Between 650,000 and 700,000 American men and women return home from prison each year. Most of them are under- or uneducated, have limited skills and end up in the same neighborhoods and situations that led them to crime in the first place. Nearly half are re-incarcerated less than two years after their release.

The cycle costs taxpayers millions – and fattens the pockets of the private corporations that build and supply prisons – and strains state budgets.

Attempting to reverse the trend, the Second Chance Act authorizes \$362 million to local governments and nonprofit organizations that run programs designed to help returning prisoners find jobs, housing, educational opportunities, drug counseling and more.



Towering Over his Opponents

Restoring our respect with Barack Obama

BY SHERWOOD ROSS

Of course, when fanatics can't attack a man for anything he's actually done that's downright despicable, they'll go after him for what he's said, and if they can't find anything he's said that's awful they'll go after him for what his friends or associates have said.

Apparently, that's why Fox News has endlessly replayed those clips of Sen. Obama's pastor saying controversial things. All they can charge Obama with is knowing the man, not exactly a crime yet in America, and the Fox newscasters aren't the least bit mollified that Obama has repudiated Rev. Wright's comments that were offbase.

By contrast, Fox commentators don't begin to hold Sen. McCain up to the same standard they demand of Obama's pastor. Bill O'Reilly sees nothing wrong with McCain's vote to launch an illegal war against Iraq because O'Reilly backed that war, too, and seemingly swallowed the lies Bush told to start it.

As far as Fox News is concerned, it's OK to make illegal wars and kill innocent people. What's not OK is to have a pastor that condemns illegal wars in an angry tone of voice.

As this campaign drags on, I have begun to suspect that Sen. Obama does not believe in killing innocent people. Recall that Sen. Clinton scolded him last year for saying he would not use atomic weapons to go after terrorists. Obama said he wouldn't do it as nukes might kill civilians. Since the use of such weap-

ons is prohibited by a treaty the United States has signed, it's an eminently sensible position. Besides, when you drop an atomic bomb, the fallout spreads and who knows where it might wind up?

The Three-Mile Island debacle pales beside the prospect of military use of a nuclear weapon. But Clinton chided Obama for taking the nuclear "option" off the table when, in fact, no such option exists.

Now this is a very real and significant difference between the candidates. As

much have your pick of jobs at many a prestigious law firm and earn yourself a bundle. Instead, Obama took a \$13,000-a-year post as head of a faith-based community organizing agency funded by the Catholic Church and directed by a church coalition.

According to biographers, Obama worked "to counteract the dislocation and massive unemployment caused by the closing and downsizing of southeast Chicago steel plants."

So I ask you, who would want a man

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far as I can tell, Obama is the only one of the three sane enough not to claim the right to use banned atomic weapons.

Maybe that's because, as a constitutional scholar and former University of Chicago law school professor, Obama believes in law and order. The Illinois Fraternal Order of Police thought so when it endorsed him for the Senate in 2004.

However, by their votes favoring an illegal war, Sens. McCain and Clinton have proved they are no respecters of law and order, no more than is President Bush, no more than is Fox News.

Speaking of the law, when you graduate magna cum laude and as president of the Harvard Law Review you can pretty

believes in law and order, refuses to vote for illegal wars, pledges not to drop atomic bombs on civilians, works with the church, and devotes his life to alleviating human suffering in preference to enriching himself? (If you guessed Bill O'Reilly, guess again.)

Barack Obama is a candidate of exceptional intelligence who towers over his opponents. If this country is lucky, he may turn out to be that rare, transformative visionary capable of restoring the lost arts of American diplomacy and possessing the considerable skills it will require to beat swords into ploughshares.

Sherwood Ross is a longtime civil-rights activist.

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Letters to the Editor

Macpherson Supports Treatment

In the race for Oregon Attorney General, Greg Macpherson is the only candidate that has delivered real results in expanding drug treatment. In 2005, Rep. Macpherson negotiated and passed a bipartisan bill that virtually ended meth labs in Oregon and added \$8.5 million for drug courts.

In 2007, Macpherson passed a bill that funded the African-American Chamber's Project Clean Slate, helping people in recovery to get a fresh start and turn their lives around.

In February, Macpherson joined with fellow legislators, prosecutors and law enforcement to offer voters a smart-on-crime choice at the ballot box that includes longer sentences for repeat property offenders and an historic expansion of drug treatment both in the community and in prison. That measure offers voters an alternative to the wrong-headed approach of Kevin Mannix whose misguided property-crime measure creates a gold-plated revolving door in our prisons because it does nothing to address addiction.

In the job of Attorney General, we need someone who understands how Oregon works and someone with the track record to deliver real results right away on drug treatment. That person is Greg Macpherson.

Rep. Chip Shields
Northeast Portland