

OPINION

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Letters to the Editor Vote for Sean Cruz

Voters in Senate District 23, which includes northeast and southeast Portland, Parkrose and Maywood Park, have a choice to make in the contest to fill the seat left with my transition from the Legislature to teaching at Portland State University.

I will be voting for Sean Cruz, my very able chief of staff for over 5 years, and urge you to do the same.

Here is why: The legislature needs more voices that will speak out from experience about the needs of Oregonians living in poverty in our still rich state. Sean Cruz will do this passionately and will not forget to put the needs of the most vulnerable populations, meaning our seniors, children and people living with disabilities, first.

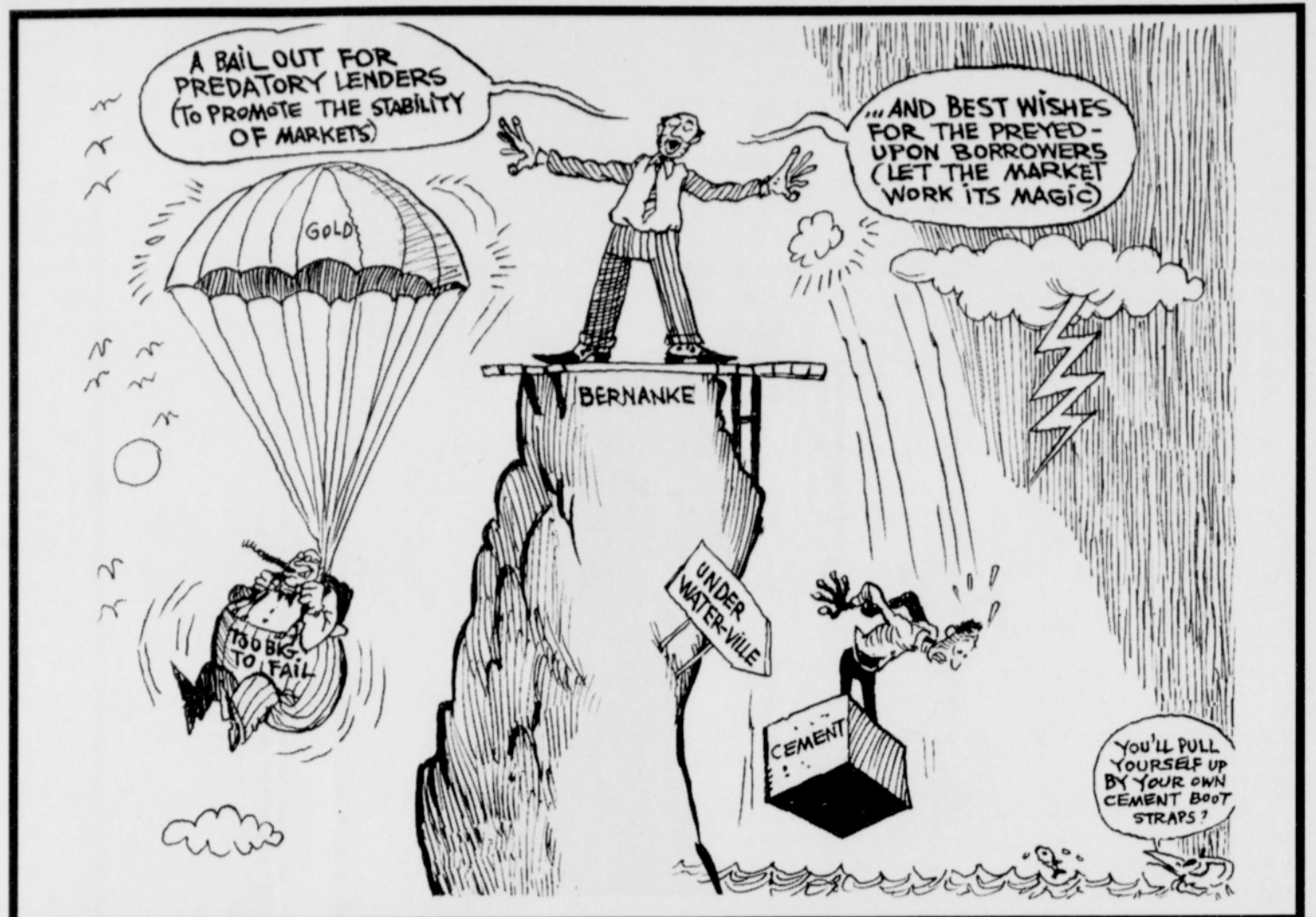
As a proud Mexican American with farm-worker family roots, Sean Cruz will be particularly sensitive to and a champion for issues of concern to all of Oregon's underserved and poorly served racial and ethnic populations.

Senate District 23 needs a champion for health care and mental health reform in a state where our district proportionately saw the most people lose their health coverage under the Oregon Health Plan. Sean Cruz will be that champion.

Sean Cruz will continue to be a passionate voice for our many veterans who are returning broken in their physical and mental health.

Middle class Oregonians have their champions in the House and Senate, but there are too few champions for the poor. Send Sean Cruz to the Oregon Senate. He is qualified and ready to serve.

Avel Louise Gordly
District 23 Senator



Court Sanctions Modern Poll Tax

A blow to the right to vote

disenfranchise Southern black voters by requiring them to pay a tax in order to vote, were struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1966. This current ID requirement appears to be nothing more than a thinly disguised modern-day poll tax that places a burden upon many citizens — especially minorities, low-income, the elderly and people with disabilities — seeking to exercise their constitutional right to vote.

BY MARC MORIAL

This election season has been full of stories about bowling scores, barroom boiler-makers and pick-up basketball. But, a little-noticed U.S. Supreme Court ruling may have jeopardized Americans' precious right to vote. In *Crawford v. Marion County Election Board*, the Supreme Court ruled to uphold the most restrictive voter identification law in the country and failed, I think, in its duty to protect the voting rights of all Americans. In its 6-3 decision, the Court sanctioned the practice of requiring Indiana voters to present government-issued photo identification in order to vote.

Poll taxes, which were used to disenfranchise Southern black voters by requiring them to pay a tax in order to vote, were struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1966. This current ID requirement appears to be nothing more than a thinly disguised modern-day poll tax that places a burden upon many citizens — especially minorities, low-income, the elderly and people with disabilities — seeking to exercise their constitutional right to vote.

As Melaine Campbell writes in the National Urban League's State of Black America, "Today, there are still over 54 million eligible unregistered voters, including over 30 percent of African Americans and over 40 percent of Latino Americans who are unregistered. Yet there are those who consistently advocate for policies that discourage eligible citizens from becoming active partici-

pants in our representative democracy."

Indiana is one of a growing number of states that have passed or are considering similar restrictive voter ID measures. It's one thing to have the right to vote and quite another to have unfettered freedom to exercise that right.

Despite my disappointment with the court's ruling, I am encouraged that the Justices have left open the possibility that such laws could be challenged in the future with proof that the laws prevented eligible voters from exercising their right to vote.

As the historic presidential election of 2008 draws near, we should be making it easier — not more difficult — for eligible voters to participate.

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



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Leave Child Law Behind

Priority should be classroom instruction

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

Signed into law in 2001, the No Child Left Behind law was supposed to improve America's public-school system. Initially, the legislation inspired hope; it held school districts more accountable for student performance and gave parents more flexibility in choosing what schools their children attended.

Seven years later, many are left disappointed: The law's many flaws have been exposed and no one can say for certain whether or not schools are doing any better. What we do know is that public-school districts have turned into test mills, parents don't always take advantage of the tutoring or transfer options available to them and real instruction is missing from our classrooms.

From the very beginning, No Child Left Behind had its critics. The law's penalties caused many school districts to lower their achievement standards to avoid probation and other 'punishments.' Missouri, for example, improved testing scores for students, but officials there have admitted that they lowered the standards.

Other school districts have 'reclassified' drop-outs, creating an unclear picture of who is staying in and who is leaving school.

One of the biggest drawbacks of No Child Left Behind is the emphasis it places on standardized testing and what that does to classroom instruction.

"Teaching to the test" has become common, with teachers spending hours of classroom time

teaching a limited curriculum, often at the expense of developing critical thinking skills in students.

Under No Child Left Behind, parents whose children attend schools on probation are able to take advantage of federally funded tutoring services, either at the school or elsewhere. Research shows that many parents are not aware of these services.

Additionally, a parent can transfer their child to another school if the one in their local district continually fails to meet federal performance standards. Parents, again, are not taking advantage of this opportunity. School districts do a poor job of communicating to parents just what options they have under the law.

America's public schools can be fixed. Congress should continue to review the law and work to amend it — or create a new one — that truly benefits America's school children. It should be a top policy priority to deliver an education bill that requires mandatory skill improvement for teachers, reduced class sizes and an increase in real world learning and instruction.

A strong education is the foundation for future success. America has struggled for too long to deliver to our children the tools they need to become productive citizens. We must work quickly to create a solution that works.

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

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