

OPINION

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Giant Swindle on Taxes

Mission accomplished for the wealthy

BY HOLLY SKLAR

When it comes to cutting taxes for the wealthy, President Bush can truly say, "Mission accomplished." The richest 1 percent of Americans received about \$491 billion in tax breaks between 2001 and 2008. That's nearly the same amount as U.S. debt held by China.



Wall Street's five biggest firms paid a record \$39 billion in bonuses for 2007, a year when three of the companies suffered the worst quarterly losses in their history and thousands of jobs have been lost as losses mount from the sub-prime

which excludes tax-exempt interest income from state and local government bonds, the richest 400 taxpayers reported an average \$214 million each on their federal income tax returns in 2005, up from \$104 million in 2002.

Thanks to tax cuts, it's now common for the nation's richest bosses to pay taxes at a lower rate than workers. The 400 richest taxpayers paid only 18 percent of their income in federal individual income taxes in 2005, down from 30 percent in 1995.

While tax cuts help the superrich compete over who has the biggest submarine-carrying super-yacht, Katrina survivors are being hit with foreclosures, and neglected levees and bridges around the country are a disaster waiting to happen.

Most of the provisions of the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts are scheduled to expire at the end of 2010.

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mortgage market.

The International Monetary Fund says the United States is in the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. Yet, we are borrowing money with interest to finance tax cuts for Wall Street executives.

For Americans below the top percent, the tax cuts have been a giant swindle. The bottom 99 percent of taxpayers were left with a bill of \$3.74 in debt for every \$1 in federal tax cuts from 2001 to 2006.

Meanwhile, the federal budgets for environmental protection and housing for the elderly have been slashed more than 20 percent since 2001, adjusted for inflation. The Community Development Block Grant budget is down 32 percent and the lack of health insurance is an epidemic.

Most households aren't even earning as much as they did in 1999, adjusting for inflation. But the 400 taxpayers with the highest incomes doubled their incomes between 2002 and 2005.

According to the latest IRS data,

President Bush wants to make them permanent. The richest 1 percent of households would receive nearly \$1.2 trillion in tax cuts from 2009 through 2018, reports the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Tax cuts for the wealthy fuel rising inequality along with rising debt and neglect.

Taxpayers with annual incomes above \$1 million in fiscal year 2012, for example, would increase their after-tax income by 7.5 percent thanks to an average tax cut of \$162,000. The poorest 20 percent of taxpayers would get an average tax cut of \$45 on top of decaying public services.

Democratic presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama promise to end the tax breaks for the wealthy. Republican candidate John McCain wants to extend them. What do you want?

Holly Sklar is co-author of "Raise the Floor: Wages and Policies That Work for All of Us" and "A Just Minimum Wage: Good for Workers, Business and our Future."



America's Problem with Drugs

Too little treatment, too much imprisonment

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

America has a problem with drugs. To be more specific, the way America's justice system deals with individuals who have drug addictions is problematic. It is also expensive, as well as ineffective.

Instead of increasing state and federal budgets to accommodate for the growth in the prison population, which is largely due to America's imprisonment over treatment policies, this country needs to focus on the root issues that cause drug addiction.

Despite dumping millions of dollars into anti-drug campaigns in the 1980s, the American government has seen an increase in the number of individuals imprisoned for drug possession.

According to a study by the Sentencing

Project and Human Rights Watch, the arrests for drug related crimes increased by nearly 500,000 in a two-year period. In 1980, when the country was first told to 'just say no,' less than 600,000 people were arrested for drug possession.

The increase in drug arrests can be directly attributed to America's 'Get Tough on Drugs' policies. Drug dealers, however, aren't the ones being punished. More than



Under the current system, no one wins.

four fifths of those arrested on drug-related charges are arrested for possession. And four in 10 of those arrests are for marijuana possession. Instead of getting much-needed treatment, they are sent to jail.

Under the current system, no one wins. State and federal budgets are maxed as they work to fund existing and build new jails and prisons to house these mostly low-level drug offenders. Those imprisoned don't receive comprehensive care that helps them

deal with the issues that drove them to drugs in the first place. Many, upon release, return to their former lifestyle and end up in jail again. Taxpayers lose because their dollars fund this vicious, ineffective cycle.

Those tax dollars be much better sent on improving education for young people – keeping kids off the street helps keep them away from drugs – and creating "drug centers" for those individuals arrested for simple possession.

Those arrested for possession should be ordered to treatment and post-treatment, monitored for a set amount of time. Only after repeat offenses should jail even become an option for drug users. With access to intensive psychological and drug counseling, these men and women have an opportunity to turn their lives around for good.

Emphasizing treatment over imprisonment will not only save taxpayer dollars, it will save lives.

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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Fair Lady or Sweetheart? Boyfriend, girlfriend titles insult

BY JUNE POTTER ACOSTA

As a writer and lifelong devotee of the English language, I am constantly observing and listening to the way it's used (and abused).

Specifically, at the moment, one particular cause – of several – is promoting a whole new terminology for unmarried romantic relationships.

Oh please! Not "boyfriend/girlfriend," as indicated in the Associ-



ated Press Stylebook, and so slavishly followed by both print and broadcast journalists. "Boyfriend/girlfriend" can be used in casual high-school relationships and is not appropriate for anyone over 18.

When I heard a news report that David Letterman's "girlfriend" had given birth to a baby boy, I almost flew through the television screen!

Last year, when Portland Trailblazer Brandon Roy won the NBA's

Rookie of the Year honor, press coverage showed a photo of Roy with his "girlfriend" and their newborn boy.

What an insult! The couple obviously has a commitment, to the extent that they are now together parenting a baby. Surely, the young lady deserves a more respectful designation than "girlfriend." Her name wasn't even included!

I called the Trailblazers, and the lady I spoke with said that they had no influence. It was the journalist's call. I intended to write to Roy himself but didn't get around to it. Another unwritten letter added to my "good intentions" list.

The week before Valentine's Day, a local jeweler was running a radio ad, addressed to the hypothetical gentleman of a fictional twosome.

The speaker advises the man to purchase just the right ring for his "girlfriend." Later in the commercial, it is made clear that they are planning to be married.

Up in arms again, I called the jewelry company, and talked with a lady (in the manner of mouthy old women!) about the need to get rid of "girlfriend." Since they seemed to be engaged, fiancée would be appropriate – or any number of other descriptive words: Companion, partner, special lady. Or what about "woman friend?" I'm surprised the feminist movement hasn't gotten behind this cause.

Well, evidently the lady at the jewelry company had some clout!

The very next day, a totally new commercial sounded from my radio. The speaker used the pronouns "she" and "her," and it was perfect!

My all-time favorite – a winner in any language – is "friend." It makes no judgments, betrays no secrets and reveals no intimacies. Above all, it protects that precious intangible that is everyone's sacred right – privacy!

June Potter Acosta is a regular contributor to the Portland Observer.

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