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OPINION

Diversity in the Media

Russert was one of the rare leaders

BY MARC MORIAL

The National Urban League and Black America lost a dear friend in Tim Russert. He was not only a master newsman and commentator, he was one of the rare leaders in media who never feared to ask or answer the tough question.

For Russert, honesty and fairness were non-negotiable. I saw that first hand when he asked me to join a racially and ideologically diverse Meet the Press panel on Sept. 4, 2005 where we discussed the tragedy and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Russert did what few others dared do in those early days of the recovery, he encouraged us to discuss the impact that race may have played in the government's inexcusably delayed reaction. It was a very necessary and emotional debate which I believe helped spur the public demand for a more urgent and effective government response.

In 2006, the National Urban League issued a report, entitled, Sunday Morning Apartheid: A Diversity Study of the Sunday Morning Talk Shows, which showed that less than 40 percent of Sunday morning political talk shows featured black guests, and that only 20 percent of the broadcasts contained interviews with African Americans.

After releasing the report, we requested meetings with all of the Sunday morning executive producers to talk about our findings and the producer of Meet the Press was the first to respond. When we walked into the meeting we were surprised to see not only the execu-



tive producer, but also the show's long-time moderator, Tim Russert. Russert got it. He understood that diversity in programming is not important purely for diversity's sake. Russert knew that a broader pool of guests improves the tenor and quality of debate, offers a richer and more varied array of information and helps fulfill news outlets' responsibility to educate their audiences so they will be better equipped to make informed political and policy choices.

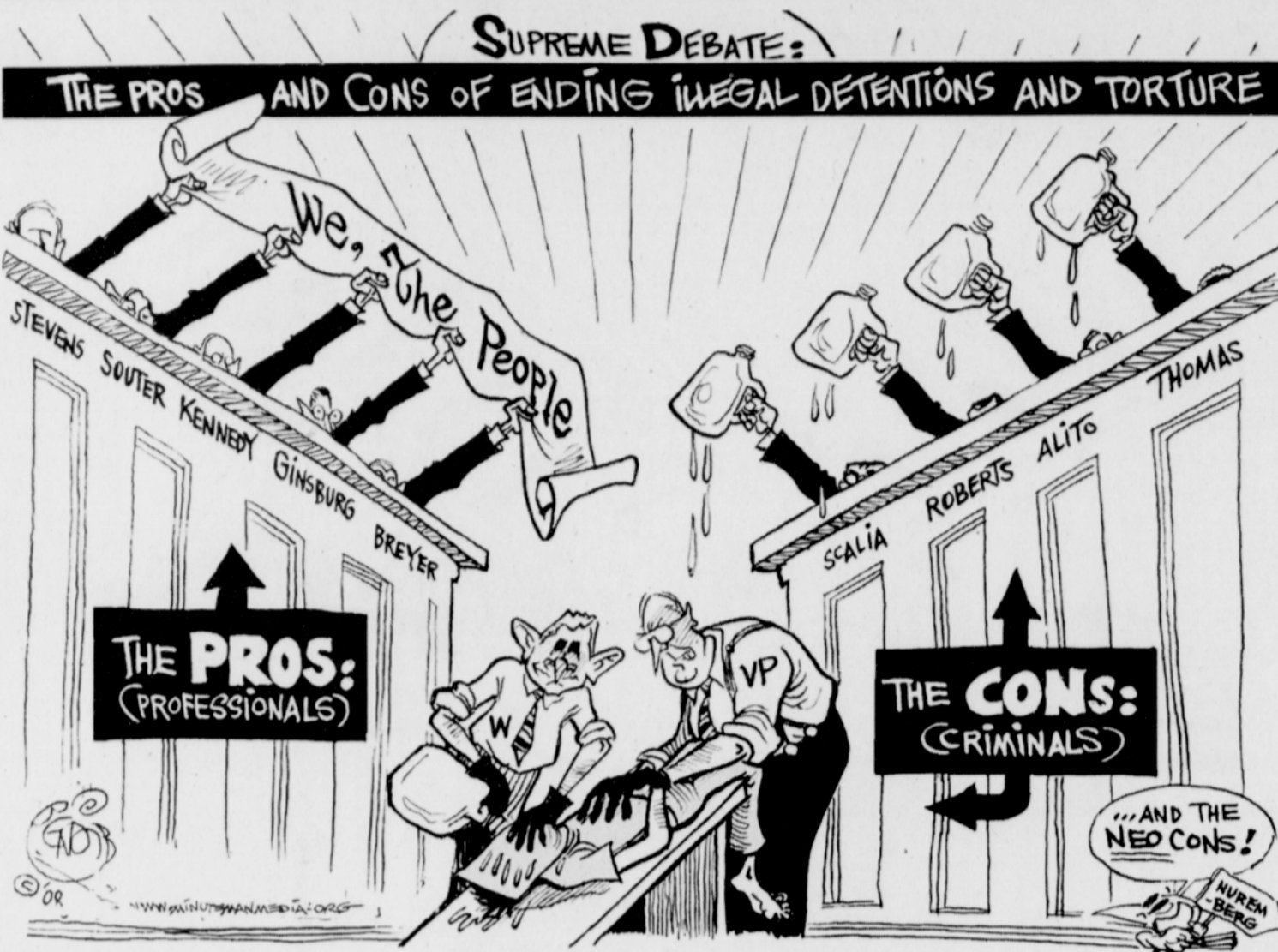
Tim Russert had not only read our report, but admitted that Meet the Press and other shows needed to do better. The producers and he then placed several black commentators on the show's roster including Eugene Robinson, Gwen Ifill and Michele Norris -- giving Meet the Press the deepest pool of black commentators of any Sunday morning show.

Since the release of our original study, the overall trend is inching toward greater inclusion. While white males still dominate the Sunday morning talk shows, there are more women and African Americans in front of the camera too.

As the 2008 presidential campaign kicks into high gear, with its first-ever African-American candidate, we know that the issue of race will be unavoidable. In order for that discussion to be meaningful, it must include perspectives from African-American citizens and commentators alike.

The National Urban League will continue to monitor and document progress by the networks. We are grateful that Tim Russert stood by us and with us in this important fight. We will miss him.

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



Family Doctor Shortage Looms

Our medical care is at risk

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

Most students graduating from medical school are faced with hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of debt.

Mandatory post-graduate residencies, lasting about three years, pay around \$45,000 per year, hardly enough to pay off the large student loans they had to take out to pay for their education.

While in training, doctors can defer these loans, but interest accumulates and the debt grows. For these very reasons, many newly minted doctors are choosing not to become primary care or pediatric physicians.

While they are the heart of the medical profession, these two specialties are two of the lowest paid. Not an attractive option for a young doctor with nearly \$300,000 in debt to repay.



Instead, the docs choose to enter higher paying specialty practices, creating a shortage in critical areas of health care. Congress must act now to alleviate some of the debt that doctors choosing to enter into family or pediatric care

Detroit, the rest of the country is in a similar predicament. Tuition costs are rising, repayment terms are tightening and the cost of living is increasing. All of these factors play into a doctor's decision to say "no" to those practices that serve families and say "yes" to a bigger pay day.

A shortage in family and pedi-

would like to enter these less "glamorous" and lower-paying practices.

Beginning this month, the U.S. Department of Education will no longer allow doctors to put off repayment of their medical school debt. Congress can act now to end this shortage. Repealing the law that ends deferment of medical school payments is a start. Expanding programs that allow doctors who work in impoverished areas to have a portion of their loan debt canceled is another. Tax incentives for doctors who start and maintain a family or pediatric practice is yet another.

Congress needs to begin exploring ways to combat the looming physician shortage now. The effects of any legislation may take a few years to produce visible results; any delay could create a gap in the medical care Americans receive.

Quick action is needed to ensure individuals and families can access the basic medical care they require.

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

With fewer doctors to access, many of us will not seek the help we need.

face before the impending shortage threatens the nation's already shaky health care system.

Adding to the pending shortage is that a large number—about one-third—of the country's doctors are over 55 and set to retire in the next 10 years. A recent analysis of medical professionals in Detroit projects a shortage of more than 4,000 physicians in Michigan by 2020.

Family medicine is expected to be hardest hit by the shortfall. While the research was limited to

ric positions puts America at risk. With fewer doctors to access, many of us will not seek the help we need to diagnose and treat many common diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure. Children won't get the routine medical care they need to stay healthy.

Untreated, many illnesses create greater health problems that require specialty doctors. The result: a greater financial burden for the patient.

As it stands, the government isn't making it easy on doctors who

What's Keeping Us in Our Seats?

Stand up for something!

BY ROSE WRIGHT-SCOTT

I believe this is the most exciting time in history. I also believe that the time has come that we must all take a stand. You've heard it said, "Rosa Parks sat down so we could stand up."

I wonder why many remain in their seats when many girls and boys in our country go to sleep hungry while food is being thrown away. How can anyone remain in their seats when HIV/AIDS continues to run rampant in our communities? The great Malcolm X said, "If you don't stand for something you're fall for anything."

I am certain that people remain in their seats for many reasons in-



cluding fear, lack of faith and past failures. Nevertheless, we must stand even in moments of fear.

God did not give us a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind. We have taken a stand, even in times of fear.

Past failures should not keep us in our seats any longer. We must remember that the race is not given to the swift nor to the strong, but to the one that endures to the end. We must continue to press, toward equality and justice for all people.

As people of faith and justice, we must also remember that all people don't get up out of their

seats at the same time or the same way. You may get out of your seat and stand on a picket line. Others may stand by serving on various local, state, and national boards and committees.

Someone else may stand with pencil and pad in hand. Others stand by reaching one person at a time, one day at a time.

I'm grateful for those that get out of their seats, fall down on their knees and cover us daily, for the work that God has called us to. However you choose to get out of your seat, just do it, stand up for something!

As you stand, don't judge another for how he or she chooses to take their stance on justice. What's keeping you in your seat?

Rose Wright-Scott is minister for program development in the United Church of Christ.

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