

OPINION

Correcting a Bush Injustice

Renewing the fight for Civil Rights

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

George W. Bush's term as president ended nearly a year ago but America is still feeling the effects of his presidency: an economic recession, two wars that drain both human and financial resources and a less than stellar reputation in the international community.

Thanks to a recently released report, we can now count neglecting civil rights among the many injustices former President Bush and his administration inflicted upon this country.

According a report from the Government Accountability Office, which reviewed activities of the federal Civil Rights Division from 2001 to 2007, lawyers within the division wanted to in-

vestigate several allegations of civil rights violations but were often not allowed to do so by their supervisors. Among the

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cases not investigated were allegations of voter intimidation and violations of employee rights.

The report also notes that, when compared to the tenure his predecessor, former President Clinton, Bush's oversight of the

Civil Right Division signaled a drop in the enforcement of several major laws that promote equality and justice.

The division filed about six lawsuits per year in an effort to

enforce anti gender and race discrimination laws whereas, under Clinton, it filed about 11 such suits each year. There was also a decrease in actions taken to enforce the Voting Rights Act, a law that prohibits discrimina-

tory electoral rules. Under Clinton, the division filed four suits per year; during Bush's time in office that number dropped to two cases a year.

To many, it may seem that we are living in a post-racial America. In reality, violent race-based crimes have increased over the last

year. Subtle and not so subtle discrimination and bias is alive and well in the work place. And, if you believe that the voting booth is free from such bias, we have to only think back to the 2004 election, where blacks in Florida reported being turned away from the polls. If you recall, the controversial election

went to President Bush.

Though Bush is gone from office, the effects of his actions remain.

Just as Obama has to work tirelessly to clean up the economy, he will also have to work to boost the efforts of the Civil Rights Division. This particular area of government was allowed to falter under Bush and, as a result, many entities may have gotten away with serious civil rights infractions.

The President will not only have to clean up the department, he'll also have to put the most serious offenders on notice, letting them know that their actions will no longer be tolerated.

Greg Mathis is a retired Michigan District Court judge and syndicated television show judge.



The Curse of State Lotteries

Going for the gold

BY WILLIAM A. COLLINS

In not-so-ancient times, gambling was viewed as a tool of the devil, much like sex or liquor (this was before illegal drugs).

People played the horses and the numbers through convenient newsstands and accommodating runners. The mob organized this efficient system, and the judicious application of hot lead settled any disputes. Las Vegas was Satan's embassy in the U.S., where he also practiced sex and divorce.

Times change. Las Vegas has morphed into a "family entertainment" center while gambling has cleverly donned the protective garb of "recreation." Other wagering centers have followed suit, as state after state and tribe after tribe have shed religious anathema and gone for the gold.

The gaming industry is now conducted in art-filled chambers of government, rather than in smoke-filled chambers of crime. Some feel that's not such a big step, but at least it provides for public input. If the town fathers of Black Hawk, Colo., want to hitch their wagon to a towering casino, it gets voted on. If the gaming public in

Missouri wants penny slot machines, there's formal debate. If Bethlehem, Penn., wants to try turning steel into gold by converting the abandoned mill to a casino, it's a public issue.

These high-profile decisions generate plenty of ink because

neighborhood where people can only afford to spend a little at a time. We'll make a big deal out of the winners so poor folks will erroneously feel that they have a reasonable shot at riches. This is how the devil has made his comeback. Only this time it's not the mob that is strewing temptation

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average citizens see themselves as stakeholders. Maybe not so much in terms of morality, but rather in terms of taxes, traffic, crime, image, jobs and various other side effects of a profitable if ethically challenged industry.

As much as casino owners love gambling addicts, public pressure has forced them at least to keep an eye out to protect such folk, and to fund support groups to help them get treatment.

Not so with the states themselves. They are totally mercenary. If we're going to extract money from the mentally ill, let's do it first-class. We'll put wagering outlets in every convenience store and gas station. We'll advertise on billboards and TV. We'll go into every poor neigh-

borhood where people can only afford to spend a little at a time.

Satan promotes other sly schemes as well. The recession is a hot one just now. With the resultant sag in gambling revenue, some states have chosen to throw another shovelful of dirt on morality's grave.

New Jersey, for example, always in our nation's ethical spotlight, decided to reinstate smoking in casinos, looking to attract more patrons. Illinois is looking at allowing free drinks on the gaming floor.

The only potentially deeper degradation of the industry would be to turn over the whole business to Wall Street. No doubt that's coming.

William A. Collins is a former state representative and a former mayor of Norwalk, Conn.

*Letter to
the Editor*

Make Health Care Better

We've come farther along on health care reform than ever before in the bills that have come out of the House and Senate. Now it is time to combine the bills into something even better for our citizens.

Americans need a public option for real competition, greater choice and lower costs. The House got that one right and it should be in the final bill.

Both bills impose dangerous new restrictions on women's reproductive health care, especially the House bill, and need to be removed from the final bill. The Senate proposed taxing benefits packages on some working Americans. The House did better by putting a small surcharge on the wealthiest Americans.

We also need to hold insurance companies to the same anti-trust laws as other companies to prevent monopolies and price gouging. The House bill would fix this, so it, too, should be included in the final bill.

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