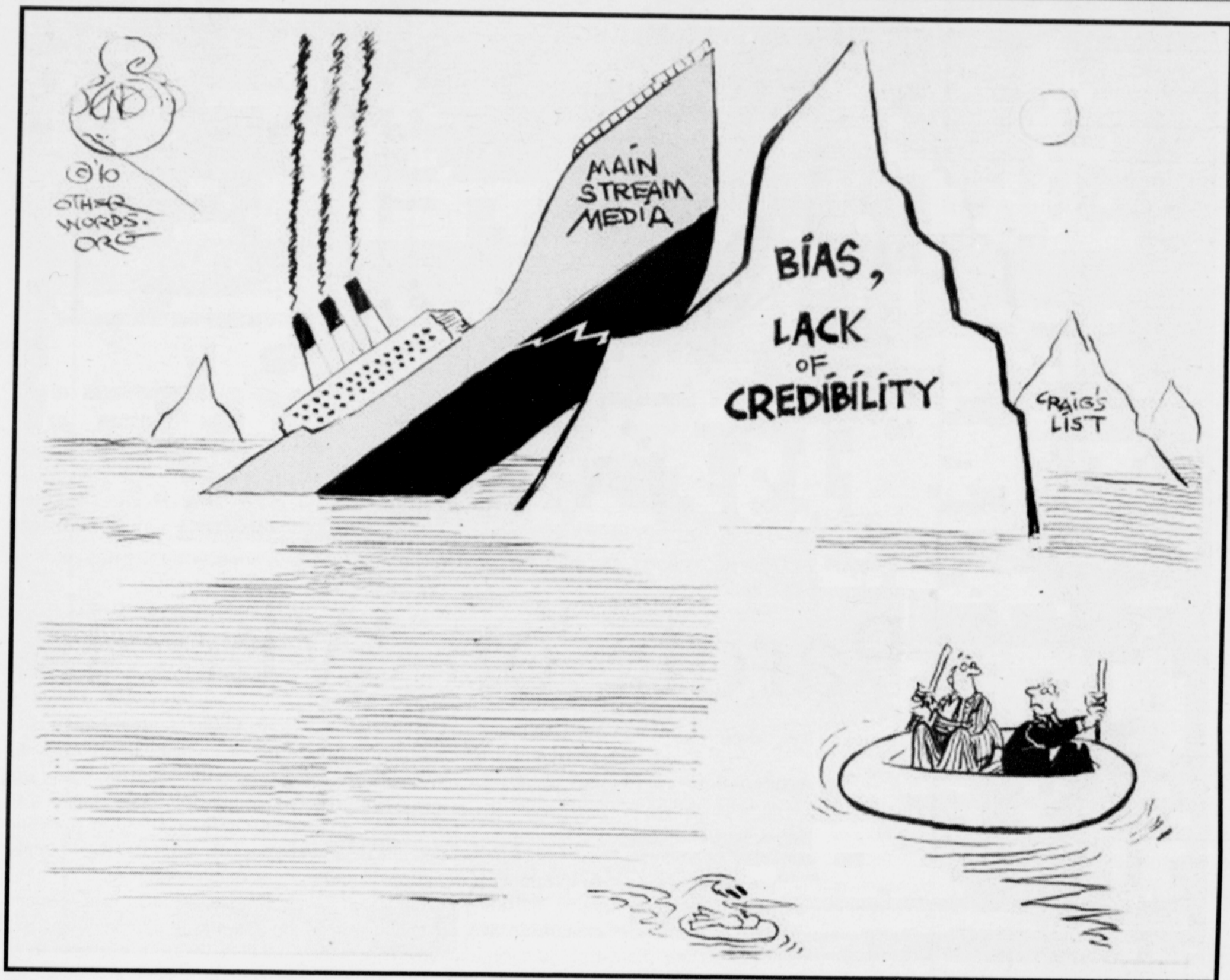


OPINION



On the Wrong Side of History

Tea Party Republican lost moral authority

"I am, therefore, asking the Congress to enact legislation giving all Americans the right to be served in facilities which are open to the public -- hotels, restaurants, theaters, retail stores, and similar establishments. This seems to me to be an elementary right," -- President John F. Kennedy, June 11, 1963

BY MARC H. MORIAL



This past Memorial Day, the nation paused to remember the hundreds of thousands of American soldiers who have fought and died in wars so that all of us could live free.

One of the saddest ironies of American history is the fact that in spite of slavery and racism, African Americans have given the last full measure of their devotion in every armed conflict since the Revolutionary War. That extraordinary patriotism, coupled with the civil rights leadership of Dr. King and others, was a major force in the movement to abolish legalized segregation culminating in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Since its passage,

hardly anyone, much less a candidate for the United States Senate has questioned the legal and moral soundness of that law, until now.

Rand Paul, the Tea Party Republican Senate nominee from Kentucky recently made it clear in a series of media interviews that he disagrees with the public accommodations provision in the Civil Rights Act on the grounds that it intrudes on the rights of private business owners.

In other words, if he had been around to vote for the Act, he would have joined openly racist southern conservatives in arguing that hotel, restaurant and retail store owners should have the right to bar African Americans from their establishments. That is

a bizarre and retrogressive view, more suited to a political campaign in 1910 than in 2010. It reveals Paul's constitutional illiteracy, but even more troubling, coming on the heels of the Arizona immigration law, it is the latest example of an insidious rise in racist thought pervading much of today's right-wing politics.

I am quite frankly shocked to hear of anyone openly endorsing racial discrimination - whether directly or indirectly - in this day and age. Paul's view is rooted in his libertarian philosophy which holds that individuals and the free market should be virtually free of government interference, regardless of the consequences. That view flies in the face of the 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution which extended equal

protections and voting rights to former slaves. It took decades of struggle and sacrifice as well as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to guarantee enforcement of those amendments. No right thinking American can seriously argue that our nation is not better because of those actions.

Rand Paul can claim that his position is rooted not in racism, but in the worship of individual rights and the free market. But, society's role has always been to protect against abuses from the free market. What other atrocities would he allow in the name of private enterprise? And how does Paul's disdain for government interference square with his support for a Constitutional ban on a woman's right to choose?

Rand Paul may have won a primary a few weeks ago, but in my view he has lost his moral authority. Clearly, he is on the wrong side of history.

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



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