

OPINION

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Time to Get Out and Vote

Too much is at stake

BY MARC H. MORIAL



On Tuesday, Nov. 2, the rallies, polls and pundits will be silenced and the American people will have the last word in what has developed as one of the most important and contentious mid-term elections in recent memory.

The stakes are high. In the midst of persistent high unemployment

and the worst economic crisis in our lifetimes, there are those who are demonizing the jobless and threatening to end their unemployment benefits.

There is the threat of the repeal of historic health care reform. There are those determined to extend job-killing foreign tax credits and tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans while shifting more of the tax burden to the middle class.

There are calls for the abolishment of the minimum wage, the Department of Education and a woman's right to choose. Immigrants, Muslim-Americans and other minority communities are wondering if they will still be wel-

comed in the land of equal opportunity on Nov. 3. And retired seniors, who just learned that they won't be getting a cost of living increase next year, would be put at further risk by those advocating for the privatization of Social Security.

People often say that in a democracy decisions are made by a majority of the people. Of course that is not true. Decisions are made by a majority of those who make themselves heard and who vote...

— Walter H. Judd, former Minnesota congressman

American families. And with 37 governorships up for grabs, issues that are being hotly debated at the state level, including school reform, immigration and health care spending will be affected.

change we voted for in 2008, or allowing a return to the policies that got us into this mess in the first place.

Our nation is facing tremendous challenges both at home and abroad. The overwhelming issue is jobs, but this election is also about our nation's moral direction and whether or not we will allow groups like the Tea Party movement to take us back to an era of overt racial, ethnic, religious and economic division.

The strength of our democracy has always been the fact that it is We the People who get to peacefully choose our leaders and shape our destiny by the power of the vote. As the Pulitzer Prize winning author, Alice Walker once said, "The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any."

So today and every day until Nov. 2, remember that the power for change is in your hands. Get out and vote.

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

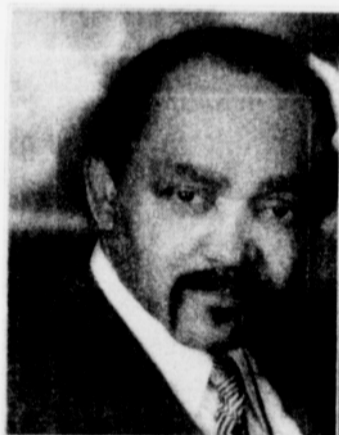
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Cease Public Defender Fees

Trend stacks up against the poor

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

Even if you've never encountered the criminal justice system, you're probably familiar with the phrase "You have the right to speak to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed to you."

What you may not know is that, in many states, defendants are being charged for that court appointed attorney. This increasing trend is leading many poor defendants to waive their legal right to representation and, instead, represent themselves.

A report released by the New York University School of Law's Brennan Center for Justice found



that 13 of the 15 states with the largest prison populations charged some sort of fee to defendants in need of a lawyer.

These charges include application fees and can add up to over \$1,000. The study found that in Michigan, many individuals facing misdemeanor charges decided 95 percent of the time to waive their right to an attorney because they couldn't afford the fees.

It's no surprise that this is common practice in states with large prison populations. With defendants representing themselves and going up against trained prosecutors, the chances of a conviction are much higher. This could lead to unlawful convictions and overcrowded prison populations.

In an ideal world, anyone ac-

cused of a crime would have the means to pay for an attorney. Unfortunately, most of those arrested come from poor communities and don't have the money - even \$1,000 - to pay for legal counsel. Charging for that service, in effect, denies them a basic right to representation.

Most of us believe that, on many levels, the criminal justice system is unfairly stacked against poor individuals. This trend of charging defendants for legal services does nothing to challenge those beliefs.

States must discontinue this practice and find another way to generate revenue. By charging for public defenders, the system is building yet another pipeline that directs individuals toward prison.

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

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