

# OPINION

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## College Dropouts Cost Us All

Working together to support students

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

Oftentimes, when we think of a student who drops out of college, we think of how that will affect them. We become concerned about the limited career options and decreased earning potential they'll face without a college degree. Rarely do we think of the cost to the larger society. But we should: college dropouts cost taxpayers billions in both the short

and long term. We owe to them – and ourselves – to ensure they complete their education.

A new report shows that states allocated more than \$6 billion to four year colleges and universities over a five year period to pay for the education of students who did not return for their second year. The study also shows that the federal government and states together spent almost \$3 billion on grants for students who didn't start their sophomore year.

In a depressed economy, it's particularly disturbing to learn that money is essentially being

wasted to pay for educations that are not being received. However, the answer is not, as many critics suggest, to discourage students who may not be ready for college from attending. Rather, schools and the government must work together to figure out how we can support students throughout their college careers and ensure they graduate.

Graduating from college is a great personal achievement. Doing so can dramatically change the graduate's quality of life. College graduates earn almost \$1 million more over the course of their career than those with a high school diploma. But it's not just the graduate's who win. The addi-

tional money they earn is then put back into the economy.

Additionally, a more educated workforce helps lift the American economy since the workers companies have to choose from will be more qualified. Making sure our young people finish college isn't important to just their personal success; it's key to our continued growth as a society.

Most parents – and society at large – expect young adults attending college to have the skills to handle all that is required of them. That isn't always the case. From dealing with increased financial pressures that come with paying for school to juggling a more rigorous course load to new

social pressures, college is a different world and, unfortunately, many students crack under the pressure.

Schools must work to increase their student service programs to provide financial, academic and psychological counseling to students at every step of their academic career.

College readiness is not always determined by academics; we must take the necessary steps to ensure our kids are able to handle all of the new pressures and responsibilities of college.

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



## End the Tax Cuts for the Wealthy

Priority should be job creation

BY EDIE RASELL

Congress has one major piece of unfinished business that must be tackled before the year ends. Policy makers will



need to decide what to do about tax cuts that will expire at the end of 2010.

During the Bush administration Congress passed two enormous tax cuts

that were skewed to benefit people with the highest incomes. To make the revenue losses appear less extreme, the cuts were phased in over a number of years and then scheduled to abruptly end on Dec. 31, 2010.

These gimmicks greatly reduced the 10-year cost of the tax cuts and made them more palatable to anyone concerned about the impact on the federal budget of trillions in lost revenue. But at the same time, supporters of the cuts assumed that Congress would make them permanent before they expired.

Now with the tax cuts fully phased in, the predicted impact on the federal budget has become a reality. In 2009, the cuts were responsible for over one-quarter of the federal government deficit. Of course, the economic downturn was the most important factor driving up the deficit. Fewer people working means people pay less in taxes. And while our safety net is meager, it is still costly when millions of additional people are

forced to rely on unemployment insurance, food stamps, and Medicaid.

As members of Congress consider the tax cuts, they need to remember that many voters believe the nation's priority must be putting people back to work. People need jobs. Moreover, the deficit will shrink only after the economy has regained strength, when working people and thriving businesses are paying taxes, and fewer people need to rely on safety net programs.

President Obama is proposing to extend the Bush tax cuts for lower-and-middle-income taxpayers. But he wants to end the cuts for 2 percent of tax payers: couples with incomes over \$250,000 and singles with income over \$200,000. This would bring in \$40 billion in additional tax revenue in 2011 and over \$600 billion over the next 10 years.

So what is a responsible member of Congress to do? Should the skewed Bush tax cuts that bestowed the greatest benefits on our wealthiest citizens be

extended, allowing the wealthiest to keep the \$40 billion next year? Or should this money be used for job creation?

Of 11 options examined by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, extending the tax cuts for the wealthy was the least effective way to create jobs. Providing a job-creation tax credit for businesses would generate four to six times as many jobs, and providing financial aid to state governments to minimize layoffs would create two to three times as many.

In recent years, the rich have gotten richer and everyone else has gotten the leftovers. Ending the Bush tax cuts for the highest-income tax payers would slightly reduce this disparity. The additional tax revenue could create jobs in the short run and reduce the deficit in the longer term. Congress should have no doubt about the best decision to make.

*Edie Rasell is minister for economic justice for the United Church of Christ.*



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