

OPINION

Hijacking America's 'Pledge of Allegiance'

No new taxes ideology puts nation at risk

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Over the long holiday weekend, children gathered in towns and cities around the country ooh-ing and aah-ing over fireworks, marching in parades, proud of their heritage and proudly waving the American flag.

Most of them still believe in the promise of America—a promise reflected in so many of the values and ideals that underlie the founding documents of our nation and the Pledge of Allegiance so many of us learned as children and repeated each morning in school.

But today the promise of America's Pledge of Allegiance is in jeopardy for millions of our nation's children, and right now many of our elected officials are letting another pledge take precedence. Americans for Tax Reform, the organization headed by Grover Norquist, created



the "Taxpayer Protection Pledge" 25 years ago and now "asks every candidate for elected office on the state and federal level to make a written commitment to their constituents to 'oppose and vote against tax increases.'"

Many of our current Congressional leaders have signed onto this pledge and now seem to believe it is the only pledge they need to honor. They are so determined and dug in they are willing to default on our country's obligations in order to stick to it—and their loyalty to this no-new-taxes pledge is putting millions of our children and entire nation at risk.

But what about those elected leaders' Pledge of Allegiance to the flag, and to the republic for which it stands, and to the promise of liberty and justice for all? Does that pledge still matter? And if so, how can there be liberty for all our children when our public education system is condemning so many of them to failure—unable to read and do math proficiently at grade level in this globalizing competitive world?

How can there be justice for our

nation's youngest citizens when they are the poorest age group in rich America and have gotten poorer—15.5 million in 2009? How could some Congressional leaders consider dismantling the health care program so many of our poor children rely on and propose cuts in federal nutrition programs at a time when hunger and food insecurity are rampant and growing?

And how can there be justice for our children if the millionaires and billionaires and the richest corporations don't pay anywhere near their fair share and have reaped hugely disparate benefits from Bush-era tax cuts while the nation is mired in debt contributing to the widest gap between rich and poor ever recorded? How can any member of Congress even consider balancing the budget on the backs of our babies and children who are losing their homes and all sense of security about tomorrow?

President Obama made some of the choices very plain in his recent press conference.

As he put it: "If we choose to keep those tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires, if we choose to keep a tax break for corporate jet

owners, if we choose to keep tax breaks for oil and gas companies that are making hundreds of billions of dollars, then that means we have to cut some kids off from getting a college scholarship... Before we ask our seniors to pay more for health care, before we cut our children's education, before we sacrifice our commitment to the research and innovation that will help create more jobs in the economy, I think it's only fair to ask an oil company or a corporate jet owner that has done so well to give up a tax break that no other business enjoys."

Our nation does have a huge deficit problem—but Congress has tunnel vision on the wrong one. Our most dangerous deficits are our values deficit and narrow self interest which pose the biggest threat to our future and our children's future and the very idea of America.

Our failure to invest in our children has already led to a deficit in human capital and companies are troubled by an undereducated workforce that can barely keep up with business today. If we don't fix our education system and prepare all of our children to thrive in the global economy, America's promise may die forever.

As we celebrate our strong nation's independence, let us all pledge to ensure all our children a more—not less—just land.

Let us demand that all our political leaders pledge not to ask children to sacrifice their hopes and health and food and education while asking for no sacrifice from powerful billionaires and corporations who have gained far more than their fair share.

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.

Anticipating Supreme Court Blockbusters

Justices should stay clear of politics

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

The U.S. Supreme Court ended its spring term with a bang, siding with discount retailer Wal-Mart and blocking a sex discrimination lawsuit filed on behalf of women who work for the company. Though the court's decision in the case will forever impact the way class action lawsuits are handled, it may seem like small potatoes when compared to the cases the court has on its docket for its fall term.

When the Court resumes this fall, the Justices will rule on some of today's hottest and most controversial issues, including same sex marriage; the health care law, immigration and, perhaps, affirmative action. Their final rulings will impact American life in a significant way for decades to come.

The gay rights movement has picked up steam in recent years and, now, a key issue in that fight will be argued in front of the court. Justices will decide whether or not it is unconstitutional for the government

to not recognize same sex marriages.

Currently only seven states and the District of Columbia issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

Four other states allow same-sex unions. Unfortunately, the federal government doesn't recognize any of these unions. The Defense of Marriage Act was passed in 1996 and barred federal recognition of same-

sex marriages and allows states to do the same if they wish. The Justice Department, spurred on by President Obama, has decided to stop defending DOMA in court, paving the way for a reversal of the law.

On the healthcare front, states are challenging the federal government's right to require citizens to purchase health insurance. The sweeping healthcare reform ushered in by President Obama mandates that all individuals be covered under a health insurance policy. The laws opponents say Congress overstepped its Constitutional authority. If the Court shares this viewpoint, the reform we all pushed for could fall flat. If it does not, the law's detractors will have suffered a major legal and political blow.

The Court's ruling on immigration reform would influence the way

the U.S. folds current undocumented immigrants into society and will affect the way we protect our borders. Arizona and a smattering of other states with hardline immigration laws where illegal immigrants are aggressively identified, prosecuted and deported, may very well learn whether or not those laws are legal under the U.S. Constitution.

There's no way of telling how the Court will vote. We must temper our optimism for progressive rulings with the fact that the current court is dominated by Justices appointed by Republican presidents. Though the Justice's decisions should not be based on politics, it is not unreasonable to think the Justices share the same ideology as the particular president who appointed them.

Let's hope that the Justices will stay far away from politics when they resume court in the fall. It has been decades since the court has heard cases that have such a far reaching impact on American society; we need them to in their assessments and interpretations of the laws and not lean on their conservative viewpoints.

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



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