

OPINION

Be Careful What You Cut

Fighting for justice
for our children

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Right before the U.S. House of Representatives left for the summer to go home to campaign for your vote, they voted to extend the Bush era tax cuts for the richest Americans millionaires and billionaires.

For more than 10 years, the richest one percent have received almost \$750 billion from these tax cuts. Income and wealth inequality have grown astronomically threatening the very fabric of our democracy. The top one percent in our nation now possesses more net worth than the bottom 90 percent combined.

In 2008, the 400 highest-income taxpayers earned as much as the combined tax revenue of 22 state governments with almost 42 million citizens. It's way past time to reset our moral and economic compass, demand a more just tax system, where those with the most pay their fair share and stop the reverse Robin Hood policies that take from the poor



and young to give to the rich and powerful. There should not be one new dime in tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires as long as millions of children in America are poor, hungry, uneducated and without health coverage. A nation that does not stand for its children does not stand for anything and will not stand tall in the future.

Like Thomas Jefferson, I tremble for my country when I think that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever.

Yet the extension of the tax cuts for the wealthiest American, especially on top of the cuts approved in the Ryan budget, passed by the full House defies the prophets, apostles and tenets of all great faiths as well as common decency and economic common sense.

The most recent vote continues to give huge tax breaks to those who need them least, while shaving away lifelines of survival from those who need them most. It would cut eligibility for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and the Child Tax Credit (CTC), two of the most effective investments we have that lift children out of poverty and from the

American Opportunity Tax Credit, which helps struggling families pay for their children's college.

These cuts would push 900,000 children into poverty and at least 6.4 million children into deeper poverty. This is an unconscionable act when 16.4 million children are living in poverty 7.5 million in extreme poverty.

This is a year of stark political, economic and moral choices. Those who caused the deficit should be asked to pay to close it and not be rewarded with more tax breaks, which will increase the deficit and shave already inadequate safety investments.

Children under five are the poorest age group in America, and one in four infants, toddlers and preschoolers are poor during the years of greatest brain development. If you believe as I do that we have more just and sensible choices, like helping babies during their early childhood development years rather than helping billionaires who need not one additional material thing, then speak up and fight back.

Cascading federal, state, county and city budget cuts adding up to hundreds of billions of dollars are being pushed by lawmak-

ers pursuing a toxic ideological agenda of no new revenues, expanded tax cuts for the top one percent of Americans and billions of cuts for poor children and families.

Our nation's greatest deficit is not one of money, but of values and priorities that leave millions of children without hope or a vision of the future worth striving for in our militarily and materially powerful but spiritually anemic nation.

That's why the Children's Defense Fund has launched a new campaign to protect children from budget cuts at the national, state and local levels. The "Be Careful What You Cut" campaign lays out the irrefutable economic case that cutting children from the budget now costs all of us more later. It's a simple calculation really. Protect children now or pay later.

Together we can and must fight for justice for our children and protect them from draconian tax cuts and budget choices that threaten their survival, education and preparation for the future. If they are not ready for tomorrow, neither is America.

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

Living Legends Who Share Our Values

Honoring Eric
Holder and Bernette
Johnson

BY MARC H. MORIAL

Two recipients of National Urban League awards at our recent annual conference in New Orleans are emblematic of our "Occupy the Vote" campaign to protect the voting rights of millions of Americans this November.

Attorney General Eric Holder has likened the sudden proliferation of voter ID laws to modern day "poll taxes," and has made stopping voter suppression one of the Justice Department's top priorities. But Louisiana's first African American woman Supreme Court Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson, who is the second longest serving judge on the state



court and thus in line to be the next Louisiana Chief Justice this February, is currently facing an unconstitutional effort to deny her that seat – a clear violation of the Voting Rights Act.

I was proud to present a Living Legend award to A.G. Holder and the President's Award to Justice Johnson at our Whitney M. Young awards gala on July 28.

Since Holder's 2009 appointment by President Obama as the first African American Attorney General in American history, he has reclaimed the nation's commitment to fairness, and expanded opportunity.

Over the past three years, his Civil Rights Division has filed more criminal civil rights cases than ever before; and he has made significant strides in combating discrimination in the nation's housing and lending markets. His commitment to voting rights is especially noteworthy.

In response to the outbreak of voter ID and restriction laws across the country, Attorney General Holder has initiated thor-

ough reviews of proposed voting changes "in order to guard against disenfranchisement, and to help ensure that none of these proposals would have a discriminatory purpose or effect."

Last December, his Justice Department rejected South Carolina's new voter ID law, finding that it discriminated against minority voters. And in June, the Federal District Court in Miami granted an injunction blocking Florida's new and "onerous" restrictive voter registration law. The Justice Department also found that Florida's effort to purge its voter rolls of suspected non-citizens may violate Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act.

Justice Johnson was first elected to serve on the Louisiana Supreme Court in 1994 and is currently the second longest serving associate justice on the court. Highly respected for her legal acumen and fairness, she has received numerous awards, including the 2009 Distinguished Jurist Award presented by the Louisiana

Bar Association and the 2000 Medal of Honor, which I was honored to present to her during my last term as Mayor of the City of New Orleans.

For much of her life, Justice Johnson has worked as an advocate for social justice and civil rights. Her election to the Louisiana Supreme Court in 1994 made her only the third African American jurist ever to serve on the state's highest court, after the Supreme Court ruled in 1991 that the state's method of electing Supreme Court Justices ensured that black voters would never be able to elect a black justice. The current move to deny her the Chief Justice seat is clearly in violation of the law.

Eric Holder and Bernette Johnson have earned their status as National Urban League honorees, and we will continue to stand with them in support of the values we share.

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

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