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Food stamp cuts hurt poor

THE WASHINGTON POST

Last year, under the flag of welfare reform, Congress passed a series of deep and gratuitous cuts in food stamp benefits. This year Congress thinks it has found a way to cut an additional \$1.2 billion over five years from the food stamp program's administrative costs. The question is, what happens to the money...

The agriculture committees, which have jurisdiction over the program, are busily trying to capture the savings for their traditional agricultural constituents. Such a step would represent another in a series of such extractions of funds from programs for the poor for the benefit of sectors that are better off. The Agricultural Research, Extension and Education Reform Act of 1997 hasn't gotten a lot of ink, but as Congress struggles to adjourn, it is one of the bills that matters most to a group of farm-state members from both houses.

At issue are the considerable administrative costs of signing up welfare mothers, not just for welfare but for food stamps. The welfare block grants that Congress gave the states last year implicitly included funds to cover these costs. The assumption was that the states would then not apply to recover the costs a second time under the food stamp program. The Congressional Budget Office, however, which over the years has developed a rather jaded view of state behavior in the face of such temptations, assumed they would try to recover a second time — to double-dip. It incorporated that assumption into its estimates of food stamp costs for the years ahead. The Senate Agriculture Committee noticed the higher estimates, figured out the source and voted to limit the double-dipping, thereby, under congressional accounting, "saving" the \$1.2 billion.

Then came the question of what to do with the savings. They could, of course, be plowed back into the food stamp program. Instead, much of the money will apparently end up going to agricultural research and, if the House has its way, some to crop insurance as well. The research projects may be worthy; the insurance program is not. But that's not the point. The point is that the food stamp program, which sets the implicit national income floor, is not at the table — not at this table, anyway. The states ought not be allowed to double-dip. The poor who were last year's casualties should share in the savings from this measure.

Truth in video and history

By Courtland Milloy
THE WASHINGTON POST

After viewing a newly released videocassette of "Rosewood," a movie about a terrible race riot in Florida in 1923, I saw an unusual offer appear on the screen.

"We hope you enjoyed the Warner Home Video presentation of 'Rosewood,'" a voice-over

said. "But if you did not, Warner Home Video will refund the cost of your rental, up to \$3."

This was the first time I had ever heard of such a "rental satisfaction guarantee" directly from a movie studio, and seeing it flash onto the screen after "Rosewood," of all movies, was almost enough to ruin an otherwise satisfying film.

I called Warner Home Video in Burbank, Calif., where a spokesman tried to convince me that the money-back offer was actually a vote of confidence in the young African American director John Singleton and the film that came out in March.

"All we are saying is that this is a wonderful film by a terrific filmmaker and that you are guaranteed to like it — or your

money back," the spokesman said, adding that "very few" viewers have requested refunds.

However, the spokesman was unable to cite any other film that came with such a money-back offer. Surely, there must be others that are as "wonderful" as "Rosewood," which features black people standing strong in the face of not-so-wonderful white racist behavior.

I recently saw "The Edge," a movie about three men (one black) and a bear in the woods. After whining interminably

about being lost in the woods, the black man accidentally cuts himself with a knife (what a twist on a stereotype), drawing blood that attracts the bear that kills him long before the credits roll.

That's the kind of movie that ought to come with a refund.

Unlike the more popular movies about race in which white people are the heroes — such as "Mississippi Burning" (which didn't offer a satisfaction guarantee, either) — "Rosewood" puts black people at center stage in the fight for

freedom.

I think Warner Home Video is being disingenuous when it says that the disclaimer is not intended to appease whites who might be offended by all of that. Indeed, efforts to deny the massacre at Rosewood have been apparent from the beginning, and they persist to this day.

Just because people don't like seeing the truth is no reason to give them a refund.

COURTLAND MILLOY is a Washington Post columnist.

Playing big-league ball costly to host communities

By Michael Walden
SPECIAL TO THE POST

RALEIGH — North Carolina is moving into the major leagues. Of course, Charlotte has the Hornets and Panthers. Now, North Carolina is home to the NHL Hurricanes, and groups in the Triad are trying to attract a Major League Baseball team.

As a fan of major league sports, this is all good news to me. Now I don't have to travel as far to see the top sports talent in the world. Also, I can now root for home-state major league teams.

So I thank the leaders of these efforts to bring major league teams to North Carolina. They have perceived a significant fan base in the state for major league sports, and have acted to meet this demand. However, in their efforts to bring major league sports to North Carolina and, more importantly, in order to secure public funding for these efforts, the major league sports promoters have claimed widespread economic benefits from pro sports. That is, they have said that not only will major league sports provide an alternative leisure activity for hungry sports fans, but they will also serve as a "jump-starter" for the local economy. Hence, the argument continues, both

sports fans and non-sports fans benefit from the presence of a major league sports team, and so it makes sense for public funds to be used to attract the teams and build the stadiums and arenas.

Economists and other analysts have generally minimized the alleged widespread economic benefits of major league sports. Although pro sports receive much media attention, they're really small businesses in terms of jobs and economic output. Furthermore, much of the spending that occurs at pro games is spending by local residents that is simply redirected from other local leisure activities. For example, Jane and John Fan spend money at a Hornets game instead of spending money at a local restaurant and movie.

But what about the notoriety that comes to a city or region that has a major league sports team? Won't seeing the area's name in the team standings and on ESPN and other networks bring more business inquiries and locations? Doesn't a major league team give valuable advertising to an area?

This question has been tested in several studies which have examined the determinants of economic growth in cities. The studies have found no impact of the presence of a

major league team on a city's economic growth. In fact, some studies have found a major league team is related to slower economic growth! Instead, basic economic factors like quality of the workforce and business costs largely determine how fast a city grows.

A problem with these studies is that they are dated, having been completed with data from the 1960s and 1970s. Economic relationships can certainly change over time, and so a valid question is whether the relationship between local economic growth and major league sports teams is different in the 1990s than in previous decades. To address this question I conducted a new study using data from the 1990s.

I examined the determinants of growth in jobs from 1990 to 1994 in 46 cities. The cities were from all across the country, of various sizes, and included cities with and without major league teams. The results were consistent with those found in the previous studies, with some additional insights. Cities with a greater percentage of high school graduates and with a lower cost-of-living have added jobs at a faster rate in the 1990s. Also, cities spending more per resident on police and less on transfer programs have grown faster.

What about the presence of

GOP blinks on affirmative action

By George Wilson
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER
PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

When the words "affirmative action" are muttered on Capitol Hill, the result is a bitter partisan battle. On one side there are some Democrats who like to portray themselves as the guardians of equality and fairness. These are lofty ideals even if they don't accurately capture their true feelings. Most Republicans say that they are opposed to affirmative action because it promotes quotas and preferential treatment.

With both sides locked into their positions, the House of Representatives began consideration of a bill that would permanently affect equality for those seeking an even playing field.

Congressman Charles Cannady (R-Fla.) introduced a bill sarcastically named "The

Civil Rights Act of 1997." The intention of the legislation was to permanently abolish affirmative action in all federal programs. Cannady's proposed legislation had been languishing in the House Judiciary Committee, because the House Republican leadership knew what the reaction would be from those in support of affirmative action and in this case they were "on the money."

The Congressional Black Caucus joined hands with the Hispanic Caucus and a coalition of civil rights organization to alert their constituents to "prepare for battle over the Cannady bill." However, Wade Henderson, executive director of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights agreed that Republicans had the numbers to get the ill-conceived bill out of the Judiciary Committee. "It appears that they

have the votes. However, we want to make the political cost high for support of the bill," said Henderson and the coalition opposed the bill, have their hands on the political pulse of the nation and identified those moderate Republicans who represent districts that have fairly large groups of women, Hispanics, Asians and African Americans. The intent was to put political pressure on GOP members and make sure they had a difficult time explaining their vote when they returned to their home districts.

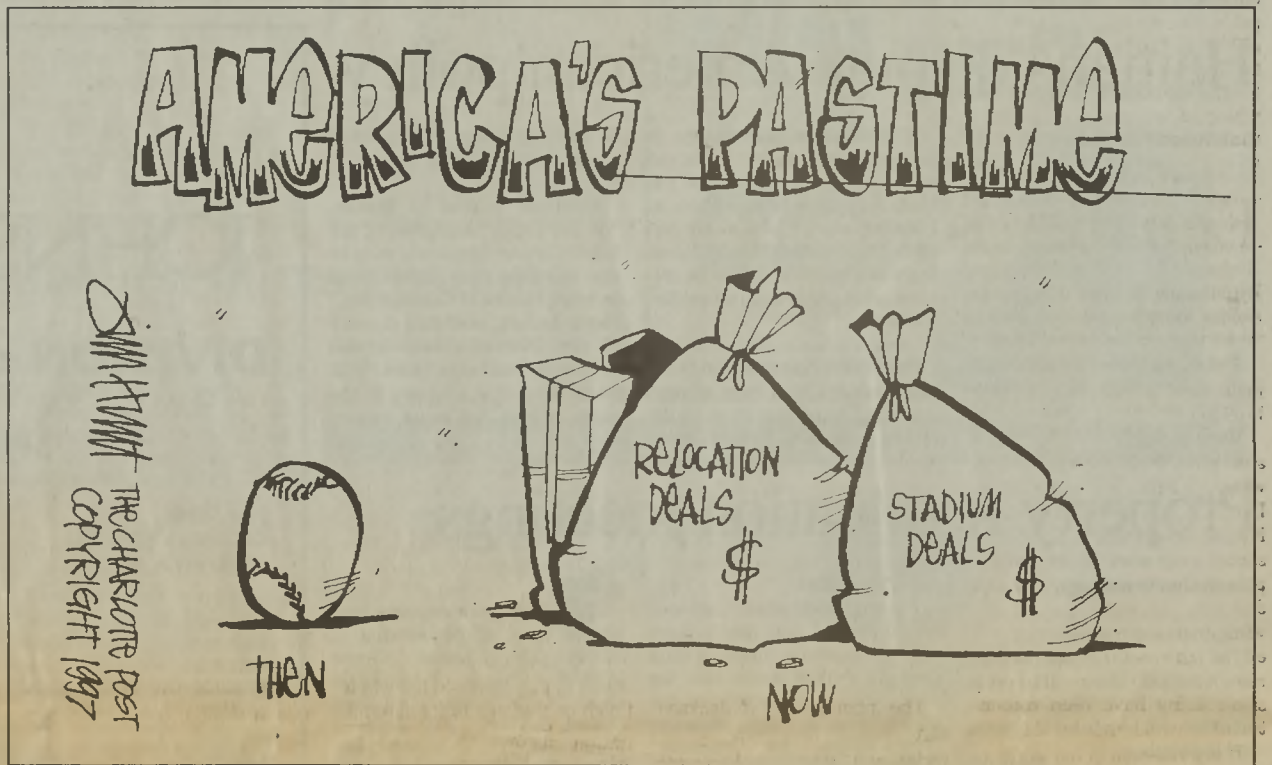
With the stage then set for a real political battle over affirmative action, the House decided to set a vote on the controversial issue. Members of the CBC were in place and the heads of the nation's major civil rights organizations were joined in the hearing room by scores of supporters,

indicating that the sometime slumbering civil rights establishment had come alive.

I don't know if it was the sight of this packed hearing room or pre-election year common sense, but when the "moment of truth" arrived the Republicans decided to table the Cannady bill. After all of the blustering and posturing the Republicans accepted the fact that pursuing the abolition of affirmative action would be a political "poison pill."

By tabling the bill, it simply means that the legislation can be brought back at any time for consideration. However, the chances are slim that the Republicans will want to push an issue like affirmative action anytime soon with major elections scheduled for 1998.

GEORGE WILSON is Capitol Hill correspondent for the American Urban Radio Network.



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FILE PHOTO

Professional sports are great entertainment, but can they be a community asset?

a major league sports team? Actually, I found that cities with a major league sports team have grown more slowly in the 1990s. Perhaps this is because such cities have devoted valuable resources to subsidizing the teams rather than improving the skill level of their workers or providing more protection for citizens and property owners.

So the lesson for cities and states is clear. Major league sports teams certainly provide excitement and enjoyment for residents. But be careful in

expecting too much from the teams. Evidence from previous decades as well as from the 1990s shows that cities with major league sports teams don't grow faster than other cities, after accounting for other important factors such as the workforce's education level and the local cost-of-living. This throws into question the use of public dollars to subsidize the teams or their facilities. In short, while a major league team may score with the fans, they strike out, fumble, and turnover the ball for the

taxpayer.

Factors influencing job growth in the 1990s are as follows: Increasing growth, higher high school graduation rate, lower cost-of-living, and more per-capita police spending. Decreasing growth: more spending per resident on transfers and presence of a major league team.

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