

commentary

Childwatch

We Can Reduce the Deficit Without Hurting Children

By Marian Wright Edelman

At a time when more than half of African-American children live in single-parent families, 46 percent live in poverty, and the black infant mortality rate is more than double that of white infants, there is a radical and reckless social revolution being rushed through Congress. Millions of black children will be hurt.

The huge and irresponsible dismantling of and cuts in aid to children — child care, foster care, and nutritional, disability, and welfare assistance — in the Gingrich block grant and budget plan (passed by the House in March), and similar Senate budget proposals would deny essential survival services to millions of our children.

In recent months, experts across the political spectrum have identified different steps that could be taken to reduce the federal deficit without permanently shredding the safety net put in place over the past 60 years for hungry, poor, disabled, abused, and neglected children.

Following is a list of some of the ways to reduce the deficit by \$179.65 billion over five years without hurting children and to help make crucial investments to give our children a Healthy Start, Head Start, Fair Start, Safe Start, and Moral Start.

Step 1. As recommended by many defense experts even before the break-up of the Soviet Union, maintain a Navy with 10 aircraft carrier groups rather than 12. Savings over five years: \$3.99 billion.

Step 2. Charge airlines, air taxis, and private planes the costs that air traffic control systems incur on their behalf. Savings over five years: \$7.17 billion.

Step 3. Increase the cigarette tax to 99 cents per pack. This would both reduce smoking and help pay some of the health and other costs society has to bear for smokers. Revenues over five years: \$49.1 billion.

Step 4. Stop subsidizing agricultural exports. Ending these subsidies, most of which go to large wheat exporters, would be consistent with the increased emphasis on free trade. And the subsidies have not been shown to increase exports anyhow. Savings over five years: \$3.39 billion.

Step 5. Eliminate the tax break that allows property or stock held by the owner until he or she dies to be exempt from certain capital gains taxes that are never paid on the growth of that asset. Taxing these gains like all other capital gains (except when the property passes to a spouse) would make taxes fairer. Revenues over five years: \$37.5 billion.

Step 6. Repeal tax exemptions for income earned by U.S. companies on operations in Puerto Rico and other territories. This special corporate subsidy has little positive effect for the territories but does give huge "welfare" payments to the corporate users. Savings over five years: \$19.7 billion.

Step 7. Eliminate airport grants-in-aid. The major beneficiaries of large government grants to airports to expand capacity and improve terminals are airlines, corporate general aviation, and passengers who, on average, are more affluent than Americans as a whole. Savings over five years: \$11.9 billion.

Step 8. Buy only 40 C-17s for the Air Force and buy commercial airliners in lieu of the rest. Thirty-two of these planes have been authorized. Budget authority exists to buy as many as 94. If this were limited to 40 C-17s and the rest replaced with commercial planes that would give the Air Force the same airlift capacity, it would both save billions and minimize the purchase of a troubled airplane. Savings over five years: \$8.1 billion.

Step 9. Lower the limit on the share of a home loan eligible for the mortgage interest deduction from \$1 million to \$300,000. This would affect only the 1.2 million taxpayers with the largest mortgages (and the most expensive homes). It would have no effect on the vast majority of homeowners or on the ability of owners of expensive homes to deduct interest on \$300,000 worth of principal. Revenues over five years: \$34.8 billion.

Step 10. Charge market prices for electricity sold by the government. Currently the government sells excess power from its 129 plants to private power companies at below-market prices. Savings over five years: \$4.0 billion.

If we took advantage of and implemented all 10 ways to save taxpayers money, we would reduce "corporate welfare" and wasteful defense expenditures, and in the process save hundreds of billions of dollars without harming those who need help for the basics of life or raising payroll or income taxes for middle-income Americans.

The issue in the budget fight is not about money; it's about values and whether this nation will keep the needs of voiceless young people a priority.

Marian Wright Edelman is the president of the Children's Defense Fund, a leading voice for children, and a leader of the Black Community Crusade for Children (BCCC), whose mission is to leave no child behind. For additional information on how you can join the Crusade, call 1-800-ASK-BCCC.

To Be Equal

Affirmative Action and The Supreme Court

By Hugh B. Price

I am deeply distressed over the decision by the United States Supreme Court that wrongfully challenges the Federal programs which award benefits on the basis of race.

The Adarand Constructors v. Peña decision casts a cloud over all efforts to use affirmative action to counteract discrimination.

It signals a profound retreat by the nation's highest court from the protections it has provided minorities against patterns of discrimination and disadvantage in this country.

Nevertheless, we of the Urban League remain determined to press for full inclusion of African Americans, other minorities and women in the educational, political and economic opportunity structure.

With a bare majority of five justices, the Court has made it more difficult for Congress to help minorities get a portion of the government construction business.

Affirmative action is the political wedge issue du jour. Unwilling to address the economic vulnerability of ordinary Americans, politicians are striving, admittedly with some success, to distract them from their insecurities by pitting the majority against minorities.

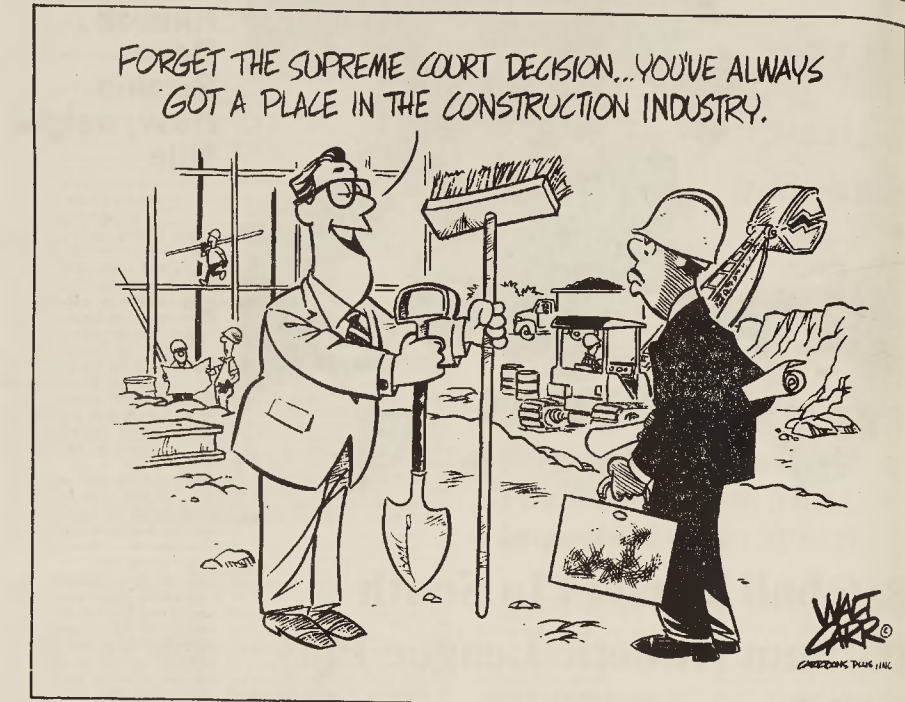
Their cynical tactic mustn't be allowed to work because it undermines the very social cohesion America yearns for.

This is much too fundamental and fateful an issue to be debated by sound bites or decided by dueling anecdotes.

At stake are the hopes of millions of fellow minority and female citizens, the resilience of our economy which must rely on their talent, and the future of an inclusive society.

I don't intend to analyze affirmative action dispassionately here, but rather to advocate passionately for it, having closely analyzed its pros and cons.

I have experienced and witnessed its net benefit for minorities in par-



Vantage Point

The Rainbow Coalition A Decade Later

By Ron Daniels

Attending the recent Annual Policy Conference of Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition in Atlanta reminded me that the Rainbow idea has been on the scene for nearly a decade. Originally developed by former State Representative Mel King during his campaign for Mayor of Boston, Rev. Jesse Jackson picked up the concept and popularized it through his campaigns for President in 1984 and 1988. In essence the concept of the Rainbow is to forge a multi-racial liberal-left coalition to promote a progressive social justice and policy agenda with and on behalf of poor and working people, people of color, women, and the struggling middle class. No concept, in my judgement has held out more promise for fundamental change in this country in this century than the idea of the Rainbow Coalition. Unfortunately, no concept has also engendered so much hope and produced so much disillusionment.

The 1984 Jackson for President crusade was one of the most electrifying campaigns this nation has ever witnessed as Rev. Jesse Louis Jackson injected the vision and vitality of the civil rights movement into the electoral political arena. The crusade captured some 3.5 million votes and Rev. Jackson went into the Democratic Convention in San Francisco with more than 400 delegates. Rev. Jackson's nationally televised speech at the Convention captured the imagination of the nation and catapulted him into national and international prominence as one of the preeminent leaders of our time.

The challenge facing Rev. Jackson after the 1984 election was to harvest the energy and enthusiasm engendered by his presidential campaign to create a permanent independent political movement and organization. Many who became Rainbow activists, hoped he would build a mass based, democratic membership organization or even a Rainbow party to fight for change at the ballot box and in the streets. However, it is the challenge to build a permanent organization that has proved to be the Achilles tendon of the man who has described himself as a "tree shaker not a jelly maker."

For whatever reasons, Rev. Jackson was slow to capitalize on the enormous momentum generated by the '84 campaign. Months elapsed before the Rainbow faithful were convened to assess the campaign and discuss the feasibility of creating a permanent structure. Once an agreement to develop the National Rainbow Coalition was reached with Rev. Jackson's guidance, it was well into 1986 before the founding convention of the National Rainbow Coalition was finally held. By then disillusion-

ticular and America in general.

Let's begin with the basic issue of whether affirmative action actually works — for its beneficiaries and the broader society.

The image of affirmative action most frequently conjured up is that of an enforcement mechanism designed to compensate for discrimination by granting its victims extra consideration in the allocation of educational, employment and contracting opportunities.

But let us be clear. Affirmative action is much more. It's also a philosophy of inclusion embraced by institutions and employers which are moved by conscience, pressured by constituencies, or, best of all, persuaded by the payoff to the organization.

Critics say the benefits have been paltry. Not so. The proof of impact is found in the obviously changed ethnic composition of college campuses and corporate work places.

Without being Pollyannish about it, there's simply no denying the striking progress that minorities and women have made in entering the American mainstream.

Take my college alma mater as a case in point. In 1959, when I entered college, there were five black students in my freshman class and fewer than 20 of us on campus out of 1,000 students.

Today my alma mater has 119 African-American students out of 1,593. This progress is typical of higher education today.

Much the same is true of the white collar labor market. The work force of virtually every Fortune 500 company is vastly more integrated today.

We once looked to the Supreme Court for racial justice, but now its decisions can stifle progress toward inclusion. But rest assured: we will refine existing tools and design new ones.

We will not relent in our efforts to help our constituents gain access to the American mainstream.

ment over the slow pace of organizational development, poor follow through by Rev. Jackson and the lack of democracy within the Rainbow had already set in.

The prospect of another Jackson for President Campaign in 1988, however, rekindled interest in the Rainbow among the true believers. As the election season approached those of us on the national staff worked to transform what had become a tired idea into a living reality. By early 1988 a number of states including New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, California, Washington State and Vermont had met the qualifications to become fully accredited Rainbow State Chapters setting the stage for one of the most remarkable campaigns in the history of this country.

The 1988 Jackson for President Campaign garnered more than 7 million votes, carried 100 Congressional Districts and swept into the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta with nearly 1,200 delegates. Rev. Jackson failed to win the nomination, but he successfully dominated the public policy debate while receiving more votes than any runner up in the history of the Democratic Party. In fact Rev. Jackson captured more votes than Walter Mondale had won the nomination with in 1984. Understandably, expectations were high that the Rainbow Coalition would now mature into a formidable progressive voice and force in American politics. Once again, however, Rev. Jackson would fail to meet the challenge at hand.

In the days and months following the general election Rev. Jackson inexplicably moved away from the idea of a mass based membership organization in favor of a Jackson centered campaign style organization with skeletal structures at the state level. He insisted on naming the state chairs for the state Rainbows even in those states that had worked through the arduous process of becoming chartered state chapters. Rev. Jackson also firmly committed the Rainbow to an inside strategy as it relates to the Democratic Party. These decisions had a demoralizing effect on large numbers of Rainbow activists and the Rainbow Coalition virtually evaporated as disillusioned activists and organizers left the Rainbow in droves.

The disintegration of the Rainbow Coalition has had disastrous consequences for the progressive movement. In my view, if Rev. Jackson had effectively organized the Rainbow Coalition, the Congressional resolution authorizing the war against Iraq could have been defeated, the rightward drift within the Democratic party might have been checked and the outcome of the election which gave the Republicans the "mandate" to impose their Contract on America might have been different.

All of these "could have beens and might have beens" represent lost opportunities rooted in the failure of Jesse Jackson to transform one of the most promising ideas of the century into a viable mass based organization. Perhaps we should not despair, however. There are signs that Rev. Jackson may have learned his lesson and that the Rainbow may yet rise again.

The reason crime doesn't pay is that when it does it is called by a more respectable name.

—Laurence J. Peter

You never know what is enough until you know what is more than enough.

—William Blake

It often amuses me to hear men impute all their misfortunes to fate, luck or destiny, whilst their successes or good fortune they ascribe to their own sagacity, cleverness, or penetration.

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge