

Letters from our readers

On child health

To the Editor:

I appreciate Dr. Mann's recent letter regarding the elimination of Healthy Families, one of California's public insurance programs. Healthy Families is especially designed for families that do not meet Medi-Cal poverty criteria but who still cannot afford health-care for their children. Here in Mendocino County, Healthy Families is providing health insurance to many children of working families.

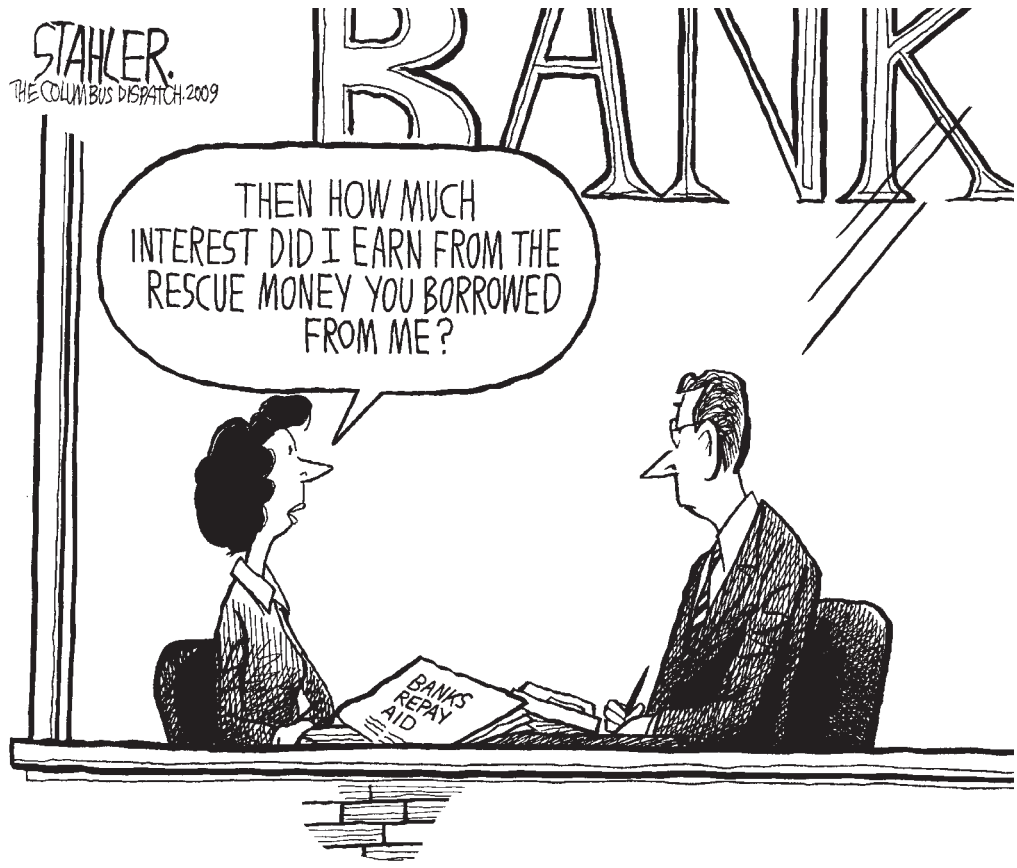
I applaud the recent actions of the California Legislature to preserve Healthy Families at this time; however, there still exists a chance that changes will be made to the eligibility criteria and co-payment amounts.

Everyone should understand that cutting or even reducing health benefits does not impact the incidence of illness. Even if they

lose the protection of insurance, children will still become sick. However, any child who is sick can receive care at one of the six community health centers in our county. These health centers guarantee that all patients, including children, receive primary health services regardless of their parents' ability to pay. No child need ever go untreated.

If you have a child who needs care, please don't let them go without because you feel you cannot afford it: Call 462-1477 or go to www.ruralcommunityhealth.org and find the community health center nearest you. The healthcare providers there will make sure your child has the quality medical, dental or counseling help they need to be at their best.

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Sweet land of liberty

BY NAT
HENTOFF



Is Obama's 'prolonged detention' American?

Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall once warned: "Throughout the world today there are men, women and children interned indefinitely, awaiting trials which may never come or which may be a mockery of the word, because their governments believe them to be 'dangerous.' Our Constitution...can shelter us forever against the dangers of such unchecked power" (dissenting, U.S. v. Salerno, 1987).

We may have to find out how strong a shelter the Constitution will be under a plan being considered by President Obama for "a new legal system" that can indefinitely confine -- possibly in American "supermax prisons" -- certain terrorism suspects at Guantanamo Bay, and not only there. They cannot be tried in our civilian courts because they have been tortured (preventing evidence against them being admitted) or because -- as NPR's Ari Shapiro puts it, they "would compromise sensitive sources and methods." Like, he adds, if they've been tortured, the assumption could be "they're dangerous because they've been tortured."

It's important to emphasize, if Obama prevails, that his "prolonged detention" -- as he prefers to call "preventative detention" -- will, as Salon's ever-vigilant constitutional analyst Glenn Greenwald tells us, also allow (beyond Guantanamo) "imprisonment not based on proven crimes or past violations of law, but of those deemed GENERALLY 'dangerous' by the Government for various reasons."

This is America, Mr. President?

And more "Supermax" prisons could be built to accommodate other "dangerous" terrorism suspects held, in cooperation with the U.S. in Egypt, Pakistan, Jordan, Indonesia -- and why not here at home?

Ever since the Bush-Cheney administration's Attorney General John Ashcroft, American streets are considered part of the jihadists' "battleground," and Americans suspected of giving the enemy "material support" could be subjected to the Bush, and now Obama, versions of due process and imprisonment.

Ah, but President Obama assured us (Miami Herald, June 1) that "prolonged detention should not be the decision of any one man." He added (NPR, May 22): "If and when we determine that the United States must hold individuals to keep them from carrying out an act of war, we will do so within a system that involves judicial and congressional oversight."

We continually see how that "oversight" operates under Obama. On May 2, the Senate passed the "Detainee Photographic Records Protection Act of 2009" that prevents disclosure of all photographs taken between Sept. 11, 2001, and Jan. 22, 2009, "relating to the treatment of individuals engaged, captured or detained after Sept. 11,

2001, by our armed forces outside the United States if, "the defense secretary and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have determined they would endanger military personnel if released."

But Obama continually and forcefully speaks of his "unyielding belief" that his administration must operate "with an unprecedented level of openness."

Asks Glenn Greenwald (Salon, June 1): "What kind of a country passes a law that has no purpose other than to empower its leader to suppress evidence of the torture it inflicted on people?"

Answer: We are living in that very country.

The Obama administration apparently never tires of adjusting our legal system to cover up defilement of our laws and treaties by itself and the Bush-Cheney regime. Witness Attorney General Eric Holder, asserting state secrets to force the cancellation of court cases that could reveal what was done to victims of "extraordinary renditions" during the years of CIA secret prisons.

For another illustration of the dedicated "transparency" of the Obama presidency, New York Times reporter William Glaberson broke the story (June 6) that "The Obama administration is considering a change in the law for the military commissions at the prison of Guantanamo Bay that would clear the way for detainees facing the death penalty to plead guilty without a full trial."

That's a neat way to ensure that any testimony about the torture of these defendants will be literally buried along with them. Denny LeBoeuf, an American Civil Liberties Union lawyer involved in death penalty cases at Guantanamo, asks: "Don't we have an interest as a society in a trial that examines the evidence and provides some reliable picture of what went on?"

The president doesn't agree.

Also, when he was a senator, Obama threatened to veto a bill that would absolve telecommunications companies of complicity in the NSA's extensive lawless monitoring of our e-mails and phone calls. But he then voted for the bill that was passed by Congress; and on June 4, Chief Judge Vaughn R. Walker of Northern California's Federal District Court reluctantly agreed with Obama's Justice Department to throw out dozens of lawsuits by "ordinary Americans" against AT&T, among other companies, which could have been hit with billions of dollars in damages.

Walker ruefully explained that these alleged constitutional violations of personal privacy by Bush and the telecommunications companies, championed by Obama as well, could not withstand the wishes of Congress. That, you see, is Obama-style congressional and judicial "oversight."

Nat Hentoff is a nationally renowned authority on the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights.

California focus

TOM ELIAS



Dump first, analyze later

Ancient Egyptians first observed that only when we eliminate traditions do we discover why they became traditions in the first place.

We modern Californians who now appear likely to eliminate scores of government programs may be about to discover the truth of that old saying. The cuts are coming because of a budget deficit estimated to exceed \$21 billion over the next two years even with the \$16 billion worth of increased sales, income and car taxes approved by state legislators last February.

Once those programs are gone, we will likely learn why many of them were deemed necessary by voters and legislators of the not so distant past. Not even public employee union contracts will save tens of thousands of workers from layoffs.

This was assured when Propositions 1A-1E lost by large margins in the May special election, a result interpreted by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger as a public mandate to abandon previous plans for raising more than \$5 billion via revenue anticipation warrants, a method by which state and local governments often borrow on Wall Street.

Some basic items are now on the chopping block. One proposal would eliminate the Healthy Families program that covers 942,000 children in families barely above the official poverty line. Do this and the state risks epidemics of diseases like measles and mumps, onetime scourges now kept in check by vaccinations. Do this and emergency rooms - which by federal law cannot turn most patients away - could be swamped. It's uncertain who would pay them for their work. Don't pay them and widespread hospital closures may ensue. "No analysis (of this) has been done," conceded state finance director Mike Genest.

Medi-Cal cuts also are contemplated, with as many as 1.9 million Californians of all ages losing health care coverage over the next three years, according to the non-partisan California Budget Project. This also imperils hospitals and emergency rooms.

Public schools will increase class sizes and might have to cut as much as a week and a half off the school year. Most are cutting back sharply on summer schools. Only time will tell how these moves affect pupil performance and the state's economic future.

Then there are state parks, visited by 79 million persons last year. Schwarzenegger's immediate post-election budget proposal called for cutting all their state funding for two years, leaving them to operate with nothing more than entrance and parking fees. The visitor tally

means the average Californian visited a state park more than twice last year. About 200 state parks could be closed if current entrance and parking fees remain stable. Parks officials now are contemplating price increases of as much as 100 percent in order to keep some units open.

Not that the public couldn't get into closed state parks by climbing fences or skirting around closed gates. But they wouldn't have parking facilities, rest rooms, campgrounds, lifeguards and other amenities normally deemed necessary. Imagine California without jewels like Emerald Bay at Lake Tahoe, Torrey Pines Reserve near San Diego or the Hearst Castle near San Luis Obispo.

Then there's the proposed \$750 million cut to the state's university systems, which would lead not only to lower enrollment, but also could spur a brain drain if frozen salaries drive off first-rate faculty. Add to this the proposed elimination of Cal-Grant scholarships long given low-income students and Cal State and University of California campuses might become the the exclusive property of the rich and upper middle class.

Also contemplated are an end to or suspension of the state's welfare-to-work program, release of tens of thousands of non-violent prisoners and an end to poison control programs, just to name a few. It's easy to imagine the outcry if these cuts produce deaths from poison or a crime wave, as could happen. This at the same time cities and counties shrink police forces and fire departments because of a planned \$2 billion "revenue shift" from their coffers to the state.

Many of these cruel moves, of course, do not have to happen. Change the rules under which some real estate now escapes reassessment to current market values when it changes hands and state and local governments might gain as much as \$12 billion in yearly revenue. Consider going to a "split roll" property tax system where businesses pay more than residential properties and much more could be raised.

But so far, lawmakers have not even contemplated those moves. Nor have they yet eliminated several barely useful commissions and boards that often serve as halfway houses for term-ed-out legislators. Perhaps examining the grave consequences of the contemplated budget cuts will open legislative eyes to the possibility of defying the powerful industrial and real estate lobbies that resist logical changes to the current taxation system. Or, more likely, not.

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Letters chosen for publication are generally published in the order they are received. We publish most of the letters we receive, but we cannot guarantee publication. Names will not be withheld for any reason.

If we are aware that you are connected to a local organization or are an elected official writing about the organization or body on which you serve, that will be included in your signature. If you want to make it clear you are not speaking for that organization, you should do so in your letter.

All letters are subject to editing without notice. Editing is generally limited to removing statements that are potentially libelous or

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