

# Opinion

## Another Viewpoint



### A model for all

By Marian Wright Edelman  
The criminalization of our children has reached a dangerous increase. Researchers and practitioners prefer mentoring, tutoring, gang prevention, substance abuse programs, dropout reduction, community service, nurse visitation initiatives, and quality after-school and summer programs, as well as jobs. These are among the right preventive investments in our nation's youth. Since 2001, however, the Bush administration has proposed a reduction in funds of nearly 66 percent for federal youth prevention and intervention programs. Actual funding has dropped more than 40 percent, with additional cuts being considered for next year - a reckless budgetary decimation of the programs and services that help keep children out of trouble and on the right path. If we know what works, how can we allow the government to ignore the immediate needs of children, particularly poor and minority children?

Eliminating youth services condemns us to much more pain in the long run in terms of our criminal justice system, incarceration and other public costs. Conservative estimates place the total savings of diverting one child from a lifetime of crime at about \$1.5 million. Most importantly, that child has the opportunity to succeed in life - an opportunity that is each person's God-given right. There are models for how we can do this for more of our nation's children. The state of Missouri's approach is one.

Experts praise Missouri's Division of Youth Services as a "guiding light." They credit Mark Steward, the division's recently retired director, with building and sustaining the country's finest state juvenile corrections system. Dubbed the "Missouri model" by reformers in other states, it emphasizes rehabilitating young offenders in homey, small-group settings that incorporate constant therapy and positive peer pressure under the direct guidance of well-trained counselors.

When a young person commits a crime, judges generally reserve commitment to a Division of Youth Services residential facility for only the toughest of cases - about 1,300 each year. For most youths, "aftercare" consists of a prolonged relationship with a case manager. Many youths are also assigned a "tracker" - often college students, or sometimes residents of the youth's home community - who monitor their progress. Missouri also operates 11 nonresidential "day treatment" centers year-round during school hours, and these facilities offer a way station for teens after leaving a residential facility.

How do we know Missouri's approach is working? A long-term recidivism study showed that only 8 percent of youths released in 1999 were incarcerated in youth or adult corrections three years later. Another 19 percent were sentenced to adult probation. This means that nearly three-fourths of these youths avoided prison or probation for at least three years. Comparatively, Missouri's results are remarkable.

Besides the obvious future savings that accompany its low recidivism rates, the Missouri model is also substantially cheaper than many of its counterparts around the country. In 2004, Missouri's Division of Youth Services devoted nine of every ten dollars in its budget to treatment services. The state's annual cost per bed in a residential treatment facility ranged from \$41,400 to \$55,000, while Maryland spent \$64,000 per bed in 2003, and California, \$71,000. Even worse, far more young people in Maryland and California end up in prison as adults, proving that those states pay twice as much for inferior treatment.

So if successful models like Missouri's exist, why isn't the entire nation following them? We know what works to keep our children safe and out of trouble.

But will we provide the support for all at-risk children? Our children deserve the chance to survive and thrive and to be protected from the prison pipeline that steals too many young dreams.

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

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail [jvannostrand@nwks.com](mailto:jvannostrand@nwks.com) or [pdecker@nwks.com](mailto:pdecker@nwks.com).

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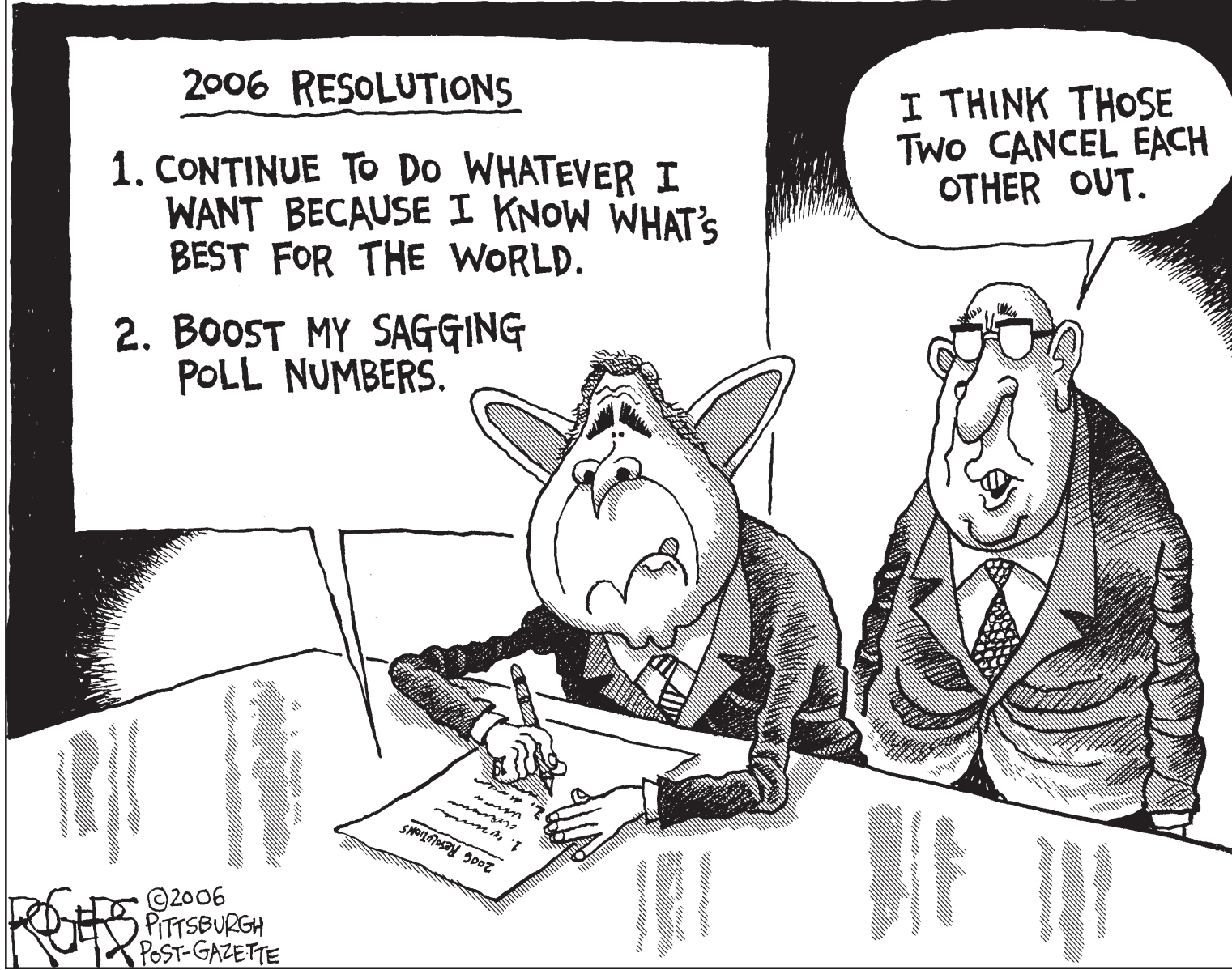
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## Reality gets even more real

"What's wrong," wife Jennifer asked last week while clearing off the dinner table.

I was leaning against the back of the couch when she asked me. I'm sure Jennifer saw my eyes focus on the tangle of chair and table legs. But that is not what I was staring at. I was still seeing what I had saw earlier that evening.

"I can't get those images out of my head," I calmly replied, not breaking my stare.

Last week, a good friend of ours from Iowa visited for a couple of days. Clinton, who we met early in his high school years through church, brought his laptop computer and showed us the dozens of pictures from his National Guard training this fall at Camp Shelby in southern Mississippi. Clinton graduated from high school in 2004 and joined adulthood rather quickly by joining the guard.

At first, Clinton showed us the pictures of the barracks, the laughs and smiles of fellow guardsmen learning how to shoot mortar cannons or keeping their hands on Humvee-mounted machine guns. After those photos, he showed us short video clips of the before and after of hidden explosive devices in Iraq.

I wish he would have stopped after the group pictures of the soldiers, including Clinton, standing with weapon in hand in a relaxed appearance.

But Clinton pushed play and I quickly tensed up.

You probably know about this by now, but here is what he showed me. Insurgents take a rusted, wore out car and pack it with explosive devices. The car is strategically, and inconspicuously, parked near where American troops caravan



**John Van Nostrand**

### Line in the Dust

through. From a distance, the person waits to hit the button at the right time to hopefully cause an American mother to cry. He doesn't wait for the armored vehicle to pass by. He waits for the troop transporter. The only thing that protects soldiers in a troop transporter from the evil unknown of Iraq is a camouflaged tarp and the metal frame it hangs on.

The microsecond I saw the flash of orange at the moment of explosion, I closed my eyes.

I don't want to know what the pain is like being involved in such an event. I doubt there is much pain at all. Being that close to that much power, pain is probably never felt for most.

One video clip Clinton found online is narrated by the man who pushed the button. I didn't know the language, but Clinton guessed the man was praying for success. The explosion threw up so much dirt and dust you couldn't see either vehicle. It probably didn't matter because I'm sure most of those fathers and husbands were done seeing anything by the time the dust settled on their blood.

It's not all losses though. Another video clip

was how insurgents couldn't aim their missiles on American bases because they propped their launchers on large rocks. American soldiers could tell what direction and area the incoming were from, and, like clockwork, quickly fired back.

Clinton had about 10 days to enjoy some time at home. He went to his Bridgewater, Iowa, home to have Christmas with his family, including his twin-sister, Constance, who Jennifer and I also became close with. Jennifer and I were flattered Clinton used his free time on us. His skiing trip was curtailed because of bad weather in the mountains.

Clinton heads back to Camp Shelby this week for more training before being sent to northwest Iraq, probably in March. He plans to be there for a year. Latest reports Clinton heard are insurgents are entering Iraq through the Syrian border, near where he is expected to go to work.

The Iraq War is closer to me now because of Clinton. I have had a lot of fun with him over the years. Clinton and I and a few others enjoyed a church youth event in Estes Park, Colo., so much we did it again the following year. During high school, he occasionally came over to say hi to us and the kids, watch movies, tell us the latest gossip and share Burger King.

Fortunately, no insurgent bomb is powerful enough to erase those images from mind.

God speed, Clinton.  
John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press.

## Life goes on, doesn't it?

Has anyone had trouble yet writing 2006 on their checks and other documents? I was very proud of myself Sunday because I managed to remember to put 2006 on the two checks I wrote, but I'm sure before the week is over I'll have 2005 on something.

Actually, I may have missed the New Year on a technicality. I had been to Denver to visit a young man from our church who is in the hospital and got to the Thomas County line at about 11:45 p.m. Mountain Time. As soon as I crossed the line it was 12:45 a.m. Central Time, so it was never truly midnight for me.

Of course, I have discovered over the years that going to bed early has never prevented the New Year from coming, but being a night owl, I usually make to midnight.

By the way, did you hear the temperature in Australia on New Year's Day was 109? We have been pretty warm as well, but at least they have the excuse of being south of the Equator where their summer months are our winter and vice versa.

It seems like the march of time gets a little more relentless every year. At first, when we were small, it was holiday and summer vacations.

Do you remember how long the Christmas vacation looked when we saw it on the calendar and how short it turned out to be when we were headed back to school?



**Jay Kelley**

### Speaking MyMind

Then it was weekends. They seemed much longer when I was little than they do now.

Finally, the years began to get shorter. I guess that is to be expected. After all, a year is one fourth of my nephew's life, but less than 2.5 percent of mine.

When we consider the shortness of life, we are left to ask why we waste it on some inane things. Yes, we need to work to support ourselves and our families and there are other necessary responsibilities which eat up our time, but there are things we could probably do better.

One of our young men back from college preached New Year's Day and his topic was having priorities and he talked about putting things before service to God. When put in that light, there are a lot of priorities that don't seem so important.

How many of us would take a job with more money, move into a bigger house or buy an ex-

pensive car if we knew it would cost the life of a loved one? I dare say none of us would even contemplate such a thing.

If we knew a house was contaminated with Radon or some other hazardous material, we wouldn't move our children or our spouses in there. Yet, we take jobs which take us away from our families at crucial times without thought to the spiritual harm which might be done.

We would never think of withholding nourishing food from our children and replacing it with junk food, yet we are willing to let them stay up late on Saturday night and miss worshipping God on Sunday without thought to the spiritual malnutrition we are creating.

I'm not trying to lay a guilt trip on everyone who missed a church service or one of their children's events last year, but it is a matter of priorities and we all get our priorities confused from time to time.

I guess making sure I keep my priorities straight is one of my New Year's resolutions each year. It is easy even to get so wrapped up in church work that God becomes a secondary priority. Keep Him first and everything else runs itself.

Imagine what we can do when we keep our priorities in order.

Jay Kelley is a local minister and writer who speaks his mind from time to time. His e-mail is [jkelly@nwks.com](mailto:jkelly@nwks.com).

## Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

