

# Point of View

## To Be Equal

# TIME TO REPAIR THE SAFETY NET

By John E. Jacob

The belief that there is a social safety net protecting all Americans from the worst privations of poverty has to be replaced by the reality that the safety net is in shreds and needs immediate repair.

In fact, for significant numbers of the poor, there is no safety net at all since eligibility rules and other barriers keep them from participating in key programs.

Intact families, no matter how poor, are often excluded from welfare aid; costly red-tape and bureaucratic mandates keep many schools from offering subsidized meals to poor students, and most of the jobless don't get any unemployment compensation benefits.

And those are just a

few of the many instances in which desperately-needed assistance simply doesn't



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reach the poor despite the existence of programs supposedly designed to form a safety net for the needy.

Virtually all of the highly publicized rise in federal social spending goes to programs that mainly benefit the middle class. Social Security and Medicare expendi-

tures cost many times more than the modest programs for the poor, which, taken together, amount to a small fraction of the domestic spending budget.

### John E. Jacob is President Of The National Urban League

Indirect costs tilt the balance even further toward the middle class — tax deductions for mortgage interest, for example, come to well over three times the cost of subsidized housing for low-income families. And the vast majority of poor families don't get any housing subsidies at all.

In the years of federal domestic austerity, it has been the means-tested programs — those whose eligibility requirements demand low income levels — that have been cut most.

Broader-based programs keep on growing, and defense spending is busting the budget, with no visible attempt to get cost-efficient results or to put a lid on the cost overruns that make weapons cost estimates a joke. It is common for cost estimates of new weapons systems to be constantly revised upwards by fifty percent or more.

All that is, ultimately, at the expense of people programs that form the safety net; for the unnecessarily high defense expenditures, along with the ill-advised tax cuts, lead to such high deficits that lawmakers become leary of providing adequate funding for poor people's programs.

That's fine for those who would like to see the government abandon the poor entirely, but it has made conditions far worse for the growing numbers of the poor. America, the world's richest nation, lags far

behind other industrial countries in maintaining a decent safety net for its needy.

For example, in Sweden an unemployed mother with two small

children gets benefits amounting to very close to the wage of the average unmarried production worker; in Germany the figure is two-thirds.

But in the U.S., even in the most generous states, the total of that economically vulnerable family's benefits come to half or less than half of the typical worker's income.

One of the reasons for the disparity lies in the way some other countries have converted means-tested programs into universal ones. Some European countries have universal children's allowances and housing allowances. That ensures aid to all who need it while the allowances are partially recovered through taxes on the payments to the more affluent.

It's hard to avoid the conclusion that our so-called safety net has just about broken down. It extends protection to only a portion of the poor and the value of that protection has been eroded further by a combination of budget cuts and higher living costs.

The haphazard design of safety net programs and the limited resources available to them mean that people in need can't get help or, if they can, the aid they get doesn't begin to help them meet the minimally adequate living standards a safety net — by definition — implies.

So the U.S. social

## PEOPLE, PLACES and POLITICS

By Joe Neal



There will be trouble in the Justice Department. You have probably heard by now that William French Smith, U.S. Attorney, has resigned and that the most likely candidate to replace him is Edwin Meese, presently the counselor to President Reagan.

The job of Attorney General of the United States is a job that Meese has always wanted. In my judgment Meese is the most dangerous man to place in this capacity of administering a system of justice in this country.

Meese is a very conservative gentleman from Sacramento, Calif., who feels that the President's ideology should become a part of everything within the Federal Government. It was Mr. Meese who influenced the President to appoint a Civil Rights Commission with similar views. It makes one wonder what Meese is going to do with the Justice Department, which has under its jurisdiction the F.B.I.

Meese is a law-and-order man. We can expect that he will attempt to have his views vented through the use of the F.B.I. We cannot expect the Department of Justice to be fair under Meese if fairness means going against the President's views.

I don't have to state what the President's views are as they relate to Black people. We have watched three years of Reagan and his boys in action and have a good idea where they want to take us — backward.

Meese has been the prime architect of this backward movement for Black people. He has played minorities against minorities for the benefit of the Administration. He was the person most influential in getting the Black guy named Reynolds to head the Civil Rights Commission, which has rendered a report that it will no longer investigate areas of Affirmative Action because it would discriminate against white males. Never mind what Affirmative Action is intended to be used for, which is a remedy after a finding of discrimination; they just want to get rid of it and thereby halt the movement of Blacks and other minorities in their achievement of their rights.

It is a fact that most of the achievements of Blacks have come as a result of a friendly Justice Department, particularly the Civil Rights Division. The appointment of Edwin Meese will close this door as the doors to the Supreme Court have been closed against Black people with the appointment of a Justice who has views similar to Reagan on Affirmative Action.

The need for Black people to go to the polls in mass this November should be evident. If we don't, we deserve what will happen to us in the next four years.

safety net is long overdue for rebuilding, and that means devoting the necessary resources to sound programs that ensure decent standards of living to opportunities for America's poor.

*The views expressed on these editorial pages are those of the artists or authors indicated. Only the one indicated as the Sentinel-Voice editorial represents this publication.*

## Editorial

Now that the Super Bowl is over and our heads are out of the clouds, we, as Blacks, must begin to think of the important issues that will be brought up during this election year.

First, we think that the present state government has been remiss in its efforts to improve conditions in our Westside area. Certainly, some things have been done, but it appears that what has been done is only a carrot held up in front of us to make us believe that all is going to be well with us.

Secondly, we believe that the Westside and other minority enterprises around the city have not received an adequate proportion of Block Grant monies, Small Business Administration loans, etc. that are available.

Thirdly, political appointments of Blacks and other minorities have been almost negligible. To be sure, a few plums have been thrown our way, but these seem to fade away when compared to the overall number of appointments that have been made.

Fourthly, we are appalled at the fact that little or no mention of the birthday of our great non-violent leader, Martin Luther King, was made by any state officer including that of the governor or any of our elected representatives.

The State of the State Address delivered by the governor failed to mention the governor's intentions for improving the plight of Blacks in Nevada.

We do not ask for miracles, but we are asking for our fair share of the political plums in this state. This is not too much to ask.

By the way, let's also now turn our attention to Black History Month which begins February 1st.