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OPINION

To Build A Better World, Start In Your Own Community

EDITORIAL

Focus
attention
on the
Republic
of Congo

How easy it is for the world to turn its back on the world's most horrific atrocities.

Perhaps the situation is too much to grasp. Perhaps it seems too unreal.

Yet the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo for those who live and die there is all too real.

Sub-Saharan Africa has the world's highest child mortality rate, and the DRC's rate is about twice that of the rest of the region.

Children die in droves daily from preventable or curable causes. And many also die despite a peace agreement reached four years ago.

Too few doctors have to pick between dire cases as they try to save a few.

Expectant mothers lie two or three to a bed in the maternity wards waiting to deliver premature babies not likely to pass out of the hospital's door alive.

Malnutrition, diarrhea, pneumonia, malaria, measles and tetanus are among the big killers of children in this part of the world — diseases and conditions that people in the West have long since conquered.

Four million people have died in the past eight years, half children, as a result of the war begun by rebels from neighboring Rwanda.

Some of those rebels still battle even though the war was supposed to be over four years ago.

UNICEF, the United Nations organization meant to advocate and assist the world's children, calls the situation in the DRC a "tsunami of death." And, indeed, it is.

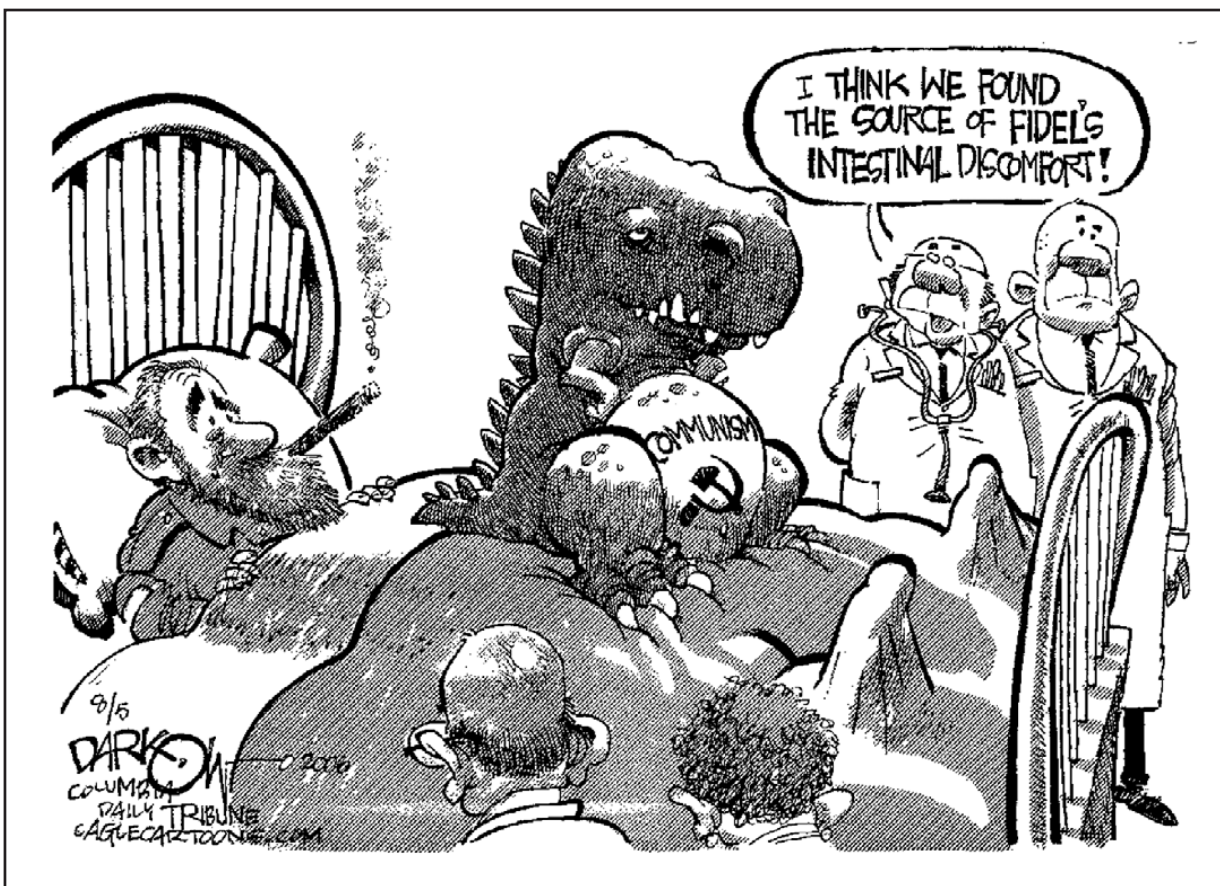
Sunday, Congo underwent its first democratic elections. But don't expect any miracles.

As long as rebels still control the hinterlands, where most of the deaths are occurring, and as long as scarce resources and medical personnel are kept from the people, children will continue to die.

The spotlight of the world needs to shine on the DRC.

Humanitarian aid in the form of vaccines, food, medical professionals, educational assistance and more needs to pour into this country and get to the people who need it most.

In the time it took to read this editorial, another child died. How much longer can the world stand by as children unnecessarily perish?



Champion of states' rights

By **Patt Morrison**
Los Angeles Times

"Oh, I wish I was in the land of oranges,"
"Old times there are not ... are not ..."

All right, so we'll be needing a different song. A new, catchy anthem, and maybe a flag and some cool slogan that says it all: California, capital of states' rights.

Not George Wallace "segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever" states' rights. That's so '60s. By that, I mean the 1860s.

I mean sticking up for state laws that give people more rights, not fewer. The Bush administration and its business uber alles allies have had a grand time hammering away at state and local laws across the country, laws that dare to give us more protections, rights and liberties than linguini-spined federal laws do.

This very week, a state governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, worked out a pact with the head of a whole country — British Prime Minister Tony Blair — to try to do more about greenhouse gas emissions than the feds are doing. (They could start by trading in their wheels, a Hummer and a Jag, respectively.)

People may joke that such a pact isn't worth the recycled paper it's written on, but if Schwarzenegger, constitutionally thwarted from becoming president, is going to act like California's president anyway, we should use his ambition to our advantage.

"California will not wait," the governor said, "for our federal government to take strong action on global warming." And it hasn't waited, on assault weapons, food labeling, medical marijuana, cleaner cars and air and water. The list goes on and on, or at least it did until the feds came huffing and puffing to blow our California laws down.

The granddaddy of these modern protections, Proposition 65, has been around for 20 years — an entire generation of consumer education, of warning labels about cancer risks and possible birth defects. Not

Golden State
fed up with
interfering feds

bans, just warnings.

Since Proposition 65, informed shoppers have effectively cleared California store shelves of dishes and calcium supplements with lead in them — and it's not like you can't buy dishes or calcium supplements anywhere in the length and breadth of California, is it?

For about half of those 20 years, Proposition 65 has been on Capitol Hill Republicans' hit list. Now, with an administration that preens about protecting the unborn but evidently wants to protect business more, Proposition 65 is back in the cross hairs.

If the Senate follows the House and passes the National Uniformity for Food Act, Proposition 65 and other state and local consumer-safety laws across the country may be as dead as road kill.

Uniformity for food. It sounds so wonderfully orderly, doesn't it? But the true moving force behind uniformity is un-informity. Nationalizing food standards means gutting state codes that tell you more about what you eat than the feds require. If you don't know what's in there, and you get sick or hurt, you can't complain or sue because you haven't got a clue what might have done it.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein has said she and fellow California Democrat Sen. Barbara Boxer will "use every parliamentary device available to us to stop" the legislation. In April, Schwarzenegger pledged to Feinstein that he'd be battling right there with her "to continue California's legitimate and rightful role of upholding strong public-health and food-safety standards."

The bill's supporters argue oh-so-unctuously that the nation just can't have a messy "patchwork" of laws. A patchwork of laws that would make it virtually impossible for the young or the poor to get

an abortion? They like those just fine. But a patchwork of laws that might cost some business somewhere an extra paper clip? We can't have that.

Already, wimpier federal law has trumped California's sterner standards. Food and Drug Administration regulations have allowed tuna canners to ignore Proposition 65 when it comes to mercury warnings on labels. National financial companies, citing federal laws, sued California and got at least part of the state's Financial Information Privacy Act thrown out. They said, oh, no, no, no, this isn't about money; it's about ironing out a tangle of laws. (Need I tell you that when they say it's not about money, it's about money?)

And now, Capitol Hill Republicans want to interfere with minimum-wage laws in seven states, including California. Working stiff earning more than \$30 a month in tips would have those tips counted as wages, so their bosses would only have to pay them the difference between the tips and the minimum wage, effectively cutting it to as little as \$2.13 an hour. And those Republicans have the nerve to put this in a bill that gives even more tax breaks to dead gajillionaires. I hope some waitress somewhere pours scalding coffee in House Speaker Dennis Hastert's ample lap.

California can't secede and become Bear Flag Republic 2.0 — I've already checked into it. But California could lead the charge in a new states' rights campaign among the many other states that would find their own laws kneecapped by the shamelessly named Food Uniformity Act.

Are you with me? Everybody sing:

"Oh, I wish I was in the land of non-genetically modified cotton,
"Cuz fed'ral laws, they are so rotten."

Patt Morrison is a Los Angeles Times columnist and frequent commentator on National Public Radio's "Morning Edition."

Open Forum

Don't sling mud at
St. Vrain teachers

I find it most unfortunate and very sad that the latest discussion regarding late-start days for St. Vrain students has turned into an opportunity for a lot of teacher bashing.

So many misstatements have been made ... teachers get six and a half weeks of paid vacation? I don't think so. Teachers work the same days and hours as their children? Not a chance. Teachers receive generous health benefits? That idea exists for very few in our country right now.

Teachers are, on the whole, hard-working people just like everyone who reads the editorial page. They take 30-minute lunches often at their desks and work extended days daily at school or at home after their own children have gone to bed. They don't ask for more than what they believe they are worth, and, to be sure, they go into teaching knowing they will never be rich.

But where does it say that because the district adopts eight late-start days, the teachers become fair game for every hostile, unhappy person out there? The late-start day concept and early-release day concept have been around for years in other districts. People in those districts would appear to

have accepted the fact that collaborative time benefits the students — it is not an excuse for teachers not to teach. It is a means to provide better teachers and teaching techniques for the students.

Teachers who are parents also deal with the problem of what to do with their children. It is a hardship on everyone in that way. But life is a trade-off. We all have to be flexible in our lives, even when it is difficult to do.

So, please, step back and take a deep breath. The late-start days are in place and the teachers, like many of you, are trying to figure out what to do with their own children. Give the late-start days a chance this year. If they are not successful, let the district know and ask for change.

But don't use this as an excuse to bash teachers. Surely they deserve common courtesy, and being needlessly blamed for a district decision to help students just doesn't make sense to me.

JUDY LYONS
Longmont

Cast ballot for
Rep. Musgrave

Many things are said during a political campaign. Much is said only to cause people to vote for the candidate who is preferred. Many alliances are made, and facts are

Senate
abandons
judicial
nominees

By **Tom Fitton**
Judicial Watch

Soon the 109th Congress will come to an end, after having compiled one of the worst records on judicial confirmations in modern political history — a remarkable "accomplishment" given the fact that one party has held Congress and the White House for six years.

Virtually everyone agrees: The president's judicial nominees are eminently qualified and the votes needed for confirmation are there. And yet, the Senate has refused to fulfill its constitutional obligations and has denied these nominees an up-or-down vote. Why?

There is a lot of blame to go around with respect to the Senate's obstruction of President Bush's judicial nominees. Democrats, who are philosophically opposed to the candidates, are playing games with the judicial confirmation process in order to appease the liberal wing of their party. They even took the extraordinary step of launching judicial filibusters to prevent up-or-down votes — a tactic that is not only unprecedented, but also flagrantly unconstitutional.

Republicans, for their part, have allowed this obstruction to happen and have even participated to some degree. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, forced in part by the so-called "Gang of 14" moderates in the Senate, struck a compromise last year to usher a few of the president's nominees through the confirmation process. But the deal left open the prospect of unconstitutional judicial filibusters at a later date. At the time, I was concerned this compromise would merely delay the fight for another day. But now, the situation is even worse. Republicans have stopped fighting altogether.

According to the Office of Legal Policy at the Department of Justice, there are 27 federal judicial nominees awaiting confirmation with 45 judicial vacancies to fill. Three of these nominees, in particular, have been targeted for obstruction because of their conservative views: Terrence Boyle, William Haynes and William Myers. According to a recent article in Roll Call, the newspaper that covers Capitol Hill, the chances of a vote on any of them before Election Day is, "Zero. Zilch."

Each of these nominees has waited years for their confirmation vote, enduring disgraceful attempts by Democrats to sully their characters and reputations. However, Judge Boyle, the president's choice for the 4th Circuit, has the dubious distinction of being the president's longest waiting nominee. In fact, Judge Boyle was first nominated 14 years ago by President H.W. Bush, but was never given a hearing by then-Democrat Judiciary Committee Chairman Joe Biden.

This time around Judge Boyle received his hearing and the nomination was discharged by the Senate Judiciary Committee. Frist, however, is sitting on the nomination, refusing to bring it to the Senate floor for a vote. This continues a long-term pattern on the part of Senate Republicans of allowing the Democrats to run the judicial confirmation process as if they, the Democrats, were the majority. When it comes to key judicial nominations, Ted Kennedy may as well have been running the show. In fact, he is.

Conservatives have waited a long time for the opportunity to confirm judges who will abide by the U.S. Constitution and the rule of law. Conservatives have the right nominees. But we are missing leadership in the Senate.

Tom Fitton is president of Judicial Watch, a non-partisan educational foundation that fights government corruption. Visit www.judicialwatch.org for more information.

Vote for Marilyn Musgrave for Congress.

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