

# National News

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## Rickets Cases Rise Among Black Children

Rickets, a vitamin deficiency disease associated with the 19th Century, is on the rise in America, according to the August issue of the *Journal of Pediatrics*. During the last six years, 30 cases of rickets were reported, almost half of them in 1998-99. All of the children affected were African-American.

The disease is caused by a lack of vitamin D, often due to lack of exposure to sunlight, which stimulates the body to produce the vitamin. Rickets is associated with a loss of calcium in, and a weakening of the bones, which in turn, causes bowed legs, a proneness to broken bones, and in extreme cases, to seizures.

Rickets was widespread in 19th-Century England, among child laborers who worked in sweatshops from dawn to dusk, and had little sun exposure.

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## McKinney Scores Failure of U.S. Africa Policy

Rep. Cynthia McKinney (D-Ga.), in an interview published in *The East African* newspaper of Nairobi, Kenya on Aug. 10, was sharply critical of U.S. policy toward Africa. "It is unfortunate that U.S. policy in Africa has been such an abysmal failure," she said. "It is true that Bill Clinton is the most friendly U.S. President to Africa in several generations, but how can someone so friendly end up with such an outrageous, atrocious, horrible policy that assists perpetrators of crimes against humanity, inflicting damages on innocent African peoples? The whole world knows that Uganda and Rwanda are allies of the U.S., and that they have been given a *carte blanche* for whatever reason to wreak havoc in the Congo."

There is no way to achieve peace until Uganda and Rwanda withdraw their troops from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, she said. She also noted the vast diamond wealth of the area, suggesting that this might be a factor in the ongoing warfare. Uganda and Rwanda "claim to have problems with

insecurity. If they amassed their troops on their borders, then these people won't cross the border and enhance insecurity within Rwanda and Uganda. [But] we also understood that those troops were not at their borders, and their forward deployment was not Kisangani but Boma, on the opposite side of the country, which puts a lie to their claim that their intrusion in the Congo was due to border insecurity. Because there are so many diamonds in Kisangani, I am left with the question: Is that the reason they are fighting each other? . . .

"On the issue on diamonds, there are wealthy people living in the United States who have a close friendship with people who make U.S. policy. So, when you start talking about diamonds, you are hitting a nerve center. . . .

"The violation of the territorial integrity of Congo pits Rwanda and Uganda against the founding principle of the Organization of African Unity. . . .

"The U.S. invests all its hopes and aspirations for good and positive things in personalities. What U.S. policy ought to be doing is building institutions; not individuals. And certainly not individual leaders."

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## Rabbi Lerner Rips Lieberman Nomination

Rabbi Michael Lerner, editor of *Tikkun* magazine, who has been described as a guiding influence on First Lady Hillary Clinton, criticized the selection of Joseph Lieberman as Al Gore's running mate, in a column entitled "Bad for the Jews, Bad for the Country," *Beliefnet* reported on Aug. 7.

Lerner says that the choice of Lieberman "is likely to accelerate the process in which the two parties seem to be merging into one pro-business, pro-wealthy, elitist, and morally tone-deaf governing force." He notes that Lieberman had earlier joined with Clinton and Gore in the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) "to transform the Democratic Party from its previous New Deal roots as the champion of working people, minorities, and the poor, to a party that would cater to the needs of Wall Street and the upper middle class." And, he adds, "they've done a great job."

Lerner further argues that the selection

of Lieberman will give greater prominence to the tendency in the Jewish community "to subordinate values and spiritual goals to self-interest and material success." He notes that American Jews have always been among the most liberal voters in America, which reflects a strong commitment to social justice and caring for the poor. But in recent years, a strong conservative tendency has emerged among American Jews, more concerned with "making it," and insisting that the interests of the Jewish people lie in identifying with America's elites of wealth and power. "The sad truth," Lerner says, "is that Lieberman represents the tendency within the Jewish world to abandon the moral and spiritual vision that led generations of Jews to be the moral conscience of our society."

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## HMOs Force Physicians To Flee California

State and county medical associations report that there has been an exodus of physicians from California, mainly due to low reimbursements from health maintenance organizations (HMOs) and the high cost of living there. California dropped four places in the ratio of doctors to population since 1990, when it ranked eighth. Now, it ranks 12th in the nation, with 244 physicians per 100,000 residents.

The executive director of the Santa Clara County Medical Association said that people are under the wrong impression that the insurance premiums they pay go to support their physicians. "Often, 8 to 12¢ [for each dollar] goes to the doctor; that's gross, before expenses."

The California Medical Association found that pediatricians are being paid about \$24 per month per child, while the average costs—including mandatory immunizations—are about \$47 per month per child. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that a lone practitioner has to pay about \$17,000 a month for office rent, utilities, and staff, out of his gross income. If HMOs pay only \$24 per child, a pediatrician would need 708 HMO-enrolled patients who require *no* medical care, in order to use his monthly capitation fees (fixed fees paid by the HMO) to cover monthly expenses.