September 17 is Constitution Day, marking the anniversary of the signing of the U.S. Constitution in 1787. But we have less to celebrate today because the Bush administration has so tarnished our constitutional rights.

In the last seven years, the Bush administration has introduced a number of executive orders, policies, and programs to support its “war on terrorism” and ostensibly to protect national security.

In reality, these efforts have resulted in a steady erosion of constitutional rights and civil liberties for people living in this country. A number of these policy initiatives have targeted particular communities for unwarranted harassment and investigation, resulting in violations of fundamental human rights. Some of the most egregious examples come from the Department of Homeland Security policies, which have swept up citizens and...

*Tarnished* continued on page 4
SHORT TAKES

PG COUNTY: ¡¡POW!!

TRANSPORTATION: Prince George's County, the Gazette reports (18 September 2008), “was hit the hardest when Maryland transportation officials cut $160.4 million in transportation funding from the state roads budget last week.” The cuts include $25 million from the early work on the Purple Line. Some people have called for shifting money from the Inter-County Connector, but apparently that is not possible because of the borrowing arrangements. Some other area cuts include $8 million to link I-95 with the Greenbelt Metro Station and $7.1 million to improve Route 1 from College Ave. to Sunnyside Rd. Might the money put aside for the transit center at University Blvd. and New Hampshire Ave. be in jeopardy?

SAFETY: County public safety employees (police, fire, etc.) have been asked to take a ten day furlough without pay to help with the budget shortfall. Some residents have raised concerns about such matters as response time in emergencies. Indeed, county police officers and other public safety employees have filed a lawsuit to stop the furloughs; the case is now in a federal court.

VERIFYING APPLICANTS

The not-friendy-to-immigrants Center for Immigration Studies reports: "The E-Verify program, which allows employers to check the immigration status of new employees, has been steadily improving and is now 99.5% accurate, according to a new paper by the Center for Immigration Studies. This voluntary program is already screening more than one in ten new hires nationwide, and as of September 13, 2008, has processed 6.21 million queries. E-Verify is set to expire on November 30, 2008, unless it is re-authorized by Congress. The House of Representatives has already passed a reauthorization bill by a vote of 407-2, while the Senate has not yet taken action.” Is it that accurate? Should it be routinely used by all employers? What happens to the people when the check is faulty?

EATING ADVICE

The “Men’s Health” magazine (August 2008) has some advice about eating in restaurants. In general, restaurant foods as well as many canned and frozen items in the grocery store have too much of two dangerous ingredients: sodium and fat. Here are a few items from the magazine:

• Papa John’s “has made little effort to introduce healthier options. After we goaded them on their slow pace of innovation, Papa John’s did introduce whole grain wheat crust pizzas last May. Now, if only Papa would toss a thin-crust version into the mix and alter the recipe for sides like cheese-sticks, which are loaded down with more than 2,900 milligrams of sodium”

• Panera Bread uses “synthetic food colorings in its pastries [that] have been linked to irritability, restlessness, and sleep disturbances in children. And British researchers found that artificial food colorings and preservatives in the diets of 3-year-olds caused an increase in hyperactive behavior. The same ingredients appear in fast-food items like mayonnaise, M&M Blizzards, and McDonald’s shakes.”

$RENTING$

Rents appear to be continuing their upward trajectory. In the Washington area, the average rent went from $929 in 1998 to $1,485 in 2008. That’s a 60% increase, well above the overall wage increase in the same period—and dramatically over the wage increase of low-end workers. If some individuals and families are forced to share their spaces to meet the rental payments, that’s no surprise. Occupancy limits were certainly not set to meet needs in such inflationary times.

BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE = BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

Reuters reports: “If you live in Miami, consider yourself among the most attractive people in the United States. The Sunshine State’s metropolis has the most beautiful people, according to an online survey of ‘America’s Favorite Cities’ by Travel + Leisure magazine.” What’s a special demographic of Miami? According to the 2006 Census survey, the city is 69% “Hispanic or Latino.” That’s about the same percent Latino registered by Langley Park. Hum.

GENTRIFICATION

Here’s a comment by a Petworth DC resident quoted in the Washington Post (19 September 2008): “It all started with Mr. Metro. Snatched people’s homes. …. You tear down all the buildings which we can afford, and build condos we can’t afford…. It’s a money thing. You either get a better job or move out to Maryland.” Perhaps these comments will apply to Langley Park in a few years if the sector plan is put into place? The key question is: how can our government “representatives” maintain affordable housing in Langley Park and its nearby neighborhoods? Maybe the economic stresses the country now faces will save the neighborhoods from the bulldozers; there might not be enough money to tear down the affordable apartment houses and replace them with much more expensive condos. Some tragedies (e.g., the economic stresses in the USA and elsewhere with housing in turmoil) may have an upside!

SCHOOLS

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: Three Prince George’s County elementary schools registered “advanced performance” on the state’s assessment exams, Tulip Grove ES, Heather Hills ES, and Glenarden Woods ES. Two of these schools are in Bowie, which certainly is a compliment to that city’s population. Also, the percent of students in the Title 1 programs (for poor families) of the three schools is less than, for instance, Langley Park McCormick ES.

BUCK LODGE: The new (from Langley Park McCormick ES) principal of Buck Lodge Middle School (and Action Langley Park participant), Sandy Jimenez, is giving special attention to parent involvement. All parents of Buck Lodge students should contact the school to ask what they can do to help the principal move the school rapidly forward. Call 301 431-6290.

FUNDS FROM SLOTS: The November ballot will decide whether Maryland will allow slot machines in the state, and there are powerful voices on both sides. Apparently, most of the earnings will go to educational institutions. That’s good; schools that are not well-funded certainly need more money for construction and other purposes. But where does the money come from? Apparently, the larger proportion of income comes from the working class and poor. If so, then the working class and poor will in some sense be subsidizing the middle class. Is that the way it is supposed to work?

“Short Takes” continued on page 3
THE ECONOMIC CRISIS ... AND US

IMPACT ON THE STATE: Already, tens of millions of dollars have been cut from the budgets of various agencies, including $12 million from the University of Maryland. (Anyone want to bet that this is the last cut?) And in the Washington Post (22 September 2008) we read: “Maryland does not have enough inspectors enforcing its environmental laws, and the shortage has become more severe over the past five years, state officials say, raising worries that the state’s new ‘green’ policies will be undercut by insufficient policing. The state Department of the Environment, which checks factories, power plants and construction sites for violations of pollution rules, has 132 inspectors to cover 205,000 sites. That’s a ratio of one to more than 1,500, significantly worse than the 1-to-1,090 ratio the state had in 2003. Now, state officials are proposing to use these same inspectors to carry out a new environmental crackdown, targeting manure-laden runoff from Maryland’s 200 largest chicken farms.” So the threats include education and the environment. And…?

AFFORDABLE HOUSING: Affordable housing? Doesn’t that refer to dwellings affordable for the working class? Laney Park is increasingly becoming less than affordable thanks to gentrification pressures fueled by the anticipated Purple Line and encouraged by many local businesspeople and government officials. Alas, according reports on Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the affordable housing goal for 2007 was missed and in 2008 the shortfall will be even greater.

WELCOME TO THE THIRD WORLD! So it has come to this: “Dear United States, Welcome to the Third World! It’s not every day that a superpower makes a bid to transform itself into a Third World nation, and we here at the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund want to be among the first to welcome you to the community of states in desperate need of international economic assistance. As you spiral into a catastrophic financial meltdown, we are delighted to respond to your Treasury Department’s request that we undertake a joint stability assessment of your financial sector. In these turbulent times, we can provide services ranging from subsidized loans to expert advisors willing to perform an emergency overhaul of your entire government.” (Rosa Brooks, Los Angeles Times, 18 September 2008)

OUR NEXT CHIEF OF POLICE?

The Washington Post (21 September 2008) published an article about our Roberto Hylton. Here are a few of the sentences: “It can take new Prince George’s County Acting Police Chief Roberto Hylton a while to reach his second-floor office in the morning. He shakes a lot of hands on the way, a gesture he also expects his officers to make toward residents on the street. ’That’s how I was raised,’ said Hylton, recalling his humble upbringing in Panama. In Hylton’s police department, however, a handshake is more than mere courtesy. It’s a symbol of the community policing and back-to-basics beat walking that Hylton, who is considered the front-runner to replace retiring Chief Melvin C. High, says the department needs in order to root out crime in its most dangerous neighborhoods.

“One of Hylton’s first moves was to name a new department spokesman, with whom Latino community members can communicate directly: Maj. Andrew Ellis, who is bilingual and worked under Hylton in Langley Park. County Council member William A. Campos (D-Hyattsville) said Hylton and his emphasis on community policing is exactly what is needed.” The full commentary may be found at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/20/AR2008092002160.html

ESSAY & POSTER CONTEST

The “Together We’re Better” contest helps schools to celebrate the diverse abilities of all students and to highlight the importance of providing equal opportunities for children with disabilities. The contest is sponsored by The Arc of Maryland and conducted in partnership with the Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council, Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education, and Maryland Department of Disabilities.

Students in grades K-6 are invited to create class posters and/or poems that explore why inclusive schools are important and how students with disabilities contribute to their schools and communities. Students in middle and high school are invited to write essays, produce a three-minute video, or develop artwork representing the concept of Together We’re Better.

Judging will be held for all categories on November 11, 2008 and all winners will be announced in time to celebrate National Inclusive Schools Week in December. Contacts: Telephone 410 767-7548 or email jwscorn@msde.state.md.us.

THE UNDOCUMENTED TO THE RESCUE

“All along the Texas coast, Latino immigrants are hauling away fallen trees, slashing through storm-tangled brush,patching punctured roofs. On working-class corners, on ladders in front of Victorian houses, in the yards of ornate mansions, crews of men in dusty jeans, sturdy workboots and baseball caps are nearly as omnipresent in the post-Hurricane Ike landscape as blue tarps on rooftops. These workers, who get picked up off the street by homeowners looking for quick, cheap labor, are helping to rebuild the devastated cities of southeast Texas. Many of them are here illegally.” (AP, 22 September 2008)

MICRO-RESTAURANT UPDATE

The food vendors of Langley Park are still being prevented from operating their micro-businesses. The result is that scores of micro-businesspeople are struggling in this difficult economy, and a thousand or more former customers are trying to cope now that their normal and convenient sources of food have been taken from them. How sad. Well, the push for gentrifying Langley Park moves forward even in this bad economy, and slowly but surely the international neighborhood is yielding to the demands of money.

In Hyattsville, vendors have been given one more year before their micro-businesses are forbidden. Another harmful crusade! Some people wanted the vendors removed immediately, stating that they felt unsafe near the vendors. Ah, unsafe: after all, most of the vendors have brown skin, speak Spanish, and are not rich; and the customers create an active streetlife. That brown + Spanish + poor + activity probably means that there is danger of rape, murder, and perhaps even terrorism! Ah, prejudice (sometimes even practiced by those who have roots in the immigrant working class but have advanced into the middle class and want to distance themselves from their former selves).

JULIE MOSES

Julie Moses, RN, and husband, Brother Moses, run the Langley Park Boys & Girls club on Merrimac Dr. Julie is written up in a current edition of www.advanceweb.com/nurses. The article begins: “If Julie Moses, RN, had to pick between nursing in the ED or ICU, she’d always pick the ED, hands-down. For her, the ED is closer to the community than any other hospital unit.” She’s a charge nurse at Washington Hospital Center.
noncitizens alike in misguided efforts to enforce immigration laws.

Consider the recent spate of raids conducted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents. One such raid took place in Postville, Iowa, in May, where nearly 400 workers were arrested. Another occurred on Aug, 25 at Howard Industries in Laurel, Miss., which resulted in the arrest of nearly 600 workers.

Instead of ensuring due process protections for the individuals swept up in those raids, U.S. federal and local law enforcement officials failed to verify that detainees understood the charges against them or to provide meaningful access to legal counsel.

Prolonged detention without charges or access to attorneys has become the norm in the immigration system, with 84 percent of those in immigration detention not having legal representation.

On top of that, those languishing in immigration detention face dangerous, overcrowded conditions. Many of the more than 80 people who have died in Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention facilities since 2003 were denied access to the proper medical care.

For example, Jason Ng, a thirty-four-year-old Chinese immigrant and father of two, was denied asylum but had lived without incident in the United States for 15 years before he was swept up for deportation. While in detention, Ng developed severe back pain that made it impossible for him to stand up, yet he was denied access to medical care. When a federal judge finally ordered the government to provide him with appropriate medical care, it was discovered that he had cancer throughout his body and a fractured spine. He died five days later.

Is this a country that still respects our Constitution and the rights that it guarantees to all who are within our borders? Should we allow some people to be arbitrarily imprisoned without access to a lawyer or the courts?

Would we violate an individual’s Eighth Amendment right not to suffer cruel or unusual punishment by denying him lifesaving medical care because he is in detention?

The Founding Fathers drafted our Constitution to prevent the U.S. government from overstepping its authority and to protect individual rights and civil liberties. On this Constitution Day, we need to reflect on that.

And on Election Day, we must demand that a new administration promote due process and fairness as cornerstones of our legal process, and that all those who reside within our borders are treated with dignity and respect for their basic human rights. Otherwise, as a nation we risk defiling the values that we hold dearest.

*This op-ed was written by Rights Working Group’s Executive Director, Margaret Huang, and was originally published in The Progressive. We thank RWG for permission to publish the commentary here.

FROM TOYS R US TO...

REGENCY FURNITURE

The large empty space where ToysRUs did business for years and then stood empty for over a year and a half will again be filled by a retail company. The new occupant will be Regency Furniture, which already has several units in the state. There is a “Regency Furniture Stadium” in Waldorf that is home to the Southern Maryland Blue Crabs baseball team. Here’s hoping that the new store will be useful to area residents and profitable to the owners and Langley Park Plaza.

**WASHINGTON ADVENTIST HOSPITAL**

The hospital, jointly with Adventist HealthCare, “announces plans for the creation of a Village of Health and Well-being with extensive health-care services, which will include emergency/urgent care services, a clinic and primary care on the hospital’s Takoma Park campus once the hospital relocates [in 2013].” Hospital representatives consulted with many area stakeholders, including Action Langley Park, and the result is that local health facilities will be retained near Langley Park. Furthermore, there will be constant shutting between the replacement facilities and the new hospital. Well done, Jere Stocks and others.