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INSIDE:

- The Medicare Part D Maze
- The New Bankruptcy Law
- Civil Rights Action on Sewer Overflows
- Ex-Prisoners Reentering the Community
- Using the Media
- Medical Debt

The Rehnquist Court's
FINAL CHAPTER ON
ACCESS TO COURTS

Sargent Shriver
National Center
on Poverty Law
FOUNDED 1967
Taking action to end poverty

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The State of Poverty Reexposed

When Hurricane Katrina swept through the Gulf Coast last August and September, Louisiana and Mississippi were not the only states brought to the nation's attention. Many in the United States saw for the first time another state—the “State of Poverty.” At about the same time that Katrina struck, the U.S. Census Bureau released its annual report: it counted thirty-seven million Americans living in poverty; thirteen million of them are children. The images of suffering caused by the hurricanes brought many Americans face-to-face with the reality of poverty in our country. At the 2005 Sargent Shriver Awards dinner in December, the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law turned the spotlight on the nation's 51st state—the State of Poverty.

The awards event elucidated the devastating effects of poverty and raised practical solutions to the interconnecting problems and structural barriers that cause poverty. “From the eye of the hurricane, we at the Shriver Center know the possibilities of moving from the state of poverty to the state of prosperity,” said Rita McLennon, the Shriver Center's executive director.

Jeffrey D. Sachs, the economist and Columbia University professor whose most recent book is *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time*, received the Sargent Shriver Award for Equal Justice for distinguished achievement in promoting the alleviation of poverty. Like the Shriver Center, Professor Sachs takes action to end poverty. “I reject the plaintive cries of the doomsayers who say that ending poverty is impossible. I have identified the specific investments that are needed; found ways to plan and implement them; shown that they can be affordable and addressed the counsels of despair who claim that the poor are condemned by their cultures, values, and personal behaviors,” he says. Professor Sachs's work as an international economist and social justice advocate outlines specific steps to end global poverty. Both global and domestic poverty require a holistic approach to the removal of the structural barriers to leaving poverty, Professor Sachs explained in his keynote address.

Morgan Spurlock, the documentary filmmaker (*Super Size Me*), also received the Sargent Shriver Award for Equal Justice. He was honored for distinguished achievement in raising awareness of the day-to-day plight of minimum-wage workers in the United States in his FX television series *30 Days*. The premier episode, “Minimum Wage,” featured Mr. Spurlock and his fiancée struggling to make ends meet for thirty days in Columbus, Ohio.

The honorees and the awards dinner program examined—once again—how we view and respond to the poorest among us. Once again we rejected the tolerance of poverty in America and the rest of the world. Professor Sachs pointedly concluded that “war against poverty has always been and remains today a matter of choice. Fundamentally, beyond choice—it's about action.” Once again we affirmed that we must work together to demolish the barriers that keep people from moving out of the State of Poverty.