

Bush at 'height of hypocrisy' with policies

By Hazel Trice Edney
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER
PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

WASHINGTON — If the past is any indication, President Bush will pay tribute to Martin Luther King Jr. on Monday, the day his birthday is officially observed as a federal holiday.

According to a leading advocate for children, Bush's words will amount to nothing but empty rhetoric.

"It is the height of political hypocrisy," says Marian Wright Edelman, president and founder of the Children's Defense Fund. "It is using words while carrying out deeds that killed Dr. King's dream, that killed the hopes

of children for a decent education. You can't, on the one hand, say lovely things and then propose budget policy to destroy and undermine programs like Head Start and Medicaid and the basic protections that children need."

Bush says his No Child Left Behind Act is his major domestic achievement. Yet, on his recommendation, the \$29 billion authorization for the educational program was under funded by \$7.1 billion in the 2003 fiscal year; for fiscal 2004, the \$32 billion authorization was under funded by \$7.3 billion.

"We are now in our fourth year of a systematic attempt to starve the federal govern-

ment of resources that are required to provide the social and economic hope and opportunity to our poor children — white, black, and brown — and to our working families," Edelman charges. "There's a different ideological view of what the role of the federal government should be. For all the incremental, but significant changes that's occurred, this Bush administration and the Congress and the political climate of the country are trying to turn it all back."

Edelman says Bush and the Republican-dominated Congress are trying to diminish the federal role in providing for the poor.

"They're trying to eradicate

all the progress for children, dismantle the federal role, whether it's been providing for an equal opportunity in education or with Head Start or with child health, they're trying to wipe it all out," Edelman says. "There's a different ideological view about what the role of the federal government should be."

As in the past 21 years, millions will observe the King holiday by taking off work to attend church services, civil and educational programs in honor of the fallen civil rights hero, slain April 4, 1968 at the age of 39. But, this year, the holiday comes during a hotly contested presidential race with issues involving billions of dollars being spent for the war in Iraq and controversial tax cuts that have caused major cuts in social programs for children.

This is not the first time that Edelman has publicly criticized the Bush adminis-

tration. In early 2000, the CDF demanded the Bush administration stop using its trademarked slogan, "Leave No Child Behind." Then, last February, Edelman joined civil rights leaders around the country, declaring that Bush had "declared war on children" with cuts to school programs and block-granted Head Start in some states.

THE CHARLOTTE POST (USPS 965-500) is published weekly for \$40.00 per year by the Charlotte Post Publishing Co., 1531 Camden Rd. Charlotte, NC 28203-4753. Periodicals postage paid at Charlotte, NC. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE CHARLOTTE POST, PO Box 30144, Charlotte, NC 28230

Activists want achievement boost

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"I don't see how any person can celebrate the results of the NEAP test," he wrote. "I don't understand how any person who believes in the education of all children can celebrate these results. The only thing that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system has demonstrated for the past 50 years is its failure to fulfill its legal, moral and ethical obligation to provide a sound basic education to all students."

Sixty-four percent of CMS fourth-graders read at grade level, according to NEAP findings, while 71 percent of eighth-graders were at grade level. The gap between the performance of black and white students is larger than North Carolina as a whole but similar to the U.S.

"Our schools continue to gain momentum in student achievement as a result of focused strategies that work," CMS Superintendent James Pughley said of the results last month. "The investment this community has made, coupled with the hard work demonstrated by

our district, is truly paying off."

But disparities remain. Fifty-two percent of white fourth-graders in CMS were proficient in reading, compared to 14 percent of blacks. Among eighth-graders, 49 percent of whites were proficient, compared to 14 percent of blacks.

"If I'm not mistaken, in 1954 (when the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed segregated schools), math and reading scores for black students in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system were about 30 points lower than math and reading scores for white students," McElrath said.

In math, the gap between white and black fourth-graders is the same as the nation, while eighth-graders had a wider disparity than nationally.

To bridge the gap, supporters of inner city schools have argued for more resources and better-trained teachers in less-affluent areas. Otherwise, they contend, African American students will continue to lag.

"This gap is intricately wound to racially identifiable schools and economically identifiable schools and classrooms within schools," Collins said. "This is a serious indictment not only of Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system, but also for urban school districts across the country."

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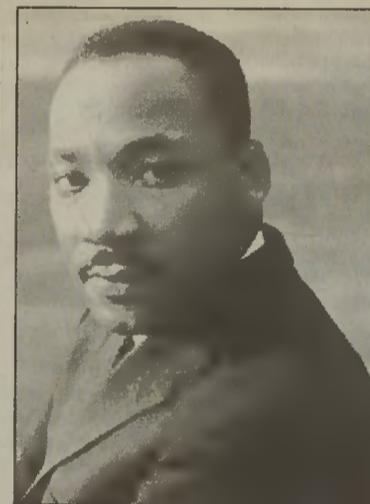
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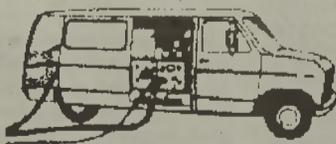
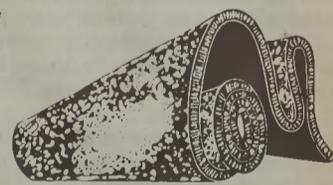
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