

OPINION

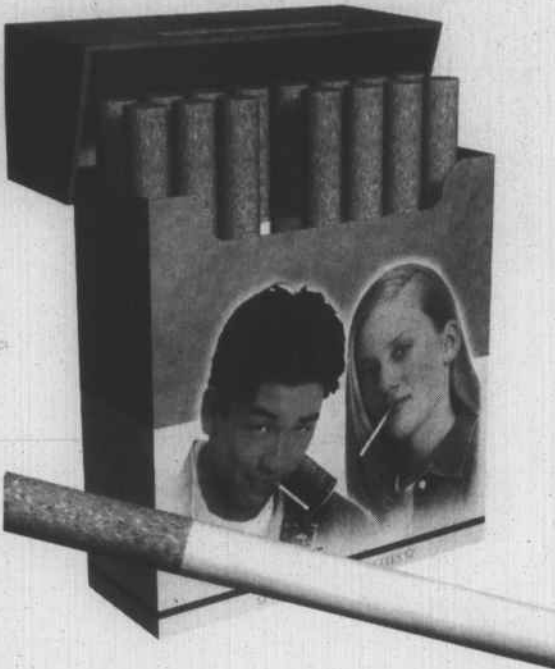
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A portion of the money from the N.C. Health and Wellness Trust Fund Commission is being used to help teens realize the dangers of smoking.

KRT Image

Politics and economics go hand in hand



Ernie Pitt
This & That

I have wondered for a long time why a prospective political candidate would spend so much money trying to become elected to office. Not only money raised from others but many candidates put their own money in the pot. Why, I often asked, would someone want to spend a million dollars to be elected to Congress? That's about what it's going to cost for the Fifth District race. Probably more.

Well, with those political offices come control over taxpayers' money and the ability to direct some of that money to places that may benefit some of the people who contributed. Mostly, naturally, nonminorities. Take, for instance, the N.C. Health and Wellness Trust Fund Commission headed by Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue's office. The office has some \$5 million available to help curb tobacco use by teenagers. Given the disparity of government spending between minorities and nonminorities one would think that the commission would welcome opportunities to interact with and form partnerships with minority-owned businesses in trying to reach the African-American teenager. Not so.

The very first thing the Health and Wellness Commission did was go straight to radio, where very few stations, if any, are owned by minorities. Second, the commission

went to television. Now, the commission is doing something else. I know this may sound self-serving, but why won't the commission use black media? What is its problem with utilizing media aimed, owned and operated by minorities? That includes agencies, black-owned radio and print.

What happens is the commission comes to us (black media) for the free stuff like press releases and goes to everyone else with the paid stuff. That, to me, is not equal opportunity or equal access. We're talking about public dollars here. That is why it is important for minorities who are elected to office to bring something to bear on that despicable situation. We live in America: a

free enterprise, democratic, capitalistic society. Some of us understand that. And that is why nonminority candidates will spend millions to be elected...so they can control your tax dollars...my tax dollars and direct them to places that do not affect our economic well-being. It is called economic racism, and that is what the lieutenant governor and the commission are doing right now before our very eyes.

It's election time. Let's remember what's really going on and demand a small slice of that big fat pie. God loves a cheerful giver. God bless you. Amen!

Ernie Pitt is the publisher of The Chronicle and the chairman of the Housing Authority of Winston-Salem Board of Commissioners. E-mail him at erpitt@wschronicle.com.



Perdue

Kerry sells out to big education



Armstrong Williams
Guest Columnist

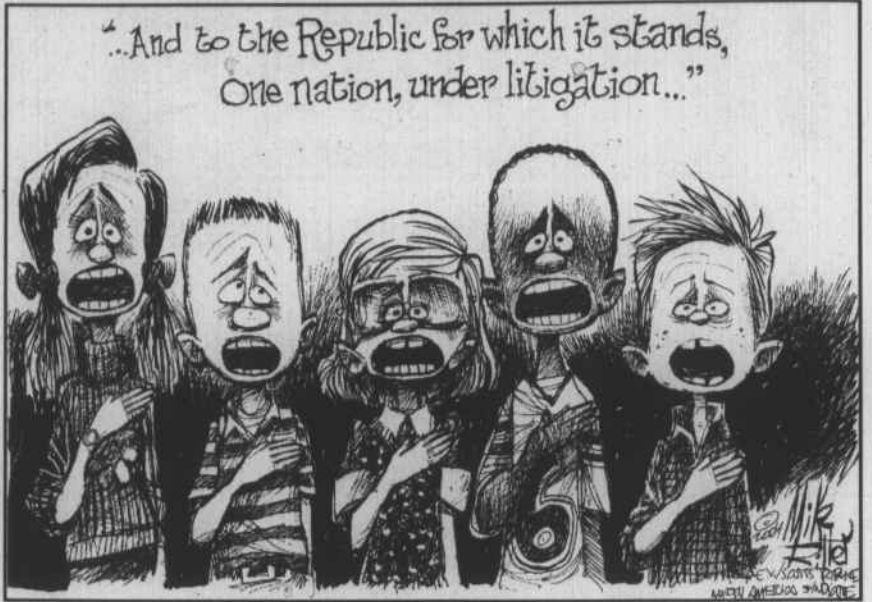
The National Education Association (NEA), the nation's largest professional employee organization, is fundamentally opposed to any education reform that seeks to hold public schools accountable for their failures. On July 3, 2004, the NEA will hold its national convention in Washington, D.C. That's when the NEA is expected to endorse John Kerry for president. Along with the endorsement will come thousands of votes from teachers across the country.

In return, Kerry will talk about how school vouchers will tear apart our public education system.

Far more instructive, however, are the remarks Kerry made about education before he won the Democratic nomination and became beholden to the big interests of the teachers.

"We must end teacher tenure as we now know it," said Kerry in 1998 speeches delivered in Boston and Washington. During those speeches, Kerry took shots at a public education bureaucracy that shielded public schools and teachers from accountability, while bemoaning that "those going into teaching have the lowest SAT and ACT scores of any profession in the United States."

In a 1998 New Republic article, Dana Milbank wrote that Kerry told her he'd "even approve government funded vouchers - good for tuition at any accredited private school - as part of an overall education reform..." At the time, Kerry was proposing turning all public schools into charter schools - the reasoning being that since students are assigned to public schools, the system has no



incentive to improve and no accountability for failure. Otherwise stated, the public school system is a monopoly. But if poor families could send their children to any charter school with the government paying all or part of the tuition, public schools would be forced to raise their standards or risk having their students flee.

"I'm from love here, folks," Kerry said. "It's time to come in and kick some butts. Democrats can't be viewed as somehow protecting these practices. You can't do this in some loosey-goosey...way."

Six years later, Kerry is singing a different tune. No longer is he issuing severe sounding rhetoric about making public education accountable. In fact, his new education plan goes so far as to demand that "any new education program Congress authorizes will be automatically funded by law." In other words, Kerry is calling for an open spigot of education spending. Once the spending is authorized, neither Congress nor a future president can turn the spigot off. Just throw money at

the problem. Reward failure not with accountability, but with more funds. Certainly sounds like Kerry's buying into the big interests of the education unions now.

So, why the flip flop? It's pretty straightforward. Kerry could afford to be a little more bold and a little more flexible while working on the local and state levels. Now that Kerry is the Democratic nominee for president, he has to march in step with the party.

The NEA owns a piece of the Democratic Party. According to the NEA's budget, the NEA donated \$20 million last year to Democratic legislators, second only to the American Federation of State/City/Municipal Employees. Receiving a large part of your campaign money directly from the teachers unions means the Democrats are obliged to repay the debt in some form. That's why the same Democratic representatives who send their own children to private schools are up in arms each session, crying about how extending that same right to poor children - mostly of color

- would destroy the public education system.

The union's motivation for opposing vouchers and public school accountability is equally straightforward. The union realizes that vouchers would mean fewer teachers, fewer membership dues, the likely defection by public school personnel to privatized systems that have traditionally resisted centralization, and the birth of competing collective bargaining entities. For the teachers unions, the idea of competition can only mean giving up leverage. Since the job of unions is to accumulate leverage and membership dues, the teachers unions have decided that it is in their best interest to vehemently oppose the vouchers movement.

Together, Kerry and the unions talk about protecting the interest of our children. It would be nice, however, if these so-called representatives of our children's interests could find a way not to sell out the greatest instrument of our children's empowerment - their education.

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The exorbitant cost of war



George E. Curry
Guest Columnist

Now that the United States has turned over government control in Baghdad to the Iraqis - in name but not reality - this is as good a time as any to reflect on how much this war is costing us. And that's exactly what an Institute for Policy Studies task force, headed by Phyllis Bennis, has done. The 54-page report, which is available on the Internet at www.ips-de.org/iraq/costofwar/, provides an exhaustive and insightful look at the cost of the invasion of Iraq and the subsequent occupation. Below are just a few of the IPS findings:

HUMAN COSTS - Between the start of the war on March 19, 2003, and June 16, 2004, according to research compiled by IPS, 952 coalition forces were killed, including 836 members of the U.S. military. Between 50 and 90 civilian contractors, missionaries and civilian workers - 36 of them Americans - died. Thirty journalists were killed in Iraq, eight of them employed by U.S. media companies. U.S. forces were responsible for at least nine of the deaths, including employees from the BBC, Reuters, ITN, ABC network, U.S. network, Arab TV stations al-Arabiya and al-Jazeera and the Spanish network Telesinco. Over this period, more than 5,134 troops suffered wounds, including 4,593 since President Bush declared the end of combat operations on May 1, 2003.

Iraq and its people are paying an even higher cost, the report says.

"The image we were presented with was one of happy Iraqis welcoming U.S. troops with rice and flowers and immediately going back to work to rebuild their new, democratic free-market country," recalls the report, titled "Paying the Price: The Mounting Costs of the Iraq War." It continues, "Reality was very different. While the removal of the brutal



Children watch as a U.S. soldier patrols alongside an Iraqi guard unit in Baghdad on Sunday.

KRT Photo

dictator Saddam Hussein is no doubt a welcome development for many Iraqis, the costs of the war have been extremely high and are likely to continue."

Iraq Body Count, a group of academics and researchers, placed the number of civilian deaths as a direct result of the U.S. invasion somewhere between 9,436 and 11,317. In the past, the number of wounded in war has typically been three times the death rate, meaning that approximately 35,000 Iraqis may have been wounded.

ECONOMIC COSTS - The report notes that Lawrence Lindsey, a White House economic adviser, was fired in 2002 for predicting that the Iraq war would cost between \$100 billion and

\$200 billion. In retrospect, he was correct. So far, Congress has approved \$151.1 billion and is expected to approve even more as U.S. troops remain in Iraq after the official change in government. One economist projects that the cost of the war will average at least \$3,415 for every U.S. household.

SOCIAL COSTS - "The Bush administration combination of massive spending on the war and tax cuts for the wealthy means less money for social spending," the report observes. "The administration's FY 2005 budget request proposes deep cuts in critical domestic programs. It also virtually freezes funding for domestic discretionary programs other than homeland security."

If Bush is re-elected, the report states, he plans further cuts in domestic spending.

"Indeed, a leaked memo from the White House to domestic agencies outlines major cuts following the election, including funding for education, Head Start, home ownership, job training, medical research and homeland security - all programs the president has been touting during the campaign," it says.

"The \$126 billion already appropriated and the \$25 billion pending for the war in Iraq could have purchased any of the following desperately needed services in our country: close to 23 million housing vouchers; health care for over 27 million uninsured Americans; nearly 3 million new elementary school teachers; 678,200 new fire engines; over 20 million Head Start slots for children; health care coverage for 82 million children."

SECURITY COSTS - "Polls reveal that the war has damaged the U.S. government's standing and credibility in the world. Surveys in eight European and Arab countries demonstrated broad public agreement that the war has hurt, rather than helped, the war on terrorism. At home, 54 percent of Americans polled by the Annenberg Election Survey felt that "the situation in Iraq was not worth going to war over."

The report continues, "A number of former military officials have criticized the war, including retired Marine General Anthony Zinni, who has charged that by manufacturing a false rationale for war, abandoning traditional allies, propping up and trusting Iraqi exiles, and failing to plan for post-war Iraq, the Bush Administration made the United States less secure."

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com. His most recent book is "The Best of Emerge Magazine," an anthology published by Ballantine Books. Curry's weekly radio commentary is syndicated by Capitol Radio News Service (301/588-1993). He can be reached through his Web site, georgecurry.com.