

OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

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Cause of Death: Bureaucratic Failure



Marian Wright Edelman
Guest Columnist

For too many of the nine million uninsured children in America, the lack of health coverage can literally mean the difference between life and death.

Children are dying because their health coverage under Medicaid or the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) ran out, was not renewed in a timely manner or simply does not cover the services a child needs. Some of these deaths occurred because attempts to gain access to health care are ensnared in red tape. The impact of this oppressive bureaucracy on children is tragically illustrated by the death of Devante Johnson of Houston, Texas.

Tamika Scott, Devante's mother, didn't plan to rely on government supported health insurance to protect her children. At 29, she managed raising three boys while pursuing a career, buying a house and completing a college degree. Then her doctors told her she had Multiple Sclerosis and strongly urged her to leave her job for health reasons. She and her sons lost their private health insurance and she had to cash in stocks and use money from her 401(k) retirement fund to pay bills. Fifteen months later, the family sank even deeper into financial difficulty when her oldest son, 10-year-old Devante, was diagnosed with Wilms tumor, an advanced kidney cancer. Because of the family's reduced income, the six months of chemotherapy Devante received were covered by Medicaid. At the end of the treatments, the doctors pronounced him cured. But six months later the cancer returned. Devante and his mother were told that a new three-year course of chemotherapy, radiation and constant monitoring were critical to Devante's recovery.

Undeterred by this reversal, Devante proceeded with the new treatment with high hopes and the unwavering support of his mother. Two months before the expiration of the Medicaid coverage that was essential to the health-restoring care Devante needed, Tamika submitted an application for renewal to the Texas Department of Human Services. She was confident that there was more than sufficient time for the application to be processed to allow her child's health care to continue seamlessly. One month before the cutoff date, she became concerned when she hadn't received notice that the application had been approved. There was still time, she thought. Tamika Scott submitted two more completed applications, one of them through the Texas Children's Hospital. She followed up with dozens of phone calls and faxed information. But time ran out and Devante's health coverage was discontinued.

A month passed, then two. She inquired on numerous occasions as to the status of the application, but never got a satisfactory answer. For four months, no one in the Department of Human Services told her the application was lost in the system and had never been processed.

Devante's growing tumor became a visibly protruding lump on his back. His pain increased and walking became difficult. He lost twenty pounds. Yet Devante didn't give up. He never complained and was a comfort to his mother. He remained an honor roll student who took advanced classes and looked after his younger brothers.

In desperation, Tamika Scott appealed to her state representative. Through his intervention, Devante's health coverage was restored in one day. He was transferred to the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center where he received first rate, comprehensive care. All too late. This courageous 14-year-old died on March 1, 2007. The cause of death was complications from advanced cancer. But perhaps other causes were the obstacles and delays involved in navigating Devante's renewal application through a complicated bureaucratic system.

We must not let Devante's death be in vain. We need a national solution to the urgent child health problem. The Children's Defense Fund endorses the All Healthy Children Act (H.R. 1688), introduced by Congressman Bobby Scott (D-VA). The measure would consolidate Medicaid and SCHIP into one fully funded single program with guaranteed, comprehensive health and mental health benefits for all children and pregnant women with family incomes at or below 300 percent of the federal poverty level (\$61,950 for a family of four in 2007). Under this measure, 5-6 million children currently eligible for Medicaid and SCHIP won't fall through bureaucratic cracks. Enrolling uninsured children in health care programs and keeping them covered would be streamlined with an automatic enrollment process and other simplifications.

The loss of children like Devante is disgraceful and unworthy of the nation America must become. Extending health coverage to every child in America can be achieved in 2007. We must stand against those who say we can't afford to cover all children this year. We must also stand against those who seek to phase in health coverage for all children over many years. Which of us would like our children to wait one, two, five or more years to get health care? The nation must embrace the moral and political will to save our children from unnecessary suffering and death. To help, go to www.childrensdefense.org/healthischild.

Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund and its Action Council.



Fight against offensive lyrics



George Curry
Guest Columnist

The late C. DeLores Tucker left a rich legacy when she died in 2005. A participant in the Selma-to-Montgomery, Ala. March and longtime NAACP board member, she became Pennsylvania's first Black Secretary of State in 1971. She would later chair the National Political Congress of Black Women, Inc. But perhaps her greatest — and least appreciated — accomplishment might be her relentless campaign to eliminate sexist and degrading lyrics from the music industry.

It was a war for which she never volunteered.

"I have, since 1993, led a crusade against this gangster, porno rap," she said in a 2000 interview on CNN. "And all of the industry does not support it. In fact, I got involved by two of our entertainers coming to us and asking us to help: Dionne Warwick and Melba Moore and many others who did so, but didn't want their names known."

Tucker took her campaign against sexually explicit lyrics to the streets, picketing music stores, and to the suites, purchasing stock in Time Warner and challenging its top executives at stockholders' meetings.

Rap artists, in turn, attacked Tucker with a vengeance.

Tupac Shakur, in a song titled, "How Do U Want It?" raps: "DeLores Tucker you's a [MF]. Instead of trying to help a nigga you destroy your brother."

On another song titled "Wonder Why They Call U Bitch," Shakur says: "Got your legs up trying to get rich. Keep your head up and your legs closed Dear Ms. Delores Tucker."

Eminem, the rapper from Detroit, said on the "Rap Game" CD: "Tell that C. DeLores Tucker slut to suck a dick/ [MF] ducked, what the fuck? Son of a bitch/Take away my gun, I'm gonna tuck some other shit."

KRS-One, hailed as a race-conscious rapper, spent time denouncing Tucker on a CD supposedly about freeing Mumia Abu-Jamal. The first verse:

Everywhere I look there's another house negro
 Talkin about they people and how they should be equal
 They talkin but the conversation ain't going nowhere
 You can diss hip-hop, so don't you even go there
 C. DeLores Tucker, you wanna quote the scripture
 Everytime you hear nigga, listen up sista.

The second verse of the song was also spent attacking the "girl named Delores."

The music industry refused to accept any responsibility.

Responding to a news conference held in 1996 by Tucker, former Secretary of Education William Bennett and Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) issued a statement that said, in part:

"...The recording industry flags explicit sound recordings with a Parental Advisory Logo. The highly visible black-and-white logo has provided parents, for the last 12 years, with a tool to determine what is appropriate for their children. Parents — not some special interest group — should be the arbiter of family values."

Tucker countered that even free speech has its limitations — except when it comes to her.

Tupac Shakur was shot to death in Las Vegas in 1996. Undaunted, Tucker filed a \$10 million defamation lawsuit against Shakur's estate, Time and Newsweek. Time reported that "claims that lewd remarks made about [Tucker]...caused her so much distress that she and her husband have not been able to have sex." Newsweek referenced claims that the lyrics "iced their sex life."

Tucker's suit, taken all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, was dismissed, according to judges at various points, largely because she was deemed to be a public figure and therefore must prove that malicious lyrics were written, knowing in advance

that they would damage her reputation.

Rather than ignoring rap lyrics, as many conservatives have charged in the wake of Don Imus' being fired for calling Rutgers University basketball players "nappy-headed hos," many African-Americans have challenged the portrayal of Black women, especially in rap videos. Essence magazine has launched a "Take Back the Music Campaign," women at Spelman College protested Nelly's "Tip Drill" video, and public figures — including NAACP Board Chair Julian Bond, Bill Cosby, Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton and E. Faye Williams, Tucker's successor at the National Political Congress of Black Women — have voiced mounting opposition to lewd lyrics.

Some African-Americans refused to join C. DeLores Tucker's campaign because she often paired her efforts with those of Bill Bennett, a conservative Republican. But critics of the music have run out of excuses. It's time to pick up where Tucker left off and declare language that degrades females, whether uttered by Don Imus or rappers, must not be tolerated.

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Bringing the Invisible Man to light



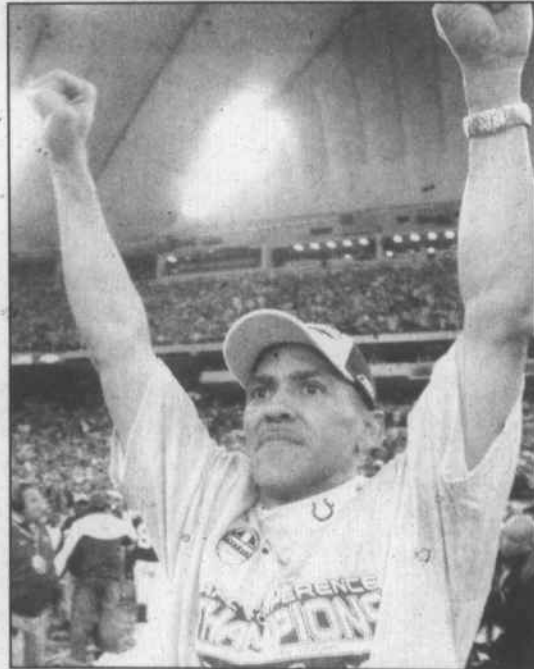
Marc Morial
Guest Columnist

Prominent African-American scholar and author Ralph Ellison once depicted the black man as socially invisible in his watershed novel Invisible Man. His hard-hitting portrayal of life in 1940s black America suggested that it'll take more than a major Civil Rights movement to bring the nation out of its racist past. That was in 1953.

Since then, much progress has been made in terms of black men gaining greater visibility in the United States. At the anecdotal level, African-American men have broken down color barriers in a wide array of arenas — from sports to medicine to the arts to law to higher education to finance — and have risen to great prominence, giving their white brethren a run for their money.

From Barack Obama to Tony Dungy to Thurgood Marshall to Colin Powell to Tiger Woods to Russell Simmons to Spike Lee, there are a multitude of male African-American role models who have proven that they can compete and excel on the same level as whites to choose from.

But for all the outstanding examples of black men defying a culture of low expectations dating back to the slavery era that was created and placed upon them by mainstream America via the media and other outlets, there are many more who are light years away from fulfilling their true potential. They represent the greatest



Tony Dungy celebrates victory.

source of untapped potential in the United States.

There is definitely a crisis afoot among black African-American men that we must stop complaining about and take action to resolve — if not for them, their families and our society as a whole.

But instead of dwelling on the statistics, let me propose some recommendations to not only help black males but all Americans:

1. Universal Early Childhood Education: All children in this nation should have a right to comprehensive early childhood education, which, as Head Start proves, is very effective in giving them a leg-up

when they start school.

2. Greater Experimentation, with All-Male Schools, Longer School Days and Mentoring: All-male schools such as the Eagle Academy and Enterprise School in the New York City area combined with mentoring and longer days help keep young boys focused on education and away from the distractions that could lead them down the wrong paths.

3. More Second Chance Programs for High School Drop-Outs, Ex-Offenders: These programs aim to bring ex-offenders and disadvantaged individuals who are out of school and out of work back into the mainstream. Such pro-

grams help steer more Americans, especially those at-risk, back on track by providing assistance in getting GEDs, skills training and new jobs.

4. Restore the Federal Summer Jobs Program to Its Previous State: At the end of the 21st Century, federal lawmakers agreed to "reinvent" the federal Summer Jobs Program that had been in place for decades by changing its status from a stand-alone mandatory program to one of 10 optional youth services programs. Under this reform, cities and municipalities have the option of offering the program or not. It resulted in a major scaling back of this successful federal program.

5. Drive Home the Message That Education Pays Big Dividends in the Long Run: Parents need to instill into their children the value of education in achieving their dreams and improving their financial security. They must continually talk to their children about how much better off they will be by graduating from high school and college. They must tell them that their opportunities for professional and economic advancement are much greater with a college degree or higher than without. So what we've presented here is blueprint from which we are urging our nation's leaders to work from. Empowering black men to reach their full potential is the most serious economic and civil rights challenge we face today. Imagine if our nation tapped the full potential of all the black boys languishing in the shadows? It would mean greater prosperity for all.

Marc Morial is president and CEO of the National Urban League.