

Portland
Observer
Opinion

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Can We Turn Rhetoric Into Reality?

By MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN
As the campaign gets into full swing, a lot of politicians are spending a lot of time talking about leaving no child behind. Governor Bush, the Republican National Committee, Vice President Gore, and the Democratic National Committee have hijacked the Children's Defense Fund and the Black Community Crusade for Children's trademarked language: Leave No Child behind. But underneath the election-year rhetoric about children is the reality that in this time of unprecedented prosperity, there are still millions of American children being left behind every day. Far too often the children being left behind are Black and Brown.

In 1903 Dr. W.E.B. DuBois famously predicted the problem of the twentieth century would be the prob-

lem of the color line. As we look to the twenty-first century and beyond, many Americans want to believe that problem has been solved, and that America has become a society where all children finally are judged by the content of their character and not the color of their skin. Sadly, the facts show that despite significant progress, Black children still face far greater obstacles than White children.

Poverty rates for Black children are nearly twice the White child poverty rate. One in three lives in poverty and nearly half of Black poor children live in extreme poverty. Black children are almost twice as likely to lack health insurance as White children, and are more likely to be in poor overall health than White children. Despite steady progress in in-

creasing rates of early prenatal care and reducing infant mortality, Black mothers and infants are less likely than White mothers and infants to get the prenatal care so crucial for healthy development. Black infants die at over twice the rate of White infants. Although birth rates for all teen mothers have declined sharply, the rate for Black teenagers is still much too high, and a Black baby is born to a teen mother every four minutes.

Black children are more likely to be placed in foster care than White children, and are likely to stay in foster care longer. Black children are disproportionately likely to be victims of child abuse and neglect and of violent crime. And Black youths are overrepresented at every stage of the juvenile justice system: they are more

likely to be stopped, questioned, arrested, jailed, sent to court, convicted, and given harsh sentences.

The much-noted educational "achievement gap" between Black and White students shows Black children receiving lower standard test scores from elementary school through to the SAT tests often required for college admission. The growing "digital divide" is serious concern for our children where the majority of students are minorities are less likely to have strong computer facilities, and Whites are more likely to have Internet access from their homes than Blacks and Hispanics are from any location. School segregation still exists: recent statistics show over two-thirds of Black students attend schools where the majority of students are minorities.

These disparities should remind all of us how much work we still need to do to make our country one where no child is left behind and where children of all colors truly succeed and thrive equally. What can we do? We can begin by continuing to teach our children they can succeed despite any odds still stacked against them. This is the lesson our parents and grandparents have always passed on, and our children still need to hear.

As we listen to campaign speeches and promises this year, we can make sure we vote and tell elected officials that leaving no child behind will require more than rhetoric. It will require acknowledging the inequalities and committing to specific actions to solve them. And let's hold them accountable after they are elected.

The
Portland
Observer

USPS 959-680
Established 1970

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Send address changes to
Portland Observer
PO Box 3137
Portland, OR 97208
Periodical Postage
paid in Portland, OR
Subscriptions are
\$60.00 per year

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Letters to the Editor

Health Care Advocates Oppose 4 & 89

The American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, and American Lung Association urge you to vote No on Measures 4 & 89.

The purpose of the settlement with the tobacco industry was to recover some of the costs incurred by the state from tobacco-related health care and, more importantly, to reduce future costs. We believe the best way to achieve this goal is to commit a substantial portion to tobacco prevention especially for our kids.

Daily, you read about how thousands of Oregonians are uninsured, how thousands of children don't have coverage, and how some patients are denied life-saving treatments because the Health Plan can't afford them. To make matters worse, the Office of Economic Analysis projects the Health Plan will suffer a \$38 million budget shortfall next year because of declining cigarette tax revenue. The Oregon Health Plan is in financial crisis right now.

Yet a recent study of Measure 4 done by an independent economist show that it would barely generate enough money to cover the projected shortfall, even when you take into consideration federal matching funds. And, next biennium, Measure 4 would

only generate 2.1 percent of the Health Plan's projected budget. These numbers are hardly enough to stabilize the Health Plan, let alone extend coverage to more uninsured Oregonians.

Voting "No on Measure 4 & 89 will send the tobacco settlement issue back to the drawing board, where we can ensure the settlement is properly allocated according to its original intent and in a way that will benefit the majority of Oregonians.

Democrats better for Our Economy

We remember the Reagan years of '80-88. We were staunch Republicans, and Reagan seemed like a breath of fresh air.

Then came the George Bush (SR) years, and we watched things go rapidly downhill: the biggest recession in 30 years while the president chose not to deal with the issue; the ballooning of our national deficit from \$155 billion to \$290 billion—an 87% increase; and the loss of our personal saving after layoffs as we struggled to keep heads above water.

The Clinton Administration brought a period of recovery. Today, the economy is at its best in the last 30 years, unemployment is at a 32-year low, and we have a budget surplus instead of a budget deficit.

Now it's election time again, and we look at our choices. Democrat or Republican? Experience or "good ol' boy"? Facts or rhetoric? We'll Vote Gore!
**Charles & Julie Pruitt
Gaston, OR.**

Yes on 97

I urge a yes vote on Measure 97. In 1997 I found a trap submerged in a pond, no warning signs, only a quarter of a mile from where children live and residents of our community walk their dogs. Out of concern for neighborhood children and pets, I pulled it out of the water and it snapped on my hand. I have never experienced anything that hurt so badly.

I was finally able to drive to the home of a friend who removed the trap, but had sustained severe nerve damage in my wrist that would take nine months to heal, with no medication available to alleviate the pain of nerve damage.

I knew that I would get that trap off, but an animal doesn't. I know how an animal must feel when caught in such a trap; terrified, in shock, excruciating pain and agony beyond description, desperate enough to chew off its limb to get free. Let my voice speak for those cannot speak for themselves.

**Jennifer Kirkpatrick
Scappoose**



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