



OPINION

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Bush's Marriage Proposal Misguided

BY JOHN LEWIS

In February, President Bush unveiled proposals for changing the 1996 welfare reform law, which Congress must reauthorize this year. Included is a proposal to provide up to \$300 million for state-based initiatives "focusing on family formation and healthy marriage activities." While the goal of stable families is laudable, the focus on marriage is misguided.

The President's marriage proposal is dangerous because it relies on fiction: namely, that the only thing missing from a single mother's life is a man to take care of her. It appeals to the hopeless romantic, and that isn't rational.

We don't need an Oregon matchmaking agency. Our Congressional delegation should not get involved in this illusion.

John Lewis is an administrator with the Oregon Center for Public Policy.

Jackson Urges Middle East Reconciliation

"There is a worsening state of crisis with global consequences in the Middle East. Our nation's human rights, political, economic and military interests are at stake. To blame President Bush is wrong, to have high expectations of his leadership and the Secretary of State, Colin Powell is right.

"Our influence in the world and our reputation is on trial. We are not responsible for starting this round of violence, however we must assume responsibility for stopping it. We need the United States and the United Nations to act. We need to use the United States and its allied strength to enforce United Nations Resolution 1402. We must intervene with the highest level of leadership.

"The political prison status elevates Yasser Arafat to the status of a martyred symbol and

strengthens him politically. It isolates the United States in the region and leaves our ally, Israel, vulnerable and alone. Humiliation policy does not punish, rather it exalts Arafat.

"Our Sept. 11 coalition is weakening. Our present role as silent and military partners to the invasion into the compound strengthen anti-American forces against allied governments and contributes to destabilization. That is why they are uniformly appealing to us to change our policy and our rhetoric. We are not an inconsequential third party in this conflict, yet we are too distant diplomatically to be so close militarily and financially. Our interest and exposure is substantial.

"The Palestinians and the Israelis are holding each other in a death grip, bound by pain, fear and politics. Neither has the

strength to turn the other loose. Only President Bush can call both and get a response. And with that kind of power, he must pry them loose from each other and create a venue to negotiate and break the cycle of fear and death and create a buffer zone or a bridge between the two. The jail warden and the prisoner cannot negotiate peace. Self-demolition—the language of despair is fed by humiliation policy. Thus, planning funerals and not futures feeds off of the present policy.

"We must do a more difficult thing than choose sides, we must choose reconciliation. That is the heavy lifting that our nation can and must do to move it towards stability in the region."

Rev. Jesse L. Jackson Sr. is the founder and president of the Rainbow Push Coalition that's based in Chicago.

Coach Them to be Champions in the Classroom, Too

BY HUGH B. PRICE

The National Collegiate Athletic Association tournament's win-or-go-home format simultaneously puts a premium on both an entire team's unquestioning commitment to teamwork, and yet also on the necessity in virtually every game of an individual deciding to rise above others to make the difference.

It's too bad the enjoyment the collegiate game brings has to be unnecessarily undermined by a fact that can no longer be ignored in discussing higher education and its varsity athletes.

That issue is why do so few of these varsity athletes, especially in football and basketball, not graduate on time or not at all?

The statistics about varsity-level athletes who don't graduate within the standard graduation-rate measuring stick of six years from entrance—especially at the major football and basketball colleges is astonishing.

According to last year's study by the Knight Foundation Intercollegiate Athletic Commission, only about a third of the male basketball players at the top 100 or so NCAA colleges graduate on time, a rate that's fallen sharply in the last five years. The NCAA itself puts the rate at 40 percent, which it says is the second-lowest rate in nearly two decades.

The national graduation rate for all college students is 56 percent.

Last year only four of the 28 first-round selections in the Na-

tional Basketball Association draft had completed four years of college.

The problem is still largely confined to the male side of the gender line. The top four women's teams in the tournament have an average graduation rate of 66 percent; the top four men's teams: 32 percent. But many see similar problems ahead for women athletes as those games become more exciting—and lucrative to the television networks, and the schools themselves.

Let's ask the varsity athletes what are they doing with their time, and what are they thinking—or not thinking—about their future.

And let's ask their parents what advice they're giving their children.

And then, let's ask the high school coaches and the teachers and guidance counselors and principals about their responsibility to equip these superb athletes with, at least, respectable academic skills to get them ready not just for college, but for life.

And finally, let's ask the college and university coaches and deans and presidents to stop rationalizing their exploitation of these young people.

These colleges and universities understand that their responsibility to the athletes whose exploits on the playing field that brings them such acclaim, should include coaching them to be champions in the classroom, too.

Hugh B. Price is the president of the National Urban League.

West Side Willamette River Combined Sewer Overflow Project

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