

OPINION

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Crossing All Lines of Reasoned Discourse

Words were immoral, anti-family

The Links, Inc., one of the nation's oldest African-American women's organizations, calls on The White House, Congress and the Federal Communications Com-

mission to condemn former Education Secretary William Bennett's racist comments and cancel the Republican commentator's radio program.

Dr. Gladys Gary Vaughn, national president of The Links, urges the U.S. Senate and House to pass resolutions condemning Bennett's statement linking a presumed reduction in the crime to aborting unborn black babies.

"You could abort every black

baby in this country and your crime rate would go down," he said.

"Bill Bennett's hypodermal contemplation crosses all lines of reasoned discourse. The Links, Inc. respectfully urges Congress to pass resolutions condemning his remarks and the FCC to require the Salem Radio Network to cancel his show, Morning In America. "We also call on the White House to denounce the immoral, antifamily

and racist remarks. There are no circumstances in which his words would be appropriate," Vaughn said.

Established in 1946, The Links, Inc., is one of the nation's oldest and largest volunteer service organization of women are committed to enriching, sustaining and ensuring the culture and economic survival of African-Americans and other persons of African descent.

Portland Schools Ignore Real Issues

Students face racism and discrimination

BY BYRD

Portland Public Schools under the direction of superintendent Vicki Phillips comprised a design team to 'study' alternate configurations for the predominantly black Jefferson High School.

Phillips and the PPS board seemingly gave in to opposition from the Jefferson community concerning a 7th through 12th grade configuration for the school during a school board meeting on March 28. She had justified the configuration by stating it was the best model to raise student achievement in non-white, low income, non-English and special needs student populations.

During a recent City Club address, she tied progress in closing the achievement gap for students of color and those from low-income homes to an examination of the assumptions about these students, the curriculum used, the teaching methods used and how schools interact with the community.

Based on her own reasoning it would appear that Phillips 'assumes' there is a 'special way' to educate black children, that black children learn 'differently' than white students, and that there is a connection between the learning abilities of black children and those of special needs children.

Instead of confronting the negative conceptions towards black students and learning, Phillips perpetuates the 'assumptions' held by many who work within Portland Public Schools. By focusing on the grade configuration of Jefferson, she deflects attention from the real issues confronting many black students and others in PPS: Racism and Discrimination!

Five parents with students in PPS, four black and one white, have recently contacted me with concerns for their respective children.

One parent wanted her high achieving son to be promoted to a more challenging math class and was denied. Another parent told a similar story, different school. Another parent told me his son was placed in a Special Ed. class when his son is not a Special Ed. student and never has been. Nonetheless, he was placed in Special Ed.

A parent affected by recent school closures wanted her daughter transferred out of what she deemed an inferior school and for good reason, she was denied. At the end of the last school year a mother's son and his friends were called 'nigger' by a substitute teacher at a local elementary school. And then there was the incident at Davinci Middle School last year involving two black students and a 'lesson' in slavery.

If Phillips is truly concerned about raising achievement for black students and others as she purports, she would first deal with her own assumptions about the manner in which black children learn. She should know that the shuffling of Jefferson High School students would not engender an increase in academic achievement. Research clearly demonstrates that it is the educational environment both mental and physical, not the configuration that increases student achievement.

All successful schools regardless of configuration and racial makeup for that matter, have a few things in common, effective parent, school and district communications; administrators who steadfastly believe all children can learn; administrators that actively promote and maintain strong and vibrant school programs.

Byrd is a public schools advocate and local African American resident.

Appalling Racism

The appalling, racist comments of William J. Bennett demand condemnation.

How could a man who equates black children with crime—not to mention seeing genocide of African Americans as a theoretical crime solution—have been entrusted by the Reagan administration with educating our children and by the administration of George H. W. Bush with protecting them from illegal drugs?

Bennett's comments give us insight into a dangerous mindset that has led to underfunded public schools that are leaving behind so

many children—especially children of color and poor children. They underscore the horror we saw when New Orleans flooded and the poor—mostly black and brown—were left behind.

Truly, America needs a new direction. Every responsible public official—Democrat and Republican—must condemn Bennett's grotesque comments and he must apologize to African Americans and to all Americans whom he has so deeply offended.

John Sweeney
AFL-CIO President

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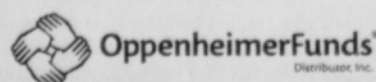
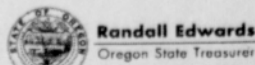
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Benefiting from the Devastation

Minority-owned firms not so lucky

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

After Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, the federal government set aside over \$62-billion in emergency funds to aid victims, clean up and rebuild from the storm.

There are millions of dollars to be made in reconstruction projects. What's ironic is that friends of the federal government – the same government that was negligent in its handling of the disaster – are now benefiting from the storm's devastation.

A major "winner" in the post-Hurricane clean up work is the Shaw Group. The Baton Rouge based construction and engineering firm, received two \$100 million no-bid contracts, one from Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the other from the Corps of Engineers, to work on levees and to pump water out of New Orleans.

Joe M. Allbaugh, President Bush's 2000 campaign manager and a former director of the FEMA, represents the Shaw Group and Halliburton, Vice President Dick Cheney's former employer. Kellogg Brown & Root, a Halliburton subsidiary, stands to earn millions under a no-bid contract for work at Naval facilities in Louisiana and Mississippi. Cheney was Halliburton's CEO until 2001.

Unfortunately, minority-owned businesses aren't quite as lucky as the President's friends. Only 1.5 percent of the \$1.6 billion already awarded by FEMA has gone to minority businesses; that's less than one third of the 5 percent usually required.

To expedite the rebuilding process, Congress and the Bush administration decided to waive certain rules, like open and com-

petitive bidding for Hurricane Katrina recovery contracts. This opened the door for companies like Shaw, which already had the ear of the decision makers, to lay claim to the billions at stake. As a result, minority-owned firms are pushed to the side, along with the debris.

This scenario is all too familiar. In 2001, Kellogg Brown & Root was awarded a no-bid contract worth several hundred million dollars by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to repair Iraq's oil infrastructure and put out oil fires.

For far too long, the wealthy establishment in this country has prospered on the backs of the poor. We can no longer allow this to continue. To see the same circle of individuals that were originally neglectful,



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contributing to the loss of property and human lives, now profit in Katrina's aftermath is appalling. It is also unacceptable to know that minority-owned firms are loosing out on these multi-million dollar contracts. It only seems fair that a majority of the clean up work in New Orleans, a predominantly black city, should go to local firms, owned by people of color. These companies and their employees have ties to the community; these personal, emotional and financial connections are necessary to ensure the city is rebuilt and repopulated as quickly as possible.

Judge Greg Mathis is chairman of the Rainbow PUSH-Excel Board and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.