

OPINION

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BY MARIAN WRIGHT-EDELMAN

Tobacco and Children: An Ongoing Fight

Against relentless, powerful opponent

In the midst of all the focus on the war in Iraq and current moral scandals among some of our political and religious leaders, a different issue was quietly appearing on ballots across the country on Election Day. Voters in Arizona, Florida, Nevada, Ohio, and South Dakota all approved statewide measures that required either smoke-free work places, increased state tobacco taxes to fund needs like health care and early child development programs, and/or funded tobacco prevention programs.

The fact that more states and communities are passing laws like

these, which are critical for children's health, should renew our courage to keep fighting against tobacco companies whose deadly products cost many thousands of lives every year.

Smoking can harm children before they are born. Women who smoke during pregnancy are at greater risk of having a premature birth, pregnancy complications, low birthweight infants, or a stillbirth, and have a higher rate of infant mortality.

Smoking during pregnancy is also associated with Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), poor lung development, asthma, and other negative consequences for children's health and development. Increasing access to prenatal care is one key to helping address negative behavioral habits like smoking that can harm children. There is

good news here: The percentage of women who smoke during pregnancy has declined during the last decade. But in 2002, more than one in 10 women giving birth still reported smoking during pregnancy, so there's much more work to be

quit, and to protect everyone from secondhand smoke. They've studied all the facts about children and smoking and have a long list of compelling reasons why it's important to protect children now. Here are just a few of the alarming reali-

illnesses. Almost 90 percent of adults who smoke took their first puff at or before the age of 18. The tobacco industry spends more than \$9.7 billion a year or more than \$26.5 million a day, advertising and marketing its death products. Parents and adults who want to keep children away from tobacco and cigarettes are definitely fighting a relentless and powerful opponent.

These statistics are a wake-up call for anyone concerned about children's and public health. Every year, the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids sponsors a "Kick Butts Day" to expose and counter the tobacco industry's marketing strategies aimed at young people. Students of all ages take part in events like youth-led rallies in state capitols, surveys of tobacco advertising in local stores, and street activ-

ism. Events like this can make a real difference in teaching young people some of the facts about and consequences of tobacco use, and the ways tobacco companies' marketing tactics are addicting them to life-threatening habits.

Many organizations provide materials specifically to help parents teach their children about the dangers of smoking. And all of us can pay attention to and support more ballot measures like the ones that passed this year. Together, we can make a real difference in protecting more children from secondhand smoke and reducing the number of children who start smoking—two key steps in giving more children the Healthy Start in life they all deserve.

Marian Wright Edelman is president and founder of the Children's Defense Fund.

The struggle to stop children and youths from smoking is even fiercer.

done.

The struggle to stop children and youths from smoking is even fiercer. The nonprofit Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids is at the forefront of the fight to prevent young people from developing dangerous smoking habits, to help smokers

ties: Every day, another 1,500 children become daily smokers. Of these children and youths, 148,482 will die prematurely from their addiction. Altogether, more than 5 million children alive today will die prematurely from smoking-related

The Portland Observer Established 1970
USPS 959-680
4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., Portland, OR 97211

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, PUBLISHER: Charles H. Washington
EDITOR: Michael Leighton
PUBLIC RELATIONS: Mark Washington
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Good News for Schools, State

A welcome reversal of fortune

BY SUSAN CASTILLO

It is very different today than it was when Gov. Ted Kulongoski and I took office four years ago. Then we were looking at unprecedented budget cuts. Now we are looking at an opportunity for unprecedented reinvestment. I want to thank the governor for his commitment to education, and I want to thank the voters across the state of Oregon for turning back measures 41 & 48.

The governor's budget is good news for students and families be-



cause it begins the strategic reinvestment in our schools. We have a great deal of ground to make up, and the governor's long-term plan recognizes that.

His budget is also very good news for the state of Oregon because strong education funding is the catalyst for Oregon's continued recovery and long-term prosperity.

We must ensure that we make good choices with the dollars we have been given. Our opportunity is for smart re-investment—to invest in education programs and services that deliver increased student achievement. That is our goal and our purpose.

As we move forward this session, one of the key principles for K-12 education is spending must be its transparency. We need to ensure that we make the most of every dollar we have been given, but we must also ensure that our communities know what we are doing and why. I believe that K-12 education does a wonderful job in showing where the dollars go, and the Open Books Project is a perfect illustration of that. Every school district's actual spending is set out for review and comparison with other districts across the state.

I'd like to highlight a few items in

the governor's education budget: K-12 funding \$6.06 billion. This is the first time education has been above essential budget level in 10 years, and I believe it is an excellent start in the strategic reinvestment in Oregon's K-12 system.

I support the establishment of an Innovation Fund, and I will work to increase the resources

available for full funding of Head Start for all eligible students.

I am pleased the governor supports the expansion of full-day kindergarten across the state. I strongly support the expansion of performance audits for schools and districts. I am especially excited about the funding of Oregon's Teacher Mentor Pro-

Our opportunity is for smart re-investment—to invest in education programs and services that deliver increased student achievement.

available in that fund. I am thrilled that the governor has earmarked \$10 million for new high school graduation requirements. We need these funds to successfully implement the changes the State Board of Education is proposing, and I am gratified that the governor recognizes the fundamental need for these funds.

I support moving the corporate kicker into a "rainy day fund," and I support the proposal to raise the corporate minimum tax. These funds will add much-needed stability to the state school fund and will

program. This is the first funding for this essential program in 10 years, and it will make a huge difference for teachers and students across the state.

Finally, I wish to thank the governor for his support for the KIDS project, Oregon's integrated data system. This initiative will streamline data collection and allow for sophisticated data analysis, leading to improved classroom instruction and student achievement.

Susan Castillo is the state schools superintendent.

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Staggering Jobless Rate

Editor's note: U.S. Rep. Melvin L. Watt, chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, released the following statement on behalf of the CBC:

Unemployment figures from the U.S. Department of Labor show that African American unemployment is a staggering 8.6 percent, compared to 3.9 percent for white Americans and 4.9 percent for Hispanic Americans, once again widening the already dramatic gap that exists between African Americans and other Americans.

The rate of unemployment for African Americans is consistently more than double the rate for white Americans. Such a huge gap shows that African Americans lag woefully behind in jobs, employment opportunities and the ability to survive.

This, unfortunately, impacts on all aspects of life and widens the disparities gap for African Americans in health care, retirement security, education, employment security and wealth building.

As we approach the end of another year, this trend must end. It is harmful to the millions of African Americans still unemployed who are unable to participate fully in this society. We once again call on President Bush to show his personal commitment to closing the disparities that continue to plague our country.



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