OPINION

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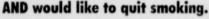
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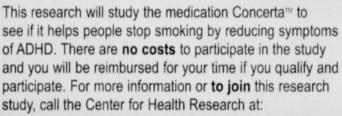
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Smith, Dungy and Obama:

Breaking barriers at the top of their fields

BY MARC H. MORIAL

mier contest - the Super Bowl.

And another black man - Illinois elections. Sen. Barack Obama - took the first the battle for the nation's highest the National Football League's

What a delightful coincidence that these historic developments would occur in the month that celebrates the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Obama's hardly the first African American to vie for the presishoulders of the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Shirley Chisholm, the Rev. Al crown-jewel game makes up for the "Rooney Rule" broke down barri-Sharpton, Carol Moseley Braun and others.

Not since Jackson in 1988 has a black been considered a serious contender for the Oval Office. But, unlike his predecessors, Obama probably stands the best chance of becoming the first African American to win his party's presidential nomination in 2008 or beyond.

In a recent Zogby poll, the Illinois Democrat led the field in New Hampshire, a historic testing ground for presidential candidates. with 23 percent of voters favoring

For the first time in history, not Hillary Rodham Clinton and John 1989, Art Shell became the first cess gives an additional impetus of one but two blacks - the Chicago Edwards. Up until 1992, the candi- African-American head coach in the continuation of that kind of Bears' Lovie Smith and the India- date who won the primary usually the NFL's modern era. napolis Colts' Tony Dungy - are made his way to the White House. leading their teams to football's pre- Bill Clinton and George W. Bush Pittsburgh Steeler who got his Bears fan Obama made a great point

That Smith beat out his mentor step toward throwing his hat in the Dungy by a few hours to be the first ring in the ultimate political contest black coach to guide his team into

In his own way, Dungy, a former have defied that trend in recent coaching start in 1981, played his own role in diversifying the profession by recruiting Smith to be line- more to the content of their characbacker coach for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 1996.

The institution of the so-called men of humility. They're both men

They give our children hope that the American Dream is possible for all

dency: He stands upon the broad members of society to attain.

fact that his Bears handily defeated ers in the NFL's 'old-boy' network my beloved New Orleans Saints to get there. I'll forgive Lovie this year because it is truly a great day in history when two black coaches meet at the pinnacle event of professional football. I cannot make promises for next year, though. If Lovie robs my Saints of their Super Bowl dreams next year, I'll have to take it personally.

Roughly 66 percent of National Football League players are African Americans but blacks have long faced formidable obstacles to their

by requiring teams to consider at least one minority candidate in their hiring processes. By the start of this year's season, there was a record seven black head coaches.

"For years and years, the coaching decisions and many other decisions in professional football really followed the old way of doing things," Darrell Millner, professor of black studies at Portland State University, told the Oregonian newspaper recently. "These two black coaches today are reflection

him compared to 19 percent for Sen. populating the coaching ranks. In that that is changing. Their succhange.'

In a recent television interview. about these two men that speaks less to the color of their skin and ter, to invoke Dr. King. "What makes it even better is that they're both

of God. They never trash talk. They're not yellers or screamers on the sidelines. They're a couple of class individuals," he said.

In a Letter to the Editor to his local paper, Hal Nelson, executive director of secondary education for the Sarasota County School District, wondered if divine intervention played some

role in bringing two black coaches together in the Super Bowl to "illuminate the potential of the American experience" and underscore the importance of three key qualities exhibited by Dungy and Smith - competence, character and tenacity.

Smith, Dungy and Obama are positive role models for future generations to aspire to. They give our children hope that the American Dream is possible for all members of society to attain.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

Demand More Education Spending

Reform starts with financial commitment equally prepared for college or the

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

5 years ago, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind law. This piece of legislation was intended to improve the public school system by increasing the penal-

academic standards.

Though controversial, the law next level. was an attempt to provide America's spending on public education didn't biased system are black. increase sufficiently.

strategies need to improve their demicrequirements for students; this schools. They were doomed to fail

and, in turn, so are our children. The No Child Left is the time for progressive

thinkers to fight for an inties for schools that didn't meet crease in education spending.

School systems have, for years, If a student was struggling, he/ routinely used standardized tests if the school continued to fall short with the passage of No Child Left of expectations, students are al- Behind, these tests went from belowed to transfer schools. Schools ing an assessment to, in many cases, harsh penalties, including closing. or not a student will move on to the

For students in under-funded, public school children with a quality i.e. poor, school districts, passing education. There was one huge flaw these tests is next to impossible. for schools went up, but federal Many of those affected by this

Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass., has Without adequate funding, proposed a plan that calls for states schools couldn't implement the to work to develop consistent acawould ensure students, regardless of where they live, would leave school

workforce. Kennedy has also called for an expansion of social programs for poor children; social workers. Behind Act is up for re- will be in every school that has a newal. With the Democrats large population of students living exerting their recently won below the poverty line. When stupower in the Congress, now dents living in urban areas are able to emotionally and psychologically 'deal with' the violence and poverty that may surround them, they learn better.

If federal and local governments she could receive free tutoring and, to gauge student progress. But, were to adequately fund the nation's public schools, the schools could implement the programs needed to ensure student success. that repeatedly fail were subject to being the deciding factor in whether Instead, the country has poured its money into the criminal injustice system and defense spending, leaving our children, our future, vulnerable and unprepared for an increasing competitive society. The public with the bill, however. Expectations The odds are stacked against them. education system needs to be reformed. Real reform starts with a financial commitment from the federal government.

Judge Greg Mathis is national vice president of Rainbow PUSH and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

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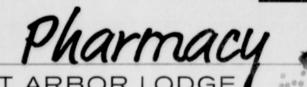
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State of the Union Brush Off



BY RALPH B. EVERETT

The President's State of the Union address was an opportunity to get a glimpse of his domestic priorities for his final two years in office.

I applaud his call for a bipartisan approach to issues of pressing importance to people of color, particularly health care, education, and retirement security. But I'm concerned that the war in Iraq has diminished his administration's ability to address these issues.

For so many Americans, particularly people of color, security is about having a job to support your family, living in a safe community, having access to quality education and health care, looking forward to a decent life in retirement, and being able to cast one's vote without intimidation and have it count.

To be sure, the war in Iraq is a matter of deep concern for us all, and we must do everything we can to support our troops and ensure that they come home safely. But the obvious constraint of the domestic agenda that the President put forth makes it Americans and other minorities.

clear that the Congress will have to demonstrate both leadership and innovation to ensure that issues of economic security, hope, and opportunity are addressed in a substantive

I was dismayed that the President made no mention of New Orleans or the broader issue of poverty in the United States. We recall his pledge, made in Jackson Square a few days after Hurricane Katrina came ashore, to "do what it takes" to help citizens rebuild their communities and their

We remember his promise of "bold action" to address the persistent poverty that exists in the region and has its roots in racial discrimination. Given the absence of this subject in the State of the Union address, African Americans and other Gulf Coast residents who have suffered so much can be excused for wondering if their federal government has forgotten about them.

Ralph B. Everett is president and chief executive officer of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a group dedicated to improving the socioeconomic status of black