

Point of View

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TO BE EQUAL

PUBLIC EDUCATION

By Hugh B. Price

The turbulent political weather in Washington bodes ill for public education, especially urban school districts.

The threatened recession of federal funding for schools, not to mention the talk of eliminating the U.S. Department of Education entirely, means it is show time at last for systemic school reform.

The world today bears little resemblance to that of a mere half decade ago, much less a generation ago. Communism has crumbled, and market economies reign supreme. This ruthless competitive world waits for no nation, no corporation, no ethnic group and no individual. Should any competitor falter, there's always an emerging country, a lean, mean start-up company, an entrepreneur, or an eager immigrant poised to fill the void.

In such a cutthroat economic environment, all youngsters must possess state-of-the-art competencies, such as critical thinking and computer skills, in order to compete in the labor market. Crudely put, if they are not equipped to put something on the table, they will not



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be at the table of opportunity in the 21st century.

The challenge is especially daunting for low-income youngsters in struggling inner-city schools who start out so far away from the table. Yet if the rhetoric that reformers espouse—"All children can learn"—is ever to become reality, the pace of positive change in urban school districts must escalate—and soon.

It strikes me there are several levers for effecting systemic educational change: Establishing national academic goals that set competency standards for all students to meet, and for all school systems to see that students meet.

Formulating a crisp and convincing vision of the kind of education we want for all kids and communicating that vision aggressively so that opinion leaders and the public, including non-parents, business leaders, and the media, understand and embrace the vision.

Providing adequate financing for public education so that educators have the wherewithal to do their work and all children have equitable access to the learning tools, from textbooks to technology, to profit fully from instruction.

Modernizing teacher training, induction, and professional development so that educators have the skills and habits of mind to serve children in all socioeconomic circumstances well.

Empowering parents and guardians to function as sophisticated, insistent, and yes, constructive consumers of their children's education.

Providing for some form of choice within public school systems to keep educators on their toes and give parents genuine options if they are unhappy.

Making certain there is an adequate development infrastructure in place after school and over the summer to support the social development of youngsters, especially preteens and teen-agers, in ways that reinforce their formal education.

Some five years ago, I suggested that public education had a decade at the outside to shore up its credibility and recapture public confidence. The seismic elections last fall, and their aftermath, confirm that the soul-searching is now well underway, at least within the souls of lawmakers. May programmatic cows long considered sacred are feeling the Congressional scalpel. Even Big Bird seems sure to have her wings clipped.

We have found so much that does work. It's time now to take school reform to the next plateau by reaffirming these reforms that are so crucial to children, to public education as an institution, and finally, to democracy.

THIS WAY FOR BLACK EMPOWERMENT

WHAT IS OKLAHOMA CITY'S LEGACY?

By Dr. Lenora Fulani

President Clinton, that most partisan of politicians, has lost no time in finding a way to use the Oklahoma City tragedy to his advantage. By assailing the country's popular and populist talk shows as "purveyors of hatred and division," he has simultaneously retaliated against his most vociferous critics, and all but accused them of being the authors of the worst terrorist act ever committed on American soil.

These expressions of America disaffection and anger at our government — as vociferous as they might get —

are not the source of the degeneration of civil society. The blame for that degeneration must be laid squarely on the shoulders of our President and the bipartisan government, whose incendiary disregard for the American people has lit the telephone lines on every talk show in the country and the fuse on the bomb outside the Federal Office Building in Oklahoma City.

Mr. Clinton, together with our Congress (including Mr. Gingrich), and the intransigent and arrogant bipartisan political establishment are blocking the urgent attempts of Americans to reform the way we do politics in

America. In his speech to the National Press Club last Tuesday, no less a populist than Ross Perot reinforced the extent to which the two parties have failed to respond to this agenda. He pointed out how popular sentiment in favor of radical campaign finance reform, against the influence of corporate lobbyists, against NAFTA and GATT, and for the Balanced Budget Amendment, has been manipulated and disregarded by both parties. This kind of flagrant disregard for democratic approaches to opening up the policy-making process creates a climate for fanaticism and

terrorism. Bipartisan governmental arrogance and abandonment are more reckless, and more dangerous to our democracy than the "loud and angry voices" condemned by Mr. Clinton.

Not content with using the Oklahoma City tragedy to try to censor the dialogue of the American people, President Clinton is also using these frightening events to drum up support for his ill-considered "Omnibus Counter-terrorism Bill." And he is not alone. Republican leadership — including Senators Bob Dole and Tom Daschle, Speaker Newt

Gingrich, and Rep. Henry Hyde, who is chairman of the House Judiciary Committee — are tripping over each other to line up in support of the Administration's bill.

The bill creates a new crime — "international terrorism" — which actually doesn't cover anything that isn't already a crime. The sole purpose of this bill appears to be to allow law enforcement agencies to avoid certain constitutional protections that currently apply to Americans exercising their right to speak out and freely associate. For instance, the bill allows for "guilt by association." If an American supports the lawful, humanitarian activities of an



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organization, the president has declared to be a "terrorist" organization, that Americans can go to jail for up to ten years. If this bill had been in effect when the African National Congress was designated "terrorist," then an American who contributed to freeing President Nelson (See *Blk Empowerment*, Pg 4)

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

TOO LITTLE TOO LATE

By Bernice Powell Jackson

Twenty years ago Saigon fell. Twenty years ago this nation was torn apart after nearly a decade of war in Viet Nam and the deaths of 58,000 young American men and women. Now Robert McNamara, former Secretary of Defense has written a book admitting that he knew the Viet Nam War was unwinnable.

Twenty years ago my cousin Charles died before his 30th birthday. I don't know what the death certificate listed as his cause of death, but it should

have read Viet Nam War. Because although he didn't die in combat, Charles was surely a casualty of that war and his name should be on the Viet Nam War memorial in Washington.

And five years later, almost to the day, Charles' mother died. And while I am sure her death was attributed to pneumonia, I am just as sure that her death was caused by a heart broken because of the death of her only child. Her name should be on a wall too, as should be the tens of thousands of Viet Nam veterans who are the walking dead—some

still addicted to the drugs they came to depend on while in Viet Nam, some addicted to alcohol, others so troubled by what they saw during the insanity of war that they have never recovered mentally, emotionally or spiritually.

Robert McNamara and the other leaders of this nation who sacrificed these young people for an unwinnable war have a lot to be sorry for. It's too bad more of them don't admit that.

It's too bad they don't admit that the Viet Nam War was a war fought by children of color and

the children of working class white Americans. Not too many middle class or rich children fought in the Viet Nam war—somehow they were exempted from combat.

The Viet Nam War devastated the African American community, as thousands of my contemporaries were called into service, never to return or to return never the same. As young women, we talked about how the war had cut drastically the pool of marriageable black men. As a community, we saw for the

(See *Civil Rights*, Page 4)

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