

## COMMENTARY

# Business group champions support on educational battlefield

Marian Wright Edelman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

In a recent paper written for a new group, Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities, Dr. Lawrence Korb, who was an Assistant Secretary of Defense under Ronald Reagan, tells us that the United States has spent more than \$2 trillion on national security since the end of the Cold War.

Korb estimates that we could cut \$40 billion a year from our defense budget and still maintain the most powerful military in the world. Can you imagine the weapons we could buy for \$40 billion? I can: Weapons against preventable children's diseases and hunger, against poor education and substandard housing, and against violence and hopelessness in the neighborhoods, schools, and homes of this country.

BLSP is taking its case to the people. With a four-year, multi-million dollar national issues marketing campaign, they are seeking to redefine the national debate on federal spending priorities.

The membership of this group includes businesses large and small, made up of hard-headed, bottom-line businessmen who recognize that America's national security depends on educating our children, making

our communities safe, providing health care for our families and keeping our national defense strong.

Companies such as Ben & Jerry's, Working Assets, Newman's Own, banks, publishers, insurance companies, food manufacturers, and pharmaceutical companies, have joined with retired admirals and generals in a campaign to bring the truth to you, the voting public, through radio and television advertising, talk shows, the Internet, and a nationwide bus tour. They hope to visit with unions, civic organizations, PTAs, youth, business people, social service advocates and elected officials.

I agree with the group's director of constituency group relations, Virginia Witt, when she said that we must make certain "that every dollar spent on defending our country is spent wisely. In today's global economy, every dollar spent to educate American children and give them the skills they need to lead our nation in the next century is a dollar invested in keeping America strong and safe for the future."

This unique group joins American business leaders, who understand what it takes to run a profitable business and the foolishness of waste, with retired soldiers, officers, and

senior military advisers, who know what is needed to maintain a strong national defense and take care of our troops.

It has come together to make its case not only to the Congress and the policy makers who spend our national tax dollars, but also to inform you - the public - when and where we are failing as a nation.

A nation is no better, no stronger, and no more honorable and moral than its people. Remember, it is our money the Pentagon is spending. And it is our children who are facing the new millennium, far too many still not immunized against preventable disease and suffering from easily-curable earaches and toothaches their uninsured working parents cannot afford to treat.

It is our children who are skipping meals and becoming homeless in greater and greater numbers because of the new welfare legislation passed by the Congress we elected and signed into law by the President we elected.

It is our children who are home alone or in poor-quality day care we can barely afford because quality, affordable child care is out of reach for too many working families.

It is our children who are not prepared to learn and succeed when they enter schools

staffed by teachers and principles who expect them to fail, and shrug when low expectations are fulfilled. And, it is our children who are not safe in our schools, or on our streets, or in our homes.

It's up to us - each one of us - to stand for children and make our voices heard. It's time to say NO to any more \$600 toilet seats and \$8,000 door hinges on the Pentagon's shopping lists. It's time to say YES to our children and to our future.

To find out when the Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities bus tour is coming near your town, you can call them at 202-543-1604 or visit them at virginia@businessleaders.org.

And to find out what you can do today for children and to help realign our national spending priorities, call Stand For Children at 1-800-643-4032 or visit its web site, www.stand.org and the Children's Defense Fund's web site at www.childrensdefense.org. Stand with us on June 1, 1999, in your community to make sure every child is ready for school and ready to learn.

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## Carl Rowan's Commentary

### Rhetoric, ill-conceived proposal demonizing U.S. in world's eyes

Special to Sentinel-Voice

As U.S. planes and missiles carry death and destruction into Yugoslavia and the Serb strongholds in Kosovo, how would you like the world to view this nation?

As a compassionate people willing to risk the lives of their sons and daughters in order to halt an unspeakable atrocity in the heart of Europe?

Or as a power-mad society, drunk with the knowledge that it is the world's only remaining great military power, and now hell-bent on imposing its views and wishes on the rest of the world?

President Clinton and other officials have tried valiantly to convince the world that we are the former - that, in bombing military targets in Yugoslavia, the United States has no territorial ambitions and no ulterior motives of any sort. Just a desire to halt Slobodan Milosevic's ghastly slaughter of the Kosovar Albanians.

But now comes Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, with a proposed "Serbia Democratization Act," which he says "has but one purpose - to get rid of the murderous regime of Mr. Milosevic." Helms puts such an "Ugly American" cast on what we are doing in the Balkans that it should make millions of Americans pray that our president could speak exclusively for this country in such times of great crisis.

Clinton has articulated often and well the hope that Milosevic will halt the murders of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo and enter a



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peace agreement under which some autonomy is returned to the Moslem majority. But the Serb dictator is surely encouraged to resist and continue his "ethnic cleansing" if U.S. officials like Helms are saying that they are motivated by a desire to overthrow the Yugoslav regime.

Just as counterproductive as Helms' ill-chosen rhetoric is a proposal - being floated by Sens. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., and Mitch McConnell, R-KY. - that the United States appropriate millions of dollars to arm the Kosovar Albanians. If anyone thinks Kosovo suffers from a civil war now, imagine the magnitude of the violence that will erupt - and go on almost forever - if the United States were to pick sides and arm one group!

That would be tantamount to the United States declaring support for only one side in Northern Ireland and arming it. Or taking a similar approach to India and Pakistan, or Israel and its Arab neighbors.

The pity is that no crisis can ever be so delicate that all politicians will refrain from remarks and proposals that muddy the waters and make solutions far more difficult.

Helms and other members of our Congress don't have any real need to strut and posture over what they would do to Milosevic or Yugoslavia; they just find the temptation to grandstand irresponsibly more than they can resist. But can no one convince them that even on the eve of a new millennium, their loose lips can sink ships?

## Anti-preference legislative initiatives could become trend

Carolyn M. Dejoie  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

As many predicted, the movement against affirmative action is spreading to other states. Ward Connerly, 10-year term regent of the University of California System and vociferous opponent of affirmative action, is attempting to place a similar initiative on Florida's ballot.

The Executive Order of 1972, which established affirmative action to provide equal opportunity to African-Americans in the areas of employment, education and contracting, has been in dispute since its inception.

The latest action to abolish it comes with the initiative process placed on the ballot.

Following the successful challenge to abolish affirmative action in California in 1994, strongly promoted by Connerly, Washington State and Houston, Texas have included similar referenda on their ballots.

Washington State, which is 30 percent Black, two percent Hispanic and majority Caucasian, easily passed the anti-affirmative action initiative.

However, the language of the referendum did not include the term affirmative action and was confusing and convoluted.

The question on the ballot asked should the state be allowed to discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color and gender. The politically correct response was "no." Thus, the anti-affirmative action initiative passed. So, the citizens mandated the abolishment of affirmative action in hiring, employment and in educational benefits.

The language was purposely worded to be difficult and misleading. It was structured with double negatives which actually meant approval.

Houston utilized similar wording in its initiative. The exception, however, was to

facilitate the interpretation of the language by affixing an addendum which basically said, "Do you want to abolish affirmative action." So, the referendum was defeated, and affirmative action was preserved.

Twenty states in the nation employ the initiative process. It is feared by those negatively affected by it that the initiative process to reject affirmative action may become a trend.

In balloting, the majority rules, and legislators must act accordingly.

Realistically observing many cities and states, it is evident that the majority group is inclined to revoke affirmative action. Some researchers fear that the death knell has already sounded or at least that the writing is on the wall.

However, it should not be happening, not in a country in which "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" and "equal justice under the law" are pillars upon which United States citizens have relied.

Affirmative action clearly substantiates these principles and provides a viable vehicle to actualize them.

The United States considers itself a "moral" nation based on religion, Christianity, and defends human rights the world over.

It would be appropriate to embrace a basic criterion of fairness in the execution of its social policies.

While California, Washington, and Houston were the only places to put the question of anti-affirmative action to its voters in the form of referenda, the nation should feel a sense of collective guilt which will hasten it to fight for fairness, justice and equality.

Proponents of affirmative action must be vigilant and exercise every opportunity to counter the rapid wave to abolish it.