



President-elect George W. Bush shakes hands with children after speaking at a Houston elementary school Monday, in honor of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. Bush will formally sworn in as the 43rd president on Jan. 22.

Bush pays tribute to King

Special to Sentinel-Voice

HOUSTON - Reaching out to blacks who voted overwhelmingly against him, President-elect George W. Bush on Monday said improving public schools was vital to realizing Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream of equality.

Speaking on the federal holiday that marks the slain civil rights leader's birth, Bush recalled King's struggle to achieve equal rights for blacks and stressed the importance of reforming public education, one of his top priorities.

"The dream of equality is empty without excellent schools, schools that stress reading and discipline and character and decency," Bush told students, teachers and parents at Kelso Elementary School, which sits among one-story houses, many of them with peeling paint and bars over the windows.

"America does not always live up to our ideals. Many Americans still face prejudice. The hopes of too many children are frustrated by deep poverty and unequal schools," he said.

"Our work is not finished," he added.

Just five days before taking the oath of office, Bush appeared at Kelso with Roderick Paige, an African-American who is the Houston Independent School District's (HISD) superintendent and his nominee for education secretary.

"His presence here today signals he understands the importance of this day to you, to me and to all of the nation," Paige said.

Some in the audience of about 100 people were skeptical that Bush would succeed in courting blacks —

fewer than 1 in 10 voted for him.

"It's an attempt. I think it's going to take more than this one visit," said Calvin Milton, 50, a fourth grade teacher who said he voted for Democratic Vice President Al Gore but was pleased to see Bush visit his school.

The visit indirectly highlighted the theme of Bush's inaugural address: uniting the country.

The visit to Kelso, whose student population is roughly two-thirds black and one-third Hispanic with a few

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Congo puts Kabila's son in charge

KINSHASA, Congo (AP) - Cabinet officials thrust President Laurent Kabila's son into power Wednesday, making him head of this vast, deeply troubled African nation's government a day after Kabila was reportedly killed in a palace attack.

Reports Kabila had died continued to roll in Wednesday. Congolese officials, however, insisted he was wounded but alive when they announced the temporary measures to fill the power vacuum that has threatened to throw Congo into even more turmoil.

"Until President Kabila

has recovered, and to ensure stability, the government has decided to give command of the government and military to Maj. Gen. Joseph Kabila," Communications Minister Dominique Sakombi Inongo said after an emergency Cabinet meeting.

The younger Kabila, who already heads the armed forces, was reported to have been injured in the 30 minutes of intense gunfire Tuesday at the presidential residence in Kinshasa. He made no public appearance Wednesday. State-run television broadcast footage of the uniformed major general

sitting silently, twisting his beret, but it was not immediately clear when the images were recorded.

Tuesday's shooting and the questions about Kabila's fate have added to the disorder in Congo, a resource-rich nation where a 2 1/2-year civil war has turned into a regional conflict involving troops from a host of African nations.

As dawn broke over the capital Wednesday, tanks and trucks filled with soldiers patrolled quiet and empty streets and helicopters clattered overhead.

State television broadcast

an appeal for calm, and a nighttime curfew remained in place.

Presidential spokesman Lambert Kaboye said in a telephone interview that Kabila had been evacuated to an undisclosed country. And Congo's ambassador in Zimbabwe, Kikaya Bin Karubi, told Zimbabwean television that Kabila was being treated there.

"He is in a very critical condition," he said, adding: "He has not passed away yet."

A lobbyist and public relations consultant who acts

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Violence mars annual parade

Sentinel-Voice

The 20th annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day Parade on Saturday ended abruptly after an incident in which authorities say two men were beaten by a group said to include from 25 to 30 people.

City Councilman Lawrence Weekly called an end to the parade, which was more than 80 percent complete when the violence erupted around 1:30 p.m.

The incident took place on the corner of Fourth Street and Bridger Avenue.

The violence sparked what one police officer called "chaos" among bystanders.

Authorities are unsure what ignited the melee, though some have speculated that the incident was gang-related. The parade's two pre-

vious incidents of violence, in 1986 and 1994, were related to gang activity, according to Las Vegas police.

Authorities immediately ruled out race as an influence. The victims and assailants were all black.

Witnesses, including Councilman Weekly, who was across the street in a viewing area, said the victims were being "stomped."

Police dismissed speculation that gun shots were fired during the incident and have said there is no evidence that the incident was gang-related. Weekly characterized the police response as quick and professional.

Neither victim was seriously injured and both were treated at University Medi-

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Lucille Bryant wears her Martin Luther King Jr. shirt proudly during the city's annual downtown parade. (See additional photos on pages 8 and 9). SV photo by John Broussard

Puffy case kicks off

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Forget the Benjamins, this case is all about Puff Daddy avoiding time in the slammer.

Jury selection officially kicked off Wednesday in what could be the trial of the year in the entertainment world:

Rap impresario Sean "Puffy" Combs, possibly the most powerful figure in the hip-hop world, is ready to stand trial in New York on gun and bribery charges stemming from a 1999 Times Square nightclub shooting.

His mother and sister sat in the back of the courtroom watching as several potential female jurors gasped audibly when they realized the defendant was Puff Daddy. Both the prosecution and the defense dismissed 28 out of 80 potential jurors from the first round jury pool. Another round of 80 was due for questioning by day's end.

Jury selection is expected to last a week. If Combs and his associates are convicted of the weapons charges,

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