

Bush, Blair working on plan for African aid

WASHINGTON (AP) - President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair on Tuesday embraced a tentative plan to forgive the debt of poor African nations "on a path to reform" but failed to come together on Blair's calls to double aid to the troubled continent and tackle global warming.

The leaders expressed confidence that the remaining details of a deal on African debt relief could be worked out among them and with the other countries attending next month's summit of major industrialized nations in Gleneagles, Scotland.

The leaders' agreement represented a milestone of sorts for the Bush-Blair relationship, in which the British leader has risked his own political standing at home to provide staunch support for U.S. Iraq policies but not often gained reward from the

White House.

Standing alongside Blair, Bush also for the first time addressed a 2002 memo to the prime minister from a top British intelligence official suggesting that the United States had bent intelligence to justify a decision to invade Iraq and sought British cooperation in doing so.

"There's nothing farther from the truth," Bush said. "Both of us didn't want to use our military. It was our last option."

Said Blair: "The facts were not being fixed in any shape or form at all."

Their face-to-face talks, the first since Blair narrowly won what Bush called a "landmark victory" for a third term, touched on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iraq's halting progress toward stability and efforts to turn Iran away from nuclear weapons pursuits.

In between talks in the

Oval Office and a working dinner in the White House residence, Bush and Blair made plain that Africa was their top agenda item and sought to minimize differences.

Bush aides have said the United States wants to ensure that Blair's hosting of the July summit is deemed a success. But Blair has made global warming and dramatically stepped-up aid to Africa the main topics of the meeting, and Bush has opposed most of what the British leader wants to do — or how he wants to do it. Hinting at the outlines of a deal in progress on debt forgiveness, each leader used language pleasing to the other.

Blair talked repeatedly about a key goal of Bush's: requiring African countries receiving help to be committed to "governance against corruption, in favor of democracy, in favor of the rule

of law."

"It's not a something-for-nothing deal," Blair said.

Added Bush: "Highly indebted developing countries that are on the path to reform should not be burdened by mountains of debt."

For his part, Bush gave support to Blair's desire that organizations such as the World Bank and the African Development Bank not be required to absorb the losses from the debt forgiveness and thus reduce the overall pot of money available for assisting needy countries.

"Our countries are developing a proposal for the G-8 that will eliminate 100 percent of that debt and that, by providing additional resources, will preserve the financial integrity of the World Bank and the African Development Bank," he said.

There was no public talk, however, of how disagreements over the financing of debt forgiveness would be resolved. The Bush administration had previously rejected Blair's proposals to raise money by selling bonds on the world's capital markets and by selling off some of the International Monetary Fund's massive gold re-

serves.

Bush also announced an African emergency famine relief initiative, with the United States to provide \$674 million, the British to put in an unknown, but lesser, amount, and both calling on other nations to increase their contributions.

Along with debt relief, Blair wants summit participants to double current Africa aid levels, as part of a push to go beyond emergency relief in favor of more comprehensive, long-term help for the continent's problems.

Bush didn't retreat from his position against a doubling of American money, saying that the United States has already tripled its Africa aid during Bush's four years in office, to \$3.2 billion in 2004, and that "we'll do more down the road." The president argued that calculating aid contributions as a percentage of national income, as Blair's proposal does, is the wrong way to look at the matter.

"There's a lot of things that aren't counted," Bush said. "Our country has taken the lead in Africa, and we'll stay there. It's the right thing

to do. It's important to help Africa get on her feet."

But amid a global lobbying tour with four weeks to go before the summit, Blair suggested he still had time to win the support he needs.

"There is a real and common desire to help that troubled continent come out of the poverty and deprivation that so many millions of its people suffer," Blair said. "It's our duty to act and we will."

Bush and Blair remained farthest apart on global warming.

"I've always said it's a serious long-term issue that needs to be dealt with," Bush said. But he fell far short of Blair's call for "clear and immediate action" to address rising temperatures, saying, "We want to know more about it."

The president, who opposes the kind of government mandates contained in the 1997 Kyoto treaty ratified by 140 nations but not the United States, questions whether manmade pollutants are the cause of global warming. He said the focus should be on research into new technologies and clean-energy sources.

Voting

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mittee for Civil Rights Under the Law. "It does appear to be, just in terms of public confidence in the process, I think people would feel more comfortable if they received confirmation, just in case if the machines were to go down or something like that, that their votes would be counted."

Currently, only Nebraska has the paper audit trail. Illinois will require one in 2006.

Tennessee native Athan Gibbs Sr., a Black man who championed the voting machine

he'd invented with a paper audit trail, was killed in a car accident early last year. He had pushed for it to become a federal mandate.

Hillman says she hopes the new guidelines will lead to a system in which voting in America will increase, says Hillman. Even so, the new systems will never be 100 percent fool proof she says. "When you implement a new system, inevitably, there are going to be glitches," she says. "I don't want people to expect in 2006 that there won't be any problems. There could be."

Murphy

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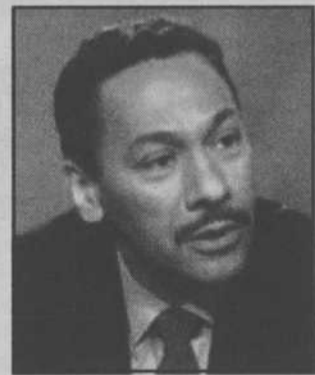
and yet so charming. It is rare in this town that you find a person with that type of combination.

The thing is that she has a way of getting your attention, almost getting on your nerves, but never crossing the line. The charm steps in and it just wins you over."

Watt said Murphy was a reliable source of information regarding the civil rights and civil liberties controversies that erupted after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. He said Murphy had the respect of each and every member of the CBC.

Among the CBC members attending the reception were John Conyers (D-Mich.), Bobby Scott (D-Va.), Lacy Clay (D-Mo.) and Carolyn Kilpatrick (D-Mich.).

Rep. Robert Livingston (R-La.), who proudly told the gathering he was an ancestral cousin of Murphy's, said she had the talent to work both parties. "I am a conservative Republican here to praise Laura Murphy," he said. "She knew how to work with



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— Mel Watt (D-N.C.)
Congressional Black Caucus Chairman

us on issues that were mutually important. We did not always agree politically, but we believe in the Constitution and that the government has an obligation to protect everyone's rights."

Sen. Paul Sarbanes (D-Md.), a longtime friend of the Murphy family, said Laura Murphy was following in the tradition of her family.

"I knew her father very well, and her brother is very active in Baltimore," Sarbanes said. "Laura's departure will be a loss for all of Washington. She played a valuable role in protecting free speech, making sure that people's rights were protected regarding the war on

terrorism and supported victims' rights regarding criminal matters. We will miss her on the Hill."

Nkechi Taifa, a senior policy analyst for the Open Society Institute, noted that Murphy was a mentor in the early part of her career.

"I remember working with Laura Murphy when we were fighting the Crime Bill [1994]," Taifa said.

"She was tenacious and was on point on the issues. We also worked on such issues as the mandatory minimum [sentences] regarding crack versus [powder] cocaine, and how racial bias was inherent in the sentencing."

Labels Don't Help Children Learn

By
Reg Weaver,
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The season of high-stakes standardized tests is moving into the season of unfair labels slapped on our public schools. The U.S. Department of Education is leading the way by telling parents across the country that their children and schools have failed to meet the demands in the so-called No Child Left Behind law.

Already on the failing schools list are about 11,000 public schools that are losing federal funding and local control because of these labels. It's estimated this list will grow by the thousands before the next school year begins. All this will be happening while the federal government is actually cutting education funding for most schools. Just at the time when, according to these labels, schools need more help, the federal government will be giving them even less.

To put the absurdity of the situation in perspective, here are some facts about the federal labels put on public schools by the so-called No Child Left Behind law:

Labels are arbitrary and don't mean anything.
Just a few weeks ago, U.S. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings granted Florida's request for "flexibility" in how the state labels schools as either failing or making progress. This decision was made after only 23 percent of Florida's schools met the standard set in the federal education law.

The Tallahassee paper referred to the secretary's action as "the wave of a hand" that suddenly changed the labels of about 400 Florida schools. It wasn't that the tests or test scores changed. But rather, the Secretary of Education was granting a favor to the state. This doesn't help any parent learn about their child's achievement level, and only causes confusion as to why these labels are put on schools in the first place.

Labels are damaging to schools and children.
We know that in the federal law, there are 37 different ways for any school to get slapped with a "needs improvement" label. We also know that in many communities that translates to failure.

Despite a wide variety of ways for schools to be labeled "failing," there are only a few narrow methods the law allows for fixing schools' problems. This just doesn't make sense. Federal funding becomes more restricted when the labels are put on schools, making it even harder for schools to hire reading teachers, for example.

Labels don't help students achieve success in school or in life.
The lack of clarity that surrounds these labels only manages to confuse parents and demoralize teachers, principals and school employees. Furthermore, it takes away precious school funding from classes and projects that actually help students learn.

It's estimated that it cost the state of Connecticut \$8 million a year to develop and administer the federally-required testing and school-labeling system. These are taxpayer dollars that could be invested in things that work like smaller class sizes, high quality teachers and up-to-date classroom materials. Investments in proven reforms and not labeling will make a difference in the way students learn.

NEA's 2.7 million members are the nation's leading advocates for children and public education.