

Tax, budget cuts threaten U.S. safety net

By Marian Wright Edelman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Astonishingly, President Bush, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist and House Republicans are pressing ahead with proposals to cut between \$35 and \$50 billion from crucial safety net programs including Medicaid, Section 8 housing, and food stamps while proposing huge tax cuts of about \$70 billion for the rich. They are opposing a bipartisan \$8.9 billion Disaster Relief Medicaid bill that would provide 100 percent federal funding for emergency health and mental health care for Katrina victims wherever they are. The Grassley-Baucus bill would also cut through the 50 states' red tape with varying eligibility requirements and just help suffering people now.

On September 24, 2001, just 13 days after our September 11th national disaster, emergency Medicaid assistance was up and running in New York. Katrina victims deserve no less. Yet, over seven weeks after Katrina destroyed the homes, schools, child care centers, jobs, medical records, and charity hospitals relied on by millions of people living in three of the poorest states in America — Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama — President Bush, Senator Frist and other Republicans in Congress are blocking the bipartisan

effort to get urgently needed health, mental health and other emergency supports to Katrina victims.

Why, after the colossal bungling, preventable loss of life and preventable suffering resulting from incompetent FEMA evacuation and relief efforts, which still persist, and why after the president's correct and compassionate words about the need to address poverty at the prayer service for Katrina victims at Washington National Cathedral, is he continuing to leave behind poor children, families, seniors, and single people who desperately need health care?

His administration and congressional allies claim they are taking care of the health and mental health needs of Katrina victims by giving some individual states Medicaid waivers. But this is a farce. They've given Medicaid waivers without a new dime to help fiscally strapped states meet the new demands of hundreds of thousands of people displaced by the storm. Mississippi, the poorest state in the nation, is turning down many people who apply because they don't fit current Medicaid eligibility requirements or are not responding promptly to people who do. Louisiana, the second poorest state in the nation, did not even bother to apply for a waiver because they don't have any money to meet the

match and, like all the other states with Katrina evacuees, don't want to accept thousands of new Medicaid applications for which they will be left holding the financial bag without 100 percent federal funding assistance. That's why Senators Grassley and Baucus introduced such a crucial emergency bill (S.1716) and tried at least twice to move it quickly with unanimous consent through the Senate. It would just get help to people. The governors support Grassley-Baucus. The hospitals and medical associations support it, African-American and faith leaders support it, child and family advocates support it, but the president, Senator Frist and House Republican leaders are blocking it.

A handful of Senators, House members and the Bush administration who are opposing the \$8.9 billion dollar emergency Medicaid bill for Katrina victims call it a budget buster and deficit increaser while supporting massive tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires that cost over 8 times more! And some leaders are still trying to impose deep cuts in safety net programs like Medicaid and Section 8 housing — programs desperately needed by Katrina and others who are our most vulnerable citizens. What hypocrites.

Who's left suffering while the president and Congress play political budget politics?

People, like the elderly heart patient no longer able to be served at a charity hospital that has closed; the family with two children — one 9-year-old with a serious neurological development delay that makes him function like a 2-year-old and a 7-year-old with asthma unable to get medications; all the diabetics and people with hypertension and arthritis with no medical cards or money for prescriptions; the single adults who aren't eligible for Medicaid; and the countless people suffering from post traumatic stress disorders including children acting out in school who need mental health assistance now.

I hope we will not tolerate this callous disregard by our president, Senate and House leaders a day longer. I hope you will call Senator Frist and Speaker Hastert toll free at 888-CDF-1221 and tell them to stop blocking help for Katrina victims, and call President Bush and tell him the same at 888-737-9612. Tell them to enact the Grassley-Baucus Emergency Health Care Relief Act of 2005 (S.1716) this week and not to bog it down, water it down, or delay it many more weeks as part of a partisan, complicated budget process. Children are suffering today. Their country ought to respond.

Marian Wright Edelman is CEO and founder of the Children's Defense Fund.

Black inmates in Seattle press for rehabilitation

By David Bash

Special to Sentinel-Voice

SEATTLE (NNPA) - Black prisoners at Monroe Penitentiary got a self-made opportunity Saturday to address high-ranking government, community representatives and grassroots folks and to make a televised plea for a chance at "rehabilitation."

Organized under their Black Prisoners Coalition (BPC), mostly long-term convicts who have become political activists, the group addressed Senator Adam

Kline, D-37th District; Representative Eric Pettigrew, D-37th District; King County Councilman Larry Gossett; Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos aide; Seattle School Board director Brita Butler-Wall; Ken Quinn, the newly appointed African-American superintendent of the prison; and about 30 additional people, many representing a diverse group of organizations, and churches at their Community Reform Summit.

Last year, Kline sponsored

a bill to address the racially disproportionate application of the three strikes law, showing that it unfairly impacted communities of color and was fiscally irresponsible, quoting statistics showing how the three strikes law would end up spending huge amounts of money warehousing and caring for a less-dangerous and aged prison population.

He also pushed a bill to eliminate the weaponless 2nd degree robbery crime from being a strike. Both bills

failed.

But at last year's BPC summit Kline said he was so impressed by the brothers' presentations that he would use his authority to have the next one televised on the government's TVW television network.

"I was...blown away by the speakers who destroyed the stereotypes of prisoners. Sometimes it affects you in the heart how you thought things that you really believed you didn't think," said Kline, Chairman of the Judiciary Committee and a member of the Sentencing Guidelines Commission.

"We don't talk about [the

issue of] rehabilitation, said Kline. "I wish I could convince the majority of my legislative colleagues to help you out."

Later in the presentation, inmate Patrick Bolt, who is White, presented statistics supporting Kline's statements, claiming that the Monroe prison used to have 20 teachers in the GED and vocational training programs there but currently employs only two.

In addition, he showed data from a three-state recidivism study showing as much as a 30 percent decline in reincarcerations rates of inmates who took vocational

training courses or improved their academic education in prison.

Bolt also noted that the average age of a state inmate is 18-25, without a high school education, and that prison inmates at Monroe under 22 years of age without a high school diploma or GED are required to attend educational classes that are provided by Edmonds Community College.

Current data presented in state judiciary committee meetings show that for every \$1 spent on education in prisons there is a \$2 rate of return to the state in taxes and

(See Inmates, Page 15)

Women

(Continued from Page 3)

Muhammad flew from California to meet her with his three sons. "We wanted to make this a family affair. This coming together for the march also helps to strengthen families' love for one another. Look all around you, thousands of Black people in love and harmony. That's why we came. We wanted our children to know that love exist between Black people all over the word," said Morales.

The program included experiences for several generations of youth.

"I came for the personal experience. We always see things on television. It's great to say you are a part of history. I wanted to hear Min. Farrakhan, Kanye West, Tavis Smiley and many other Black leaders pledge to do

more and to commit themselves to the upliftment of Black people," said Monica Veney, a sophomore at Old Dominion.

Rasheeda Brown Jordan is a sophomore at Norfolk State University and works a full time job. "Although money was tight, the sponsoring group made it affordable. The march came at the perfect time. The Bush administration tries to portray Black people as uncaring. This shows we do care," said Jordan.

Sophia Muhammad, a young mother from Altamonte Springs, Fla., said she was hoping that during her lifetime she would attend an event like this with her daughter. "Just like the brothers did in the past, there are many mother-daughter teams here today represented. This

feels so good," said Muhammad.

Some had mixed feelings about the Millions More Movement. Asantewaa Nkrumah-Ture marched with a group of 50 protesters to protest the last minute decision not to include a representative from the homosexual community. "I came here to support the right to inclusion by gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transvestites and queer brothers and sisters. Although I believe it is a mistake not to include a representative as previously promised by Rev. Willie Wilson, the event shows when Africans come together to do great things, they can be done effectively," said Nkrumah-Ture.

Valencia Mohammed writes for AFRO Newspapers.

Youth

(Continued from Page 3)

Hadiya Adams, said that hip-hop plays a large role in the Black community and, for some, it was the only incentive to come out and participate.

"Hip-Hop is connected to Black empowerment," said Adams. "The Millions More Movement gives a sense of unity and speaks to action and change. It doesn't matter what brings you out, just as long as you come out."

Although barely old enough to remember the 1995 Million Man March, Adams was able to cite the differences in the Million Man March and the Millions More Movement.

"The Million Man March had a specific purpose that called for solidarity, specifically between Black men," said Adams. "The Millions More Movement is an open call to transform the negativities within the African-American community, and, ultimately, American society."

Colleges and universities across the nation also assembled and students from Duke,

Morehouse and Hampton came out in support of the Movement.

"This is a new generation with new issues," said Marcella Dixon, a junior at the University of Rochester. "Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, along with the war in Iraq are issues that were nonexistent in 1995. Change lives for positive things and Black youth today have a different mindset that could be beneficial to the Black community."

Howard University student, Robert Modest, agrees.

"The Millions More Movement seemed to inspire Black youth to do more within their community," said Modest. "Speakers such as [the Rev.] Jesse Jackson and Cornell West really enlightened me as to what many challenges I face as a Black male and I think others were enlightened as well. As youth, we're here to get knowledge, use tools and make an impact."

Christopher Wall writes for Afro Newspapers.