

Curious well-wishers tarnish King legacy

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Most of the heroes of the modern Civil Rights Movement attended Coretta Scott King's funeral last week in suburban Atlanta. There was Jesse Jackson, the first King lieutenant to notify Coretta that her husband had been shot in Memphis. On hand was Congressman John Lewis, D-Ga., who, as chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee or SNCC, marched with King and was severely beaten on the Edmund Pettus Bridge at the beginning of the Selma-to-Montgomery, Ala., march.

In the audience was C.T. Vivian, the brave Southern Christian Leadership Conference or SCLC tactician who stood up to Dallas County (Ala.) Sheriff Jim Clark. He was caught on film taking a group of African-Americans to the courthouse to register to vote, only to have the sheriff bloody him with a nightstick.

Also present were NAACP Board Chair Julian Bond, SNCC's director of communications in the 1960s, and former NAACP Board Chair Myrlie Evers, whose husband, Medgar, was also shot to death because of his civil rights work.

Entertainer and activist Harry Belafonte, a major SCLC donor, didn't miss a major civil rights march when Dr. King was alive and he wasn't about to miss Coretta Scott King's funeral. He was so close to the family that he

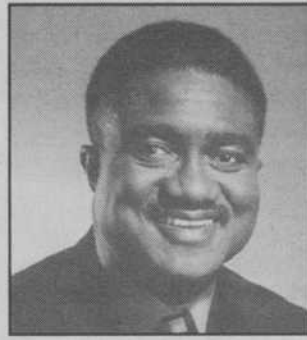
escorted Mrs. King to her husband's funeral.

And who could ever forget the contributions of Dick Gregory? He walked away from a million dollar annual income as a premier comedian to march with Dr. King, risking both his life and his career.

The new guard of civil rights leaders was also there: Marc Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League; Bruce Gordon, head of the NAACP; Al Sharpton, former presidential candidate and president of the National Action Network and Charles Steele Jr., president of SCLC, Dr. King's old organization.

Despite their varied contributions to the Civil Rights Movement, none of the aforementioned was allowed to speak at the funeral. Belafonte had been invited but the invitation was withdrawn when Bush decided to attend the funeral. In January, Belafonte called Bush "the greatest terrorist in the world" and equated the Department of Homeland Security with Hitler's Gestapo. Evidently, the funeral organizers were more interested in not offending Bush than recognizing the person who had actually supported Dr. King and his work.

Of the 30 speakers who were neither relatives nor participating in musical tributes,



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only five or six marched regularly with Dr. King.

Even more insulting, William Sessions, a former FBI director, was given time on the program, even though the FBI, under J. Edgar Hoover, actively sought to discredit Dr. King, taping his private conversations and urging him to commit suicide.

President Bush had the temerity to show up even though he has fought against many of the programs and ideas advanced by the Kings. University of Maryland Political Science Professor Ron Walters and I appeared on Jesse Jackson's syndicated radio program last Sunday and Jackson cited several examples of Bush being disingenuous.

He noted that Bush praised Dr. King on his birthday and then dispatched his solicitor general to the Supreme Court the next day to oppose two University of Michigan affirmative action programs; the president placed a wreath on the grave of Dr. King in Atlanta shortly before making a recess appointment of Mississippi Judge Charles Pickering, an ultra-conservative, to a federal appeals court and after attending Coretta Scott King's funeral in Georgia, Bush returned to Washington, D.C., to propose a budget that would, if enacted, extend tax cuts mostly to the wealthy

and cut programs vital to poor people.

Interestingly, right-wing commentators have been trying to define what should be deemed appropriate behavior at Mrs. King's funeral. These are the same people who not only opposed Dr. King when he was alive but have attempted to appropriate his image after his death to further their own anti-civil rights agenda.

Many of them have suggested that politics should not have been injected into the funeral service. Newsflash: Politics were injected the moment George W. Bush, three former U.S. presidents, the governor of Georgia and several planes of lawmakers from Washington, D.C., decided to attend the ceremony.

Dr. King did not let politics dictate his actions. Prominent church officials and movement colleagues criticized him for broadening the civil rights agenda to address the issues of war and peace. Still, he stood his ground. Dr. King never turned his back on friends and supporters to appease elected officials seeking to advance their political careers by pretending to support a cause that they had been actively undermining. It's too bad that the organizers of Coretta Scott King's funeral didn't demonstrate the same level of courage and integrity.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com.

Bush's program-gutting budget cuts our rights

By Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

We have come out of a period of national mourning for several legends of the Civil Rights Movement which has included the solemn words and actions by the president of the United States, all meant to give the impression of respect for their legacy. But however much one acknowledges this show of respect from the White House, it is in the doing that one really respects the legacy of their life's work.

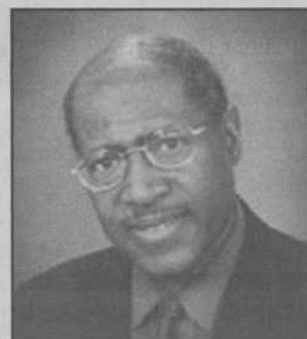
So, as we head toward the Gary Convention on March 9, the opening of a new session of Congress and the start of the campaign season, it is wise to see how policy proposals in the president's new budget lives up to the human needs legacy raised by the justice movement.

Presidents put flesh to their policy ideas by proposing to spend real money. The recent State of the Union speech by George

Bush was given by a president so low in the polls that the White House staff should all be dancing the limbo. He began with his long suit — the "war against terror" — for one half of the speech and devoted the second half to a menu of small initiatives, some of which could have been fielded by liberals. Now come the fine details in budget and the picture gets real ugly.

Basically, what we get from the massive \$2.7 trillion budget is a promise by the Bush administration to cut the soaring deficit (estimated to be \$521 billion) in half by 2009, a year after he leaves office. To get there, we are presented a set of optimistic assumptions that just don't add up.

For example, Bush and his successor



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would have to cut \$38 billion from the budget and even experts from the conservative Heritage Foundation are skeptical that will happen. The Bush administration grew spending by 42 percent since it came into office and now faces massive challenges of Iraq War and Hurricane Katrina — and possibly other hurricane damage coming.

The administration, however, only proposed to spend \$50 billion on the War in Iraq annually, but it set the same amount aside last year and has had to increase it by another \$70 billion, totaling \$120 billion so far.

The frantic moves of the administration are seen in its rejection of a \$30 billion package for spending for Katrina, down to possibly \$18 billion. He proposes to cut 141 pro-

grams "that were not working." (I wonder who made that judgment, and what was the criteria.) But while he plans to realize savings of \$14.5 billion, last year Congress only cut two-thirds of that figure, saving \$6.5 billion as a result.

The big news is a cut of \$35 billion in Medicare spending over the next five years; but this is an election year, and it unlikely that the middle class will tolerate beginning to make deep cuts in this program. So, where will Bush get the \$60 billion he will need to expand health savings accounts, fund energy initiatives, and other proposals? A lot of what he has proposed seems unrealistic, and not just to people like me.

Meanwhile, he makes matters worse by pushing to make the tax cuts permanent. This proposal would reduce government revenue over the next 10 years by an estimated \$1.4 trillion say economists Alan Auerbach of (See Walters, Page 12)

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and we're only 10 percent of the population. Why 7 out of 10 Black children are born to unwed mothers and 85 percent of Black children will live some or all of their lives in a one-parent family. Why emotional, physical and sexual abuse of children and adults is being exposed as never before. Why crime, delinquency and homicide rates are increasing among African-American children. And I could go on and on and on with social problems that plague Black children and the Black family.

So, what happened? Where is the disconnect? I submit to you that we need not look any further than the church. The Black church has been the hallmark of the Black community. Throughout history, one can't overlook the role that the Black church played in Black survival and triumphs. As children of Black

churches, we knew, without being told, what a sustainer and provider this institution was for our people. It was principally in church that I learned leadership skills, as well as how to sit straight and not fidget. It was in the Black church where our parents could lay down their racial burdens.

The Black church was a lifeline and a lifesaver in so many ways. Time and time again, we found that another grand activist, educator or leader in some other field was a minister or faithful church member, or had been mothered by the church. It was in the basement and sanctuaries of Black churches that people were organized and educated on the movement, that boycotts and demonstrations were planned, that the plate was passed for the funding of the civil rights work, that demonstrators were fed or had their wounds bound up following attacks by segregation-

ists.

The Black church and its members were the light that drove away darkness; we didn't embrace it or run from it, nor did we ostracize others. We dealt with it until there was a change of heart and a change of mind. But how can we change a heart or a mind if some of the church leadership and body won't even allow themselves the flexibility of trying to bridge the gap that has been wedged between them and a whole generation of children? How can churches ever regain the respect of young people in the community if the church goes do nothing to connect with them?

Refusing to allow the family to have their son's funeral at their institution was a new low for the churches that, historically, stood by our children — no matter how good or how bad they were. We never threw them away. We always embraced and looked for-

ward to every opportunity to touch young people's lives. But, not this time. The churches were more concerned about being politically correct or getting paid than they were about saving lives. God and the people of God are about love and service to mankind, and there was no love or service displayed in refusing to lay a soul to rest.

Finally, I know that they all read the same Bible that I read, and my Bible very simply states, to paraphrase: If any man be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he looks at himself, and goes his way, and forgets what manner of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues therein, being not a forgetful hearer but a doer, he shall be blessed.

Pastors, this time, I think you missed your blessings.