

An Opportunity (Agenda) for President Bush to Win Back Blacks

(NAPS)—In his Inaugural address, President George W. Bush made what he called a solemn pledge to build a single nation of justice and opportunity.

The question that wary African Americans keep asking—from the barbershops to the Op-Ed pages—



Hugh B. Price

is whether President Bush really cares and what he intends to accomplish on his watch. Will we keep moving forward and will the opportunity gaps that exist between blacks and whites in the areas of education, employment, poverty, technology, homeownership, entrepreneurship and criminal justice shrink as a result of his leadership and initiatives?

In a constructive spirit, National Urban League President Hugh B. Price proposes an “Opportunity Agenda” for the Bush administration. “If pursued vigorously, this agenda will help close the persistent opportunity gaps and boost the bottom-line well being of our community,” Price said.

The Urban League leader said the President was on-track in addressing the inadequate education many of the nation’s children are receiving, but that it would take more than annual testing and a reliance on school vouchers, to which the Urban League is opposed, to solve the problem.

Price’s tough agenda includes expanding the President’s literacy campaign to slash in half the number of black, Latino and Native American fourth graders who score “below basic” in reading by 2004. The agenda also

calls for overhauling the public school system to create smaller classes, better-trained teachers, increased teacher, principal and parent accountability and better facilities backed by increased funding.

To attack black unemployment, which exists at a rate of twice the national average, Price advises President Bush to champion fiscal and monetary policies that promote continued job growth. He urges expansion of programs like Enterprise Zones, the Community Reinvestment Act and the newly enacted New Markets and Community Renewal Act.

To narrow the poverty gap, Price calls for increasing the minimum wage to at least \$6.65 per hour and liberalizing the Earned Income Tax Credit so that low-wage workers have more disposable income.

Warning that the digital divide threatens America’s ability to compete globally, Price urges Mr. Bush to accelerate the E-rate Initiative to wire schools and libraries in low-income communities.

Other areas covered by the Urban League’s Opportunity Agenda include:

Homeownership:

- A homestead tax incentive for first-time buyers who purchase homes in low-income communities.

- An expansion of programs, like HUD’s Housing and Economic Development Initiative, that educate low-income families about homeownership, credit worthiness and investment.

Entrepreneurship:

- Federal actions to promote the creation and expansion of minority firms and develop

aggressive supplier-diversity programs.

Criminal Justice:

- Direct the attorney general to rectify blatant patterns of racism in the criminal justice system that contribute to disparities in conviction and sentencing among blacks, whites and Latinos.

- Increase efforts to combat racial profiling and police brutality.

- Investigate the local election processes that contributed to the election debacle and prosecute violators of the Voting Rights Act.

“The U.S. presidents and national leaders held in highest esteem by African Americans over the years have been those who’ve done the most—when we least expected it—to propel our people toward the American dream,” Price said.

He cites Lyndon Johnson, a dyed-in-the-wool Southern Democrat who stunned the nation by pressuring Congress into enacting the landmark civil rights laws in the sixties, and Chief Justice Earl Warren, the former Republican Governor of California who interred Japanese Americans during World War II, yet prevailed upon the U.S. Supreme Court to decree the end of segregation.

“The Urban League’s Opportunity Agenda presents a historic opportunity for President Bush to catapult our community and nation ever closer to the ideal of authentic equality for all Americans and leave an enduring legacy as did these other great leaders,” Price concluded.

To receive a full copy of the Urban League’s Opportunity Agenda, visit www.nul.org/econ/summit.html.