

STATE NEWS SERVICE

SECRETARY SPELLINGS PRAISES WORK OF DOROTHY HEIGHT AND NATIONAL COUNCIL OF NEGRO WOMEN

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The following information was released by the Department of Education:

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings today addressed more than 400 women at the 52nd national convention of the **National Council of Negro Women** (NCNW) in Washington, D.C. She praised the work of 93-year-old NCNW Chairwoman and President Emerita Dorothy Height for her courageous work on behalf of Americans of all races, especially women. Following are Secretary Spellings' prepared remarks:

Secretary Spellings:

Thank you. It's an honor to be here today. We all owe Dr. Height a great debt. She has opened the doors of opportunity for Americans of all races men and women.

Many people hear Dr. Height's story and wonder how a woman, born in the segregated South and raised in a small mill town in Pennsylvania, could overcome such odds to accomplish so much. It's not a mystery to those who knew her as a child. She excelled at everything from academics to debate to music. She attended a mostly white high school where she led her classmates in song at the start of every assembly. When a new principal took the honor away from her because of the color of her skin, her fellow students refused to sing until she was reinstated.

She's been leading the choir ever since. And we've all been listening. She's had the ear of every president for the last half century. And every time I step foot in the Oval Office, I know I'm following a path that Dr. Height helped blaze for women all across this country. Let me also say, at age 93, you're blazing another trail I know every one of us would like to follow. You're an inspiration to us all. And you're still fighting to give every child, especially every little girl, the chance to live the American dream.

As you know, the key to that dream is a quality education. When we passed the No Child Left Behind Act four years ago, we made a commitment to raise the bar for all our students regardless of their race, income level, or zip code. For the first time ever, we as a nation are holding ourselves accountable for closing the achievement gap and ensuring every child can read and do math on grade level.

As a result, scores are rising, and the achievement gap is beginning to close. Yesterday, we got the results of the nation's education report card for select urban districts, including Washington, DC. I'm proud to report that African American scores are rising in all these cities, particularly among our younger students. In other words, this law is working, and we must stick with it. And for those who believe urban districts working hard to improve can't make the grade, these results prove otherwise.

Last week, I was pleased that a federal district judge in Michigan dismissed a lawsuit against No Child Left Behind. He ruled that this law is a partnership between the federal government and the states and not a federal mandate. As many of us have said all along, this law is a contract that calls on us all to live up to our responsibilities to our children. It says if you take federal resources, you must meet expectations for raising student achievement. And we all need to get down to what we're supposed to be doing: helping students succeed.

At its heart, this law is all about equal opportunity. Its roots are in organizations like the **National Council of Negro Women**. Mary McLeod Bethune liked to say her mission was to leave no one behind. And she and Dr. Height built a powerful grassroots network to help carry out that dream.

This summer, Dr. Height and I held a roundtable to discuss how the Department of Education could do a better job reaching out to African American families. Thanks to No Child Left Behind, parents have more information than ever before on how their children and local schools are performing, and we must help parents take advantage of this information and of new options like free tutoring.

We must spread the word about this law and the **National Council of Negro Women** has been an important partner in this work. For our country to remain economically, civically, and democratically viable, we must ensure every child in this country receives a quality education.

President Bush likes to say that reading is the new civil right. When you teach people to read, you empower them to take control over their lives and to have a voice in their nation's future. You all understand the stakes. You've been working to empower women here in America and abroad for decades.

The road to democracy always begins with a commitment to education. That's why dictators fear learning. It's why the Taliban closed schools and jailed those with the courage to teach women. And it's why a newly freed Afghanistan is working to improve education for both boys and girls.

Last spring, Mrs. Bush and I visited the new Women's Teacher Training Institute in Kabul. Mrs. Bush helped found the school through her work with the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council. The women at the school are anxious to help spread literacy and hope to every corner of their country. And after graduation, they will return to rural communities all across Afghanistan and will help train even more women to become teachers. As a result, more and more Afghan women will have the chance to learn to read and to participate in their new democracy. And we will continue to stand behind these brave women as they do.

Literacy is a critical factor in closing what Queen Rania of Jordan has called the world's "hope gap." The hope gap separates those who believe they have a future from those who fear they have none. We must close this gap. Nearly 800 million adults worldwide cannot read, and two-thirds of them are women.

Today, we have a window of opportunity to make a real difference. In May, I saw firsthand how Jordan has embraced education reform. I visited an all-girls "discovery school" in Amman where young students are studying in state-of-the-art classrooms with computers. And while there, I met with fellow education ministers from the G8 countries and the broader Middle East and North Africa to discuss how we could work together to improve education and to promote literacy and equal educational opportunities for both boys and girls.

Once again, Dr. Height and NCNW have been on the forefront of this fight. Dr. Height and Cheryl Cooper have traveled all across Africa and the developing world. And wherever you've gone, you've brought hope and represented the best of the American spirit. You've made these people's causes your own. And as always, we're all better for your leadership on this issue.

As a child, Dr. Height learned from her mom not to show off her knowledge but to use it to help others. She must have taken that lesson to heart because she's given her whole life to helping others. She's been a teacher to us all.

And today, Dr. Height, I want to present you with a gift to show my appreciation. Dr. Height has won every honor from the Medal of Freedom to the Congressional Gold Medal. So I thought I would give you something different something that only another woman could fully appreciate. A hat. I've been told you recently purchased a gold suit, and it's my honor to present you with a matching gold hat. You're a shining example for us all.

It's been an honor to be here today. Thanks again for inviting me. And thank you for all that you do.