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World/Nation

Bush, Dukakis both vow to hike aid to ease plight of poor youths

WASHINGTON (AP) — George Bush says he is "almost haunted" by inner-city children. Michael Dukakis speaks of the torment of parents who cannot afford health insurance for their children. Both candidates agree that far too many children are growing up poor, and both promise to do something about it.

Skeptics say that for all their visits to day care centers, Republican Bush and Democrat Dukakis have never spelled out how they would attack the problem.

But others are heartened that the candidates are talking about child care, infant mortality and high school dropouts, and are confident the next president and a new Congress will give higher priority to easing the plight of millions of American children.

Nearly 13 million children — 1 in every 5 — are growing up in poverty, according to the Census Bureau.

After dramatic progress in the 1960s, the child poverty rate soared from 13.8 percent in 1969 to 22.2 percent in the re-

cession year of 1983. It has leveled off at slightly more than 20 percent in recent years.

Medicaid, the federal-state insurance plan for the poor, covers only half of these children.

Forty thousand American infants die before their first birthday, and progress has slowed in reducing the infant mortality rate. The United States, which had the sixth lowest rate in the world in 1955, now ranks 19th.

"The only reason we haven't seen action on these issues is that children don't vote," says Robert Sweeney, president of the National Association of Children's Hospitals.

Head Start, the \$1.2 billion preschool program for the disadvantaged, reaches fewer than 20 percent of its target group. Chapter One, the \$4.6 billion remedial effort to help youngsters falling behind in school work, reaches barely half.

More than 26 percent of teen-agers leave high school without a diploma. Drugs, gangs, crime and homelessness

all make the poverty trap even deeper.

"I find myself almost haunted by the lives being lived by the children of our inner cities," Bush said recently.

His response is a \$3.7 billion "Invest in Our Children" initiative which includes a \$1,000-per-child tax credit to low-income working families with children under age 4, as well as expanded Head Start and Medicaid coverage.

Dukakis makes an even bigger promise: making basic health care a birthright for all Americans, primarily by requiring employers to provide basic health insur-

ance coverage for workers and their families.

Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund, said she welcomes the fact that they both recognize that you've got to deal with enormous gaps in preventive health services for mothers and babies. The question now is translating that into money and actual programs.

Dukakis backed the ABC concept, which committed himself only to state funds, not the full \$2.5 billion.

World Briefs

Group calls for action to save pandas

HONG KONG (AP) — The giant panda faces extinction unless China takes more steps to save the endangered species, a conservationist said Tuesday.

Chris Elliot, chief China conservationist of the World Wide Fund for Nature International, said at a news conference his group and China recognize that what they have done up to this point is not sufficient.

China, the only country where pandas live in the wild, estimates that fewer than 1,000 remain, threatened by deforestation and poachers who

sell the black and white skins. China has stiff penalties for panda poaching, including the death penalty.

Elliot said his group and the Chinese Forestry Ministry have come up with a plan calling for increased patrolling of panda reserves and better training for the guards.

The plan is expected to be submitted to the State Council, or Cabinet, next year, and "it will be a blow if the State Council doesn't ratify anything," Elliot said.

Scientist: Half of core melted at TMI

WASHINGTON (AP) — At least half of the Three Mile Island nuclear reactor core melted during the 1979 accident, a government scientist said Monday as he revealed a higher percentage than most previous estimates.

"Many of you may not be aware that at least 50 percent of the core melted during the accident," James Broughton, manager of the TMI-2 Accident Evaluation Program at the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory, said at a conference of the American Nuclear Society.

The material that melted included fuel and the tubes in which the fuel was contained, he said.

In the accident at the Pennsylvania plant's Unit 2 reactor, uranium fuel was allowed to lose the vital cooling water that normally covers it, causing temperatures to rise dangerously in the core.

Broughton's estimate, based on an updated scenario of the accident, was higher than the 35 percent figure presented to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in April 1987 by Donald McPherson of the Department of En-

ergy.

But don't think a meltdown is less serious. Take like taking the core out of the containment vessel. And think how temporarily cancelled.

But no sooner...

Lawyer: Tax exemptions discriminate

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Texas law exempting religious publications from a tax on most other books, newspapers and magazines is discriminatory and amounts to an unconstitutional promotion of religion, a lawyer for Texas Monthly argued Tuesday before the Supreme Court.

But an assistant Texas attorney general told the high court that the exemption was justified because it neither advances nor inhibits religion and does not foster an excessive entanglement between church and state.

At issue is a Texas court ruling that said the sales tax on publications other than religious periodicals neither violates equal protection rights nor breaches the constitutionally required separation of church and state.

From October 1984 through October 1987, sales of books and newspaper subscriptions were subject to the Texas sales tax.

But "periodicals published or distributed by a religious faith that consist wholly of writings promulgating the teaching of the faith" were exempt from the tax.

Federal judge blocks state exit poll law

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A federal judge on Monday blocked a state law that would have banned the three major television networks from conducting exit polls just outside voting places to predict winners on Election Day.

U.S. District Judge David Doty, saying the law is likely to be found unconstitutional, issued a preliminary injunction against its enforcement.

The 1984 law prohibits voters from being asked how they voted within 100 feet of the polling place. Nearly half of the states have some limits on exit polling, in part because of fears that voter turnout will be hampered by early predictions of results.

The networks targeted Minnesota along with six other states where they successfully challenged restrictions they considered so stringent they would effectively ban exit polls.

Floyd Abrams, a New York lawyer representing CBS, ABC and NBC, had argued that the Minnesota law violates free speech and would prevent family members from asking each other how they voted if they were within the zoned area.

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Denver starts 5th Better Air Campaign

DENVER (AP) — The governor took the bus to work and the mayor greeted commuters at a bus station Tuesday as Denver launched its fifth Better Air Campaign to combat carbon monoxide pollution produced by cars and wood stoves.

Last year the campaign included an oxygenated fuels program for vehicles, and Denver dropped from first to seventh place on the Environmental Protection Agency's list of worst cities for carbon monoxide pollution. This year, the goals have been raised. Carbon monoxide levels in the

mile-high city are highest during the winter, when cold air traps the pollution. And internal combustion engines work less efficiently in the high, thin air and emit dirtier exhaust.

The Better Air Campaign encourages commuters in the six-county metro area to leave their cars at home at least one day a week and on high-pollution days until the end of January.

It also calls for wood-burning bans on high-pollution days; some communities have mandatory bans and others appeal for voluntary cutbacks.

Rebel attack kills four in El Salvador

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP) — Lefist rebels launched a daring mortar and rifle attack Tuesday on National Guard headquarters, killing four soldiers and wounding 37 people, including the guard commander, the Defense Ministry said.

Col. Jose Galileo Torres told the Associated Press that rebel mortar fire set off grenades stored inside the main building in the compound during the 45-minute attack. Firefighters were able to extinguish the blaze, he said.

One of two parked cars loaded with explosives blew up about a block from the site in northern San Salvador, a defense ministry spokesman said. Army munitions experts deactivated explosives in the second vehi-

cle, the spokesman said on condition of anonymity.

Among the injured were four civilians.

National Guard commander Col. Jose Humberto Gomez received a shrapnel wound in a leg, the spokesman said.

The guard is part of El Salvador's armed forces and takes part in counterinsurgency operations.

Col. Rene Emilio Ponce, the new armed forces chief of staff, said the attack was carried out by urban commandos of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, the umbrella group of five leftist guerrilla organizations.

Ponce, speaking at guard headquarters, told reporters that about 15 rebels took part in the attack.

MCorp files suit in continuing fight over Fed's rulings

DALLAS (AP) — A suit filed by Dallas-based MCorp against the Federal Reserve Board is the latest clash between MCorp and federal regulators over the shape of recapitalization of the troubled bank holding company.

The suit, filed Friday in U.S. District Court in Dallas, challenges a regulatory order that prohibits MCorp from paying dividends on its preferred stock. It also challenges the Fed's right to force the holding company to do what MCorp eventually chose to do anyway.

The Fed ordered on Oct. 19 that MCorp stop payment on preferred stock dividends. Two days later, MCorp said it would suspend such payments but also announced it would put a moratorium on payments of about \$470 million in debt.

MCorp, which recently sought a federally assisted bailout, said the order came after it notified regulators of its intention to take the two actions. According to the suit, MCorp told regulators sometime after Oct. 7 that the actions would be considered at a board meeting on Oct. 21.

Since MCorp already had come up with a plan to stop the dividends and debt payments, the order from the Fed was unfounded, the suit said.

Texas incumbents hold financial edge over House hopefuls

WASHINGTON (AP) — Incumbent Texas congressmen wield a commanding financial edge over their challengers, in many cases by a six-figure margin, according to a study by the citizens lobby Common Cause.

The nationwide study of 789 major party candidates seeking a House seat showed incumbents with a nearly 6-to-1 edge over their opponents in fund raising, including a twofold advantage in contributions from special interest groups.

"The PAC-rigged system for financing congressional elections is creating a challenger-proof House of Representatives," said Common Cause president Fred Wertheimer. "When House incumbents can't loose, regardless of performance, and House challengers can't win, regardless of talent, then we don't have real elections and we don't have representative government."

Only one Texas congressman, Republican Rep. Bill Archer of Houston, did not accept contributions from political action committees, according to the study of Federal Election Commission reports for the period beginning Jan. 1, 1987, through Sept. 30.

The ranking GOP member of the powerful tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee, Archer cannot allow "any false impressions regarding the decisions he makes and the actions he takes," a spokesman said.

Two other Texas candidates, Democratic Reps. John Bryant of Dallas and Mickey Leland of Houston — rank among the top 30 House office-seekers nationwide in PAC receipts, Common Cause said. Bryant was in 17th place with receipts of \$334,258; Leland was in 24th place with receipts of \$321,425.

Bryant placed 16th nationally for total receipts, at \$781,649, among the 26 House candidates whose campaigns took in more than \$700,000. His opponent, Republican Lon Williams, has raised

"MCorp never had and does not have any intention to dissipate its assets," the suit said. "Moreover, the orders are unreasonable, oppressive and render impractical the conduct of the normal business operations of MCorp."

Officials from both sides declined comment, but the suit might be a prelude to an even bigger fight.

The suit comes three weeks after MCorp, the state's second-largest bank holding company, asked for federal help in a management-led reorganization that would include \$400 million from the holding company, \$400 million raised from private investors and shareholders and an undetermined amount from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. Analysts estimate the FDIC would have to provide about \$1 billion.

Regulators have asked MCorp chairman Charles H. Bishop to first use \$250 million in cash and other liquid assets — earned from the sale of non-banking subsidiaries — to recapitalize struggling banks owned by MCorp before they will consider his request for aid.

But Bishop has said he first wants assurances that the holding company will get federal assistance as part of his own proposal to restructure the company.

\$132,002, of that \$8,626 in PAC money, and has spent \$120,801. Bryant had \$415,175 cash on hand at the end of September; Williams had \$11,200.

Leland has no major-party, general election opponent.

A Bryant spokesman said the congressman tries to raise as much money as possible in case he has a stiff opponent, and supports legislation to minimize the role PACS play in shaping campaigns.

"The PAC-rigged system... is creating a challenger-proof House of Representatives."
Fred Wertheimer

When it comes to spending, House Speaker Jim Wright of Fort Worth leads the Texas delegation at \$685,720, putting him in 14th place nationally. Wright has no opponent but spends a substantial part of his war chest helping the campaigns of other Democrats, his spokesman, George Mair, said.

"We didn't know we didn't have a challenger until Jan. 6 and money might have been spent before a campaign," Mair said. "And there are two write-in challengers so that suggests we might do something — an ad here, a placard there, a lawn sign. There are all sorts of reasons."

Another big spender in the Texas delegation has been Republican Rep. Steve Bartlett of Dallas, who has put \$648,301 into his race against Democrat Blake Cowden, to earn a 17th-place ranking among all candidates.

Cowden has spent \$6,500, raised \$9,214, and has \$2,713 in his war chest. Bartlett has \$346,013 cash on hand and has raised \$590,870.