



Legislation Text

File #: Res 0666-2003, **Version:** *

Res. No. 666

Resolution denouncing President Bush's decision to dishonor the work and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the occasion of the slain civil rights leader's birthday by injecting his administration into the affirmative action case pending before the Supreme Court.

By Council Members Perkins, Barron, Clarke, Liu, Lopez, Monserrate, Serrano, Stewart and Vann

Whereas, On Monday, January 20th, communities across the nation observed Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, commemorating the occasion by recalling the slain civil rights leader's work as a champion of peace and equality for all people; and

Whereas, Among those paying tribute that day was President Bush; speaking at a Baptist Church in Landover, Maryland, the President talked about the unfinished work that still needs to be done in order to fulfill Dr. King's dream of equality for everyone, stating that despite all the progress that has been made, "there's still prejudice holding people back"; and

Whereas, Despite the President's thoughtful and inspiring words, ironically, on January 15th, Dr. King's birthday, the administration filed an amicus brief asking the Supreme Court to declare the University of Michigan's affirmative action admissions policy unconstitutional; the University's admissions policy, in an effort to promote diversity among its student body, offers points to minority applicants and sets goals for minority admissions, thereby utilizing race as an important factor in the selections process; and

Whereas, In their brief to the Court, the administration argued that the affirmative action policies used by both the University of Michigan and its law school fail the constitutional test of equal protection under the law by ignoring race-neutral and narrowly tailored alternatives that could also achieve the goal of boosting minority presence on campuses; and

Whereas, Interestingly, shortly after opposing racial preferences in the University of Michigan case, the White House announced on Sunday that historically Black colleges and universities will receive a \$371 million increase in federal funding; specifically, the White House stated that President Bush's budget proposal for the upcoming fiscal year includes increasing funding by 5% for grants to historically Black colleges, universities, graduate programs and Hispanic educational institutions; and

Whereas, However, despite these additional funds for traditionally Black and Hispanic institutions, the President's anti-affirmative action position still leaves large traditionally "white" schools hindered in their efforts to diversify; as four dissenting moderate Republican senators, including Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania and Senator Olympia Snowe of Maine, stated in a letter to the President last week, they urged him to support racial diversity as a "compelling government interest" in the Michigan case and elsewhere, indicating that Bush's anti-affirmative action policy could do significant harm to colleges and universities; and

Whereas, By deciding to take a position on the University of Michigan case, President Bush has angered some African-American leaders, including Jesse Jackson, who has criticized the President's stance as "anti-civil rights"; one of the President's own cabinet members, Secretary of State Colin Powell, has publicly disagreed with the President's race-neutral position on the issue, expressing support for the racial preference admissions policies employed by the University of Michigan; and

Whereas, Similarly, a number of prominent political leaders from a variety of backgrounds have also publicly expressed their support for the University's policies, while questioning the President's position on the issue; and

Whereas, Sen. John Edwards pointed out that among various questionable admissions policies employed by Universities nationwide, minority admissions preferences alone have been singled out for criticism; noting the resounding silence and unquestioning acceptance that has surrounded long-standing University admissions preferences such as legacy admissions, the Senator stated, "We should support efforts that increase diversity and put an end to systems, like legacy admissions, that give special preference to the most advantaged at the expense of diversity"; and

Whereas, Using race as just one of a number of factors in the university admissions process is just one small yet meaningful way to remedy a long and ongoing legacy of racial prejudice; as Sen. Joe Lieberman stated, "Until we reach that day where everyone is truly judged as Dr. King appealed for...by the content of their character, we have a responsibility to take affirmative steps to give everyone an equal opportunity to realize the American dream"; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York denounces President Bush for dishonoring the work and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the occasion of the slain civil rights leader's birthday by injecting his administration into the affirmative action case pending before the Supreme Court.

LS # 1758

TMQ