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Bush told of Jubilee effort in Memphis

Philanthropist shares story of promise at Catholic schools

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WASHINGTON — President Bush was impressed to hear that Memphis has reopened eight Roman Catholic Jubilee schools and improved two others in the inner city during a meeting with mostly Catholic educators Friday.

Memphian Barbara Hyde, a non-Catholic, but a director of the Hyde Family Foundation which is active in educational philanthropy in Memphis, said being one of the nine leaders talking about education was “an opportunity to tell the Memphis story.”

Still “buzzing with excitement” after the White House Roosevelt Room session, Hyde said the president talked about his administration’s efforts to push for Promise Scholarships and Opportunity Scholarships as part of the No Child Left Behind program. The program seeks to hold school systems accountable for academic progress and permits parents to remove their children from failing schools.



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Stressing that the credit should go to Bishop J. Terry Steib, Catholic Schools Supt.

Dr. Mary McDonald and committed teachers and parents, Hyde said she was honored to be invited to tell Bush what Memphis has accomplished. In 1999, Steib envisioned reopening the schools and naming them in honor of the Jubilee Year 2000, which in church tradition is a year of mercy for the poor.

“He (Bush) was very impressed — as were the other participants — with the fact that Memphis has been able to do something most communities haven’t, which is to reopen these wonderful schools in neighborhoods where the need is so great,” Hyde said.

“He commented about how he’s hopeful that the federal government, by increasing the funding for these types of (scholarship) programs, can take to scale what private dollars and private leadership has tried to do in providing options for children,” she said.

The White House, in a background briefing, noted that the Hyde Family Foundation was a contributor to the Catholic Diocese of Memphis’ Urban Schools Trust. Also attending the meeting were Education Secretary Margaret Spellings, the parent of a Washington parochial school student, Washington Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl, and Catholic school educators from Chicago, New Orleans and Bridgeport, Conn.

Hyde said she also had an opportunity to commend the president on No Child Left Behind in the public schools, saying it helps educators such as Memphis City Schools Supt. Carol Johnson “drive reform within the public school system.”

At the end of the meeting, according to a White House transcript, the president said: “One thing is for certain, if you’re interested in educational excellence, you can look at the Catholic schools in the United States of America, because they provide it — and for that, this country is very grateful.”

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