

EDUCATION WEEK

Campaign Matters

By Erik W. Robelen, 10/29/03

Getting brain clog from watching campaign debates in which the many Democratic presidential hopefuls vie for a few minutes' attention?

Well, here's a chance to hear each candidate hold forth at length, just on children's issues.

The Washington-based Every Child Matters Education Fund, a nonprofit group, has organized a series of eight such events in New Hampshire— one candidate at a time before the important Jan. 27 Democratic primary there. (Because of scheduling conflicts, the Rev. Al Sharpton isn't participating.)

It all got started last week with Sen. John Edwards of North Carolina. He fielded questions on Oct. 21 from two moderators and the audience at the University of New Hampshire in Durham.

He talked about ensuring health care for every child, expanding access to early-childhood education, and spending more for K-12 programs, including providing more after-school support.

"My wife and I have started two after-school programs in North Carolina," he said. "We saw up close how important after school can be, in so many ways."

Mr. Edwards also complained about President

Bush's plans to cut federal aid for after-school programs by \$400 million in fiscal 2004.

"I do believe we still have two public school systems in this country," largely divided by economics, he said. "The truth is, as the affluence of the community goes down, the quality of the education goes down."

Later that day, Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts had his chance. He began by emphasizing his experience as a prosecutor in Middlesex County, Mass., where he encountered countless young people in trouble.

"I got really tired, angry, after having kid after kid after kid tell me their life story, and you could see the pattern," he said. "Kids for whom life around them was literally chaos. And kids don't do very well in chaos, and they're not supposed to."

He also reiterated the belief held by many Democrats: that President Bush does not support adequate funding for the No Child Left Behind Act.

"It makes me so angry," Sen. Kerry said, "that this president literally co-opts, there's a ruder word, the slogan of the Children's Defense Fund, 'Leave No Child Behind,' and every day he's leaving millions of children behind in our country."