

March 9, 2004, 9:32PM

Web site calling for education secretary's dismissal

By JASON SPENCER

Copyright 2004 Houston Chronicle

Unsatisfied with Secretary of Education Rod Paige's apology for calling the nation's largest teachers union a "terrorist organization," a liberal think tank has created a Web site calling on President Bush to fire the former HISD superintendent.

More than 2,000 people have signed the petition at www.firepaige.org, said Robert Borosage, the co-director of Campaign for America's Future.

The Washington, D.C.-based group has accused Bush of not spending enough money to help school districts comply with the tougher education standards set out in his No Child Left Behind Act.

U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum, a Minnesota Democrat, joined the call for Paige's job.

"He crossed the line, and there is no return," McCollum said. She called Paige's decision to tag the National Education Association with the terrorist label "an example of neo-McCarthyism at its best."

Paige has apologized several times for his statement, which he said stemmed from his frustration with opposition to tougher academic standards. Bush has said Paige's job is safe.

"The president continues to have great confidence in Secretary Paige and wants him to continue doing his great work in educating our children and making sure they can read, write, add and subtract," said White House spokesman Trent Duffy.

Houston Federation of Teachers president Gayle Fallon, whose organization belongs to the National Education Association, has said she believes Paige's comment was made in jest.

But Borosage said Paige's apology is not enough.

"Secretary Paige's slur of the NEA was a slur to every teacher," he said. "It also represents the mindset of this administration."
