

## It's Time to Listen *continued from page 9*

forcement officers when they do break the law. Police accountability isn't just a racial issue. On May 27 of this year the *Columbia County Spotlight* reported that the City of St. Helens and Officer Adam Raethke are being sued for excessive use of force during an arrest in August 2019. The plaintiff, Robert Barror, was pulled over while returning from a medical appointment and has a condition which did not allow him to raise his hands over his head, which he told the officers during the encounter. Barror says he was thrown to the ground, punched in the back several times, and had a knee driven into his rib cage. According to the *Spotlight*, Barror requested medical attention, but an EMT determined he did not need to go to the hospital. He was booked into the Columbia County Jail, and after his continued requests, he was seen again by the same EMT who instructed officers to take him to a hospital. At the hospital Barror lost consciousness. He was diagnosed with a dislocated shoulder, collapsed lung, and an accumulation of blood between his chest wall and lung, and spent eight days in the hospital. Barror has not been charged with a crime, while the City of St. Helens has declined to discuss the incident.

### Change is coming

As communities are faced with racial injustice and demands for accountability continue to grow, change is beginning to take place. The city of Camden, New Jersey, a city once considered one of the most violent in the country, dismantled and reformed their Police Department seven years ago. Officers are no longer judged on the number of arrests they make or tickets they write, and now do more patrols on foot while working to build trust with residents. It appears to be working – murders are down by two-thirds, overall violent crime is down by nearly half, and complaints of excessive use of force by police have dropped 95%. When the most recent protests began in Camden, rather than battle demonstrators, Camden Police Chief Joe Wysocki helped lead a Black Lives Matter march.

After weeks of protests other cities and communities are starting to seriously rethink the way they police and are taking action. Some of the ideas under consideration include, requiring officers to carry their own professional liability insurance, creating an independent agency to investigate and prosecute critical incidents involving police, mandatory psychological testing for officers, and community participation in negotiating police union contracts. In addition:

- A coalition of four current and former district attorneys in California has called on the State Bar to ban law enforcement unions from funding district attorney campaigns, saying the contributions represent a conflict of interest and that their colleagues cannot ethically prosecute police officers if they are receiving funds and endorsements from unions that finance those officers' legal expenses.
- During the current protests, citizens are calling for the defunding of police departments. This is not always a call for completely dismantling departments, but in many cases, it means redirecting funds from police departments to other parts of society that help people, like housing and education. But, in a major shake up – nine members of the 13 person Minneapolis City Council announced their intention to disassemble their department. "We're committed to dismantling policing as we know it

in the City of Minneapolis and to rebuild with our community a new model of public safety that actually keeps our community safe," Council President Lisa Bender told CNN in an interview in June. In a TIME magazine op-ed Council member Steve Fletcher said many of the members of the current Council ran on a platform of police reform and accountability, which has been met with "stiff institutional resistance." Fletcher said the City has already explored the idea of implementing programs to dispatch county mental health professionals to mental health calls, and fire department EMTs to opioid overdose calls, without police officers; experimented with unarmed, community-oriented street teams on weekend nights downtown to focus on de-escalation; and could turn over traffic enforcement to cameras and parking enforcement staff. While a smaller police force may remain to deal with crime, it won't be the default when interacting with the community in a crisis. "Our city needs a public safety capacity that doesn't fear our residents," wrote Fletcher. "That doesn't need a gun at a community meeting. That considers itself part of our community. That doesn't resort quickly to pepper spray when people are understandably angry. That doesn't murder black people." Other cities have followed Minneapolis's lead – Denver, Albuquerque, Seattle, New York, and Atlanta have all announced community police reforms.

- In a move that stunned many, on Monday, June 8 Portland Police Chief Jamie Resch resigned her position amid criticism of her department's response to the current protests. Resch had only been on the job for six months. Lieutenant Chuck Lovell, a Black American, was named the new chief. The previous week the Portland Public Schools said it was ending its contract with the Police Department to provide school resource officers in its schools. "I've asked our community time and time again, what do we need to do," said Resch while announcing her resignation. "The Portland Police Bureau has made change... but they are not *the* change. What the Portland Police Bureau has not done is stand up and say, 'We will be the change.'" In addition, the Portland City Commission is on the verge of cutting \$15 million from their \$244 million annual police budget, and redirecting the funds to community programs.
- Democrats in Washington D.C. have proposed a federal bill that would allow civil suits against police, ban chokeholds, limit no-knock raids, require police to publish use-of-force data, and implement mandatory officer re-training.

The disparities in how we police our communities are just one very visible symptom of a much bigger, systemic problem of inequality. The recent violence against Black Americans has focused a spotlight on racism in our society and is forcing us to consider change, confront our culpability, and have difficult conversations, which are uncomfortable and hopefully revealing.

After organizing and leading the protest in St. Helens on June 3, Savannah Manning closed her inspirational speech with these thoughtful words: "I know that I don't speak for every person of color, and that my experiences are my own, but I believe talking about personal experiences and collectively coming up with solutions will bring forth a more united community. We just have to come together as a community and listen. Just listen... I hope my voice is heard."

## An Interview with Savannah Manning

One of the original organizers of the Black Lives Matter protest in St. Helens on June 3 was 18 year old Savannah Manning, a 2020 graduate of St. Helens High School, where she helped choreograph and lead dance routines at school assemblies. She plans to attend Portland Community College in the fall, where she will study to become a dental hygienist, and also plans to audition for the Blazer Dancers – "Dancing is one of my biggest passions," she says. Since recent events she says she is considering writing a series of children's books that talk about racial and social equality. Manning graciously agreed to speak with *Vernonia's Voice* the week after the rally.



**Vernonia's Voice:** Why do you think it's important for young people like you to be involved in social justice and political issues?

**Savannah Manning:** The younger generations are our future and I believe if we have as many ideas as we can get then we can find the right solutions. I definitely think young people should be involved.

**VV:** What's it been like for you as an 18 year old to be so involved in something that's received so much attention in our community?

**SM:** At first it was strange because I'm not use to having so many people I don't know thank me and congratulate me, but I feel if this many people were willing to listen to someone like me then hopefully we can make positive changes in the community and more people will be willing to step up and make those changes. I'm really happy so many people have showed support and it does make me hopeful that things will change for the better.

**VV:** What's your personal reaction to the spread of the current protests around the country and the world? Do you believe real change will come from this?

**SM:** I think many people are ready for positive changes and ready for everyone to be seen as equal and treated equally. I don't agree with the violence and the looting that has occurred. I believe that if we can come together peacefully and send the message without being violent, a lot more positive change can happen. If most of our society and nation can come together, we can make those changes. I just really hope things do change, not just for my generation and the older generations, but also for the younger generations as well. I believe it's our duty to make everyone feel safe.

**VV:** What do you think we can do as individuals in our small, rural communities here in Columbia County to address racial injustice and help bring about change in our communities?

**SM:** I think the best thing we can do is keep talking. We need to have people share their experiences so we learn to do things better and change things in a positive way. People need to stop passing down hate and discrimination to their children. Children are very impressionable and their parents or our society teaches them racial injustice. It just creates this endless cycle. I feel like we need to end this cycle. I definitely believe that, not only the little communities, but in all the states, the entire nation, and the world, just needs to be able to listen so we can change things positively and peacefully. I think if we can listen it will help lead to positive change.

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