

EDITORIAL

There is still time to make the right choice for veterans

Abraham Flexner, an American educator, said decades ago, "Nations have recently been led to borrow billions (now trillions) for war; no nation has ever borrowed largely for education. Probably, no nation is rich enough to pay for both war and civilization. We must make our choice; we cannot have both."

Having made the choice, we must be prepared to deal with the consequences. The military industrial complex speaks volumes to the choices our government has made, and so do the 135,000 American veterans who are homeless. It's hard to comprehend the magnitude of money and lives our country has sacrificed in Iraq, Afghanistan and beyond. We have lost so much.

There's simply no reason why a veteran returning home from war should have to sleep in a doorway or be forced into illegal activity because of the lack of jobs.

As outlined in the cover story, "A long way from home," thousands of combat veterans are returning to Oregon and the U.S. to face an economy not equipped to support them, and a society far removed from their needs. At the same time, it's that same

war machine's costs that have contributed to the very recession and social instability that greet soldiers on their arrival home.

It is an aggravating churn of consequences: joblessness in the face of increasing economic pressures, physical and mental health problems, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The results are an increase in homelessness and violence, and an inordinate number of suicides.

There's simply no reason why a veteran returning home from war should have to sleep in a doorway or be forced into illegal activity because of the lack of jobs. Locally and nationally our attention should be to secure and develop resources for veterans, who often times are returning home with fully formed responsibilities; a family to feed and major bills to pay.

The city and county continue to look for ways to develop housing resources. It's time that our local governments put a housing levy or bond on the ballot. A small levy or bond for veterans housing would mean a sustained funding source to reinforce local housing development and preservation. We cannot wait any longer.

At the statewide level, the legislature cannot passively watch our returning men and women fall through the cracks. In action and message, our state lawmakers need to be pounding at the gates for improved access to jobs, housing and education. We have to recognize that military skills do not always translate to civilian employment, and military values do not easily adapt to the social service system. It is our responsibility to our neighbors to prevent the downward spiral that can fester unnoticed for years in advance of homelessness.

Federally, every Oregon elected official should be fighting tooth and nail for veteran's resources, whether or not the word "veteran" is attached. Because the health and welfare of our returning soldiers is interlaced with the health and welfare of our most vulnerable citizens. President Obama has vowed to end the cycle of homeless veterans. Our representatives should push the administration and a war hungry Congress to reinvest in supportive services and replace the lost funding to affordable housing programs and incentives across the country. Likewise, more resources must be dedicated to the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program, for veterans returning today, and those who came home decades ago.

Because every day, every year, we still have a choice. Let's make the right one.

No time to rest on our laurels, 2012 is here!

Individuals selling the newspaper reported back to the organization that readers were more than generous, and your support meant the world. Thank you.

We would also like to thank the many individuals and families who have already taken the time and effort to give to the organization during the holidays. Street Roots raised more than \$17,000 through the Willamette Week Give!Guide and \$25,000 through the mail and through our own website. We can't

thank you enough. Your support means Street Roots will remain strong going into 2012.

This year is an exciting time for the organization. In February, Street Roots will be unveiling a new web platform that will help the organization compete in a changing media landscape. We have been working over the past year with open source developers to build a fantastic website for the general public. The new website will allow us to be more transparent as an organization, while highlighting the content of the newspaper, the vendor program and our advocacy work.

In the next year, we will also be

expanding our physical space. For as long as Street Roots has existed, we have been operating in a shotgun office with editorial and vendor services. We will be staying in the same building, but creating editorial and development offices around the corner, in addition to our current space. The additional space will give us street side access on both Northwest Second Avenue and Northwest Davis Street. The move will allow for both the editorial and vendor program to grow over time.

Also in 2012, Street Roots will be working to expand sales locations and working with local businesses and organizations to serve the vendor program. We will also continue to publish more than 100,000 SR Rose City Resource guides and work with more than 200 organizations and institutions to distribute the guide.

All of this is a part of a larger strategy to go weekly in 2013-14. Over the next two years the organization is working to build capacity for such a venture. Going weekly would allow us to increase the income for people experiencing homelessness and poverty in Portland, and allow Street Roots to deliver more timely and important news that can't be found anywhere else.

Again, we appreciate the love. Your support is going directly to supporting social and individual change. Cheers and Happy New Year!



Israel Bayer is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach him at israel@streetroots.org

DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

Free Rail zone a lifeline for poor, elderly

I am outraged at the news that TriMet plans to end the Free Rail Zone for streetcars and is cracking down on riders who do not pay a fare on other TriMet vehicles. What a change from seven years ago, when Portland's good public transportation and Fareless Square were major reasons I moved to this city. Since then, I've seen TriMet services go steadily down, especially for the poor, elderly and disabled. Benches have been replaced with two or three skimpy seats, so most of us have to stand waiting for buses. Stops have been moved four blocks apart, a long walk on old or painful legs. Now, The Oregonian reports that TriMet's General Manager Neil McFarlane considers their recent "crackdown" a success because of a six-fold increase in issuing citations to passengers. The Oregonian terms them "fare cheats."

Do you assume everyone has the ability to pay, Mr. McFarlane? If you ride on TriMet vehicles, you may notice passengers digging deep in their pockets for change, many only trying to get to minimum wage jobs. Thousands of homeless and unemployed in the city center and outlying neighborhoods have no money or private transportation to get to services or a meal; many rely on buses for grocery shopping. I volunteer at a women's drop-in center



where low- or no-income Portlanders come to get food and diapers for their babies. The fare-free streetcar is their lifeline. What will you do if they don't have the \$175 citation fee? Press them into community service? Incarcerate them?

I have to ask TriMet officials: What is your point? According to The Oregonian article, hiring inspectors to enforce the "crackdown" is costing more than TriMet collects. A previous Portland Tribune article suggested that hotel guests may be exempted from fare. Is it another case where the poor pay but the rich ride for free? Remind us of anything else in society? Maybe TriMet needs to be "Occupied."

ANNETTE WHITE-PARKS
Portland

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Send letters to the editor to the Street Roots office, 211 NW Davis St., Portland, OR 97209, or e-mail to joanne@streetroots.org.

Our mission

Street Roots creates income opportunities for people experiencing homelessness and poverty by producing a newspaper and other media that are catalysts for individual and social change.

Street Roots publishes every two weeks, launching on Fridays, and is available exclusively through our street vendors or by subscription. We are proud members of the North American Street Newspaper Association and the International Network of Street Papers.

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Street Roots Rose City Resource

Street Roots publishes the Rose City Resource, a comprehensive booklet of services for people experiencing homelessness and poverty. To inquire about getting an order of the Rose City Resource for distribution, please write to pdxrosecityresource@gmail.com. Resources are also available online at www.rosecityresource.org.

Vendors

Street Roots vendors buy the newspapers for 25 cents each and sell them for \$1, keeping the 75 cents in profit for themselves. In order to keep the cost low to our vendors, we receive additional support from donations and in-kind contributions.



75¢
goes directly to the vendor
who sold you the paper

25¢
goes toward
printing costs

Vendor orientations are at 1 p.m. every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at the Street Roots office.