

EDITORIAL

Women's health care rights remain a cause to defend

In this edition of Street Roots Judith Arcana reminds us of how far we have come, and much we have to lose should we forget.

She was there when women's health care and reproductive rights emerged from the shadows to become a medical and social standard. Abortions went from back alleys to clinics, and contraception meant woman could plan their families and their lives. Those in poverty could access women's clinics for proper care, at a price they could afford, with no stigmas attached.

Today we have not only lost much of that forward momentum, we are sliding back to the shadows. What had been sporadic flares from one corner of the country or another, has become a barrage of bills and laws restricting access to preventative health care and derailing women's

reproductive rights. In some cases, a woman seeking an abortion must submit to an invasive, costly and medically unnecessary ultrasound.

Other laws are more backhanded, such as laws in several states that prohibit public hospitals from entering into a

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transfer agreement to provide health care to abortion patients in cases of emergency. The legally imposed prohibition has been used as an argument to close clinics, even though emergency cases are very rare. In Ohio, rape crisis centers have newly imposed gag rules on what they can say to victims of rape. It was one of several restrictive policies inserted in the state's budget bill.

And across the country, Planned Parenthood — the nation's largest provider of health care for low-income women — is being gutted by lawmakers who dismiss the value of women's health care wholesale under the dogma of abortion prohibition. It is, of course, the families in low-income households — people struggling to find or keep a job, to raise a family or keep a roof over their heads — who are most reliant on social services, and therefore public policy regarding health care. The well heeled will always be able to tap the services they need or want.

No wonder, then, that the term "war on women" is so frustrating to Arcana. It should be frustrating to all of us.

The so-called war on women is a misnomer. To label it a war suggests there was a breakdown in diplomacy, leaving the nation's leadership to turn to measures of last resort.

Sadly, what is happening is our elected government running its course. These are not political coups; this is how we — or rather they — conduct our business. As such, this methodical divestment in women's rights is more nefarious.

Nor did it just erupt, either. The attitudes about women's rights have always been there, as Arcana knows well. There is much to learn between the generations, and it will take a combined effort to turn back the policies that are attempting to turn back the clock. We are fortunate in Oregon to have government representatives who understand the need for equity in health care, including women's reproductive rights. But the efforts across the country should remind us that what we have achieved continues to be worth the fight.

Tomorrow's solutions won't rely on yesterday's perspectives

What Portland needs is real leadership on the homeless and housing front to develop a

permanent funding source to give people a safe place to call home. Many of us working in the trenches are working to make that dream a reality and looking at a variety of ways to develop those resources.

The quickest way of killing momentum for such an effect is creating a sideshow that targets one specific population of people experiencing poverty such as panhandlers.

Street Roots gets it. Some media outlets, business and tourism groups don't like panhandlers and the poor in the downtown core. What we don't understand are the efforts to tackle poverty downtown using decades-old scare tactics that do little to actually address the problem at hand.

We have seen an overwhelming growth for the middle- and upper-class in downtown, the Pearl, South Waterfront, and the inner eastside of Portland. We have some of the highest rental occupancies in the nation. We have a growing equity gap both economically and racially in our city's core. We are recognized nationally as one of the coolest cities in the country. What more does the business community want?

Blaming the homeless and panhandling for a poor business climate on the heels of a recession, even in the midst of a vibrant and growing downtown, is foolish and

dogmatic. No one is listening — or are they?

Mayor Charlie Hales recently convened a "Homeless Task Force" to talk about panhandling and homelessness. The group was made up of civic and business leaders, law enforcement and homeless service providers. It's unclear what the task force's future will be.

The Portland Business Alliance's efforts to change state laws that would have made it legal to create stricter sidewalk laws to target the poor failed in Salem.

So what are the next steps? It's anyone's guess. If it were up to Street Roots, we would ask the business and tourism community to partner with government to think creatively on how their constituents could help create and maintain revenue for mental health and homeless services downtown.

The issue of panhandling is an issue of free speech. The issue of panhandling in relation to the poor has been a distracting issue in Portland for 30-plus years, and nationally dating back to the early 20th century. If you want fewer people begging, especially individuals who are the hard to reach population, then we need to develop the resources it takes to support giving people an opportunity to be successful.

If we are to be successful moving forward, we need to create an environment where everyone at City Hall, the business community, housing bureau, government partners, providers and those in the trenches are all looking at big picture strategies to address these problems. There's no better time than the present.



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DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

All Along

By Joanna Nordness

Infinite possibilities. Only one future.
Unbounded abilities. Healing a suture.
Expansion of chaos. Ascent into anarchy.
Chance is a coin toss. Caste, a hierarchy.
Fate is a path. Fortune an illusion.
Destiny is math. Only one conclusion.
Capital is a myth. Renounce your belief.
It will cease to exist. Burn a dollar like aleaf.
To maximize utility. You can't eat money.
It's their facility. It's their milk and honey.
This product we don't need. It's a fiction of power.
It's a falsehood of greed. It's a toxic shower.
We need to wash the Earth clean. Remove the seed of fear.
Begin to trust the unseen. And all will come clear.
I'm not sure how I know. So I could be wrong.
But there's got to be a better way than the one we've been taking all along.

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 guides, call 503-228-5657. 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.