

The fight intensifies for liberties, dignity of those in justice system

SHANNON WIGHT
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

As I write this column, it's been less than 48 hours since Donald Trump announced Sen. Jeff Sessions as his choice for attorney general.

My chest tightens and tears fill my eyes as I think of this man following Eric Holder and Loretta Lynch to that office. Holder was an early national figure in calling for us to leave "tough on crime" behind

and embrace a "smart on crime" approach. As someone who has fought for greater justice in our public safety system for nearly a quarter century, his call was a welcome reflection of the changing values in our communities.

Sessions, just this year, in reaction to changing laws regarding marijuana, said, "Good people don't smoke marijuana."

What?

Over the past 25 years, our country has experienced an explosion in prison building, constructed largely on the backs of black and brown people and those struggling with addiction and mental illness.

In just the past few years, elected officials on both sides of the aisle began to face the fiscal and human impact of those failed policies, and our prison population started to trend downward. In Oregon, we flatlined prison growth starting in 2013 but are now seeing an upward trend, most notably in the rate of women going to prison.

Black Lives Matter highlighted the urgency of reforms and transformation of our criminal justice and public safety systems, and that need is not lost on many, including our current attorney general. A week after

the election that would replace her with Sessions, Lynch, the first black woman to be AG, said that for many, our criminal justice system "is not a guarantee of equality, but an obstacle to opportunity." She went on to say: "When we begin to treat defendants as cash registers, rather than citizens ... we stain the sanctity of our laws. And we only tighten the shackles of those struggling to break the chains of poverty."

Fully 70 percent of women in prison in Oregon today are there for drug or property crimes. The vast majority suffer from addiction or mental illness, sometimes both, and almost all are victims of violence. They are disproportionately women of color. What do we achieve by incarcerating these women, tearing them from their children, and interrupting employment?

Professor and activist Angela Davis recently spoke to an audience in Chicago and cited one of my favorite and most relied upon sources of inspiration, a letter from James Baldwin to Davis when she was in jail. In her talk, she cited this passage from the letter:

"Some of us, white and black, know how great a price has already been paid to bring into existence a new consciousness, a new people, an unprecedented nation. If we know, and do nothing, we are worse than the murderers hired in our name. If we know, then we must fight for your life as though it were our own — which it is — and render impassable with our bodies the corridor to the gas chamber. For if they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night."

When asked what we should be doing now, she had no concrete answer but replied, "Whatever we are already doing, we need to do more."

There are many fronts where we need to do more and fight as if it were our life on the line, including supporting the safety and

liberties of LGBTQ, Muslims, immigrants and refugees — and of those facing long prison terms.

Those of us at Partnership for Safety and Justice will be fighting for the lives and dignity of women sent to prison, who are disproportionately black and brown, who have almost uniformly been harmed by violence, and many of whom struggle with addiction and/or mental health issues. We know that they can be held accountable for their crimes without being sent away for lengthy prison terms, separated from their children, to a place where they cannot get the services they need to rebuild their lives.

We will continue our work to shrink our prison system while building a world where victims receive the support and services they need to rebuild their lives, where people who have caused harm are afforded the opportunity to do better and make amends with dignity, and where the families of both are considered in the policies and services that affect them.

We will also reassess our priorities, digging in deep with friends and allies to unite our work toward common goals that will be achieved with our collective power.

We invite you to join us.

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SAFETY and JUSTICE

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Together we can fight to end HIV/AIDS for good

BY STACY M. CROSS
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In these partisan times, it can be difficult to find topics on which we all agree. Ongoing bipartisan support is needed to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States and globally, and we need this support to extend to all communities. Health care should not be political, and that includes the fight against HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS continues to be an urgent human rights and public health crisis, impacting millions in the United States and around the world. This, despite the fact that when it comes to ending the epidemic, we know what works: access to a full range of sexual and reproductive health care and rights; combating stigma, discrimination and policy barriers that restrict the ability of all people to access lifesaving information and services; and centering the needs of marginalized communities, including women and girls.

We also know that, like most health conditions, politics and social issues impact

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the way the HIV/AIDS epidemic works. Marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS, including gay and bisexual men, black women, young people and transgender people. And social issues such as poverty, gender inequality, discrimination, lack of education and violence put individuals and communities at increased risk of acquiring HIV and compound the impact of HIV/AIDS.

That's why at Planned Parenthood Columbia Willamette, our doors stay open. We will never back down and we will never stop fighting to ensure that Planned Parenthood patients have access to the care they need, including prevention, testing, counseling and treatment of HIV/AIDS, no

matter their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, income, country of origin or postal code.

Our U.S. values should also dictate that, regardless of partisanship, as part of the global response to HIV/AIDS, the United States should continue to provide robust support for global health programs, including HIV/AIDS and reproductive health care. Planned Parenthood works with more than 100 organizations across Africa and Latin America to reach more than one million people every year with sexual and reproductive health information and services, and engage in effective advocacy efforts that help fight HIV/AIDS. We've been working globally for more than 40 years because we truly believe in care, no matter what, and no matter where.

The United States has also historically been an important leader in the fight to protect and advance global sexual and reproductive health and rights. It supports global health programs in more than 60 countries to combat HIV/AIDS and support reproductive health care, including family

planning, maternal health and child health. Such global health programs stretch back 50 years and are supported by the vast majority of U.S. voters. The United States must continue to provide robust support for the domestic and global health programs that aim to address these challenges, including HIV/AIDS and reproductive health care. Every dollar cut from U.S. global health programs affects the lives of some of the poorest women and children around the world. We need strong health systems, continued U.S. political leadership and sound policies to achieve an AIDS-free generation.

Every individual should have access to the care they need to control their body and their future. This is true whether they are HIV-positive or not. I encourage you to #StandWithPP and support efforts to combat HIV/AIDS. Now is the time to move forward, not backward, on an issue that has affected so many millions around the world. Let's protect our progress and double down on our efforts to achieve an AIDS-free generation.