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to see major pushback around the time that Obama was elected during the first term, and then the second term. So you find that some whites are feeling marginalized or feeling like they're being disenfranchised or dispossessed of the country. So you find a lot of working class or disenfranchised white folks who think the country is being taken over. So he's probably picked up on a lot of that rhetoric.

J.P.: So to ask about Trump, have his positions actually helped to change minds in a horrible way and create hate, or are they simply emboldening the groups that are already out there?

L.B.: We find that his rhetoric is emboldening people and making it OK for people to verbalize and act out what they think. Then, of course, when you have the president of the United States saying "America first," and "We're going to build a wall," and "We're going to have a Muslim ban," it kind of provides people with cover to be able to say those same things themselves.

J.P.: How would you describe the president's response to what happened here in Portland?

L.B.: Oh, it was awful. I think I read that it took three days, four days. That was such an awful tragedy; it should have been spoken to right away. In fact, with the increase of hate and bias incidents, we've long called on him to speak out strongly against such acts and call them what they are: un-American. But he doesn't seem to be able to do so. There's also criticism, which I would agree with, that it seems that his staffers posted that tweet on his POTUS account and not his personal account. He has far more followers on that personal account, so it would have been a more important message for him to denounce that hateful act from that account, but he didn't.

J.P.: After this incident, our mayor in Portland called on the federal government to cancel a couple of rallies that were going to be held downtown on federal property. One was a "March Against Sharia" and the other was an "alt-right," free-speech rally. The General Services Administration declined not to revoke those permits. One of the organizers canceled the event anyway, the March Against Sharia. The American Civil Liberties Union criticized the mayor. What would SPLC's thoughts be on moves like that?

L.B.: Well, the Southern Poverty Law Center certainly supports free speech laws. And no, it should not have been canceled. I think the organizers of that anti-Shariah event did the right thing by postponing it. But, you know, we have to deal with hate by finding a way to counter-protest these gatherings. But to cancel it is not the answer.

J.P.: Attempting to block – or even succeeding in blocking these rallies – what does it do to the psychology of extremists? Does it embolden them? Does it dishearten them?

L.B.: Oh, it emboldens them. We had such an event at Auburn. Richard Spencer, the white supremacist, was supposed to speak at Auburn University, and the university administrators canceled the event. And that certainly emboldened him and his supporters, and it ended up being a much larger thing than it would have been had the

administration just let it go forward. We saw the same thing happen at Berkeley. So, yeah, it adds fuel to the fire, and it feeds their mistaken notion that their free speech rights are being impinged upon. We just have to find a way to hold these events and depend on law enforcement to keep them safe.

J.P.: What's the adoption been like of Southern Poverty Law Center's education curriculum Teaching Tolerance here in the Pacific Northwest? And could we do more to teach it in schools?

L.B.: The Teaching Tolerance project began in 1991 as a way to kind of inoculate students against messages of hate. What we're wanting to do is provide educators across the country with free resources so that they can work with the students to develop an appreciation for diversity before they can become subjected to messages of hate. We have an excellent following in the Pacific Northwest and teachers across the Pacific Northwest use our resources. We, of course, want to see them in every single school. After the election, we sent resources to every school in the country. We also sent our magazine to every school in the country with the hope that they'll adopt and use our free resources.

J.P.: Are there any new strategies that SPLC is considering, given this environment that we're in right now. New programs that are being pondered?

L.B.: Well, we're working on some programming within Teaching Tolerance that will help teachers be better at analyzing digital messages and with developing some fluency around digital literacy. We're also looking to educate them more about hate groups and extremist views so that they're able to recognize any signs they see in their students early on and intervene. So our program strategy is the same, we're just developing different resources and materials to meet the present needs.

J.P.: When you mentioned digital literacy, it made me wonder if fake news is a big part of how these groups spread.

L.B.: Of course, of course. I don't know if that's how they spread, but it's how the rhetoric spreads, right? The disinformation, the lies that are kind of floating around as to the danger of Muslims, the danger of immigrants, this kind of disinformation is what feeds people on the extreme right.

J.P.: Since you guys have been tracking these incidents for years around the country – violent incidents – do you have any advice, generally speaking, for Portlanders who are grieving and trying to figure out how to respond to something like what just happened?

L.B.: Well, I think what happened in Portland is kind of a testament to true America and how we stand up for one another. The gentleman who died, his dying message being, "Tell everyone on the train that I love them," is a beautiful message for all of us. We certainly don't want to encourage people to get in harm's way, but we also do want people to stand up against hate. And if we do it together, united, we have a great chance of pushing back. We have to push back. We cannot allow hateful violence and rhetoric to become normalized. We need to marginalize people who are espousing these beliefs and not give them any credence.



Laila Hajoo is the director of Islamic Social Services of Oregon.

Safety concerns rise among Muslims, transit operators

BY ELIZABETH BUELOW
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In Portland, like the rest of the nation, displays of hatred against Muslims is on the rise. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the number of anti-Muslim hate groups in the United States tripled in 2016, from 34 to 101. And the FBI reported a 67 percent surge in attacks on Muslims in 2015, the latest data available, demonstrating levels not seen since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

"Minority groups are in jeopardy here. The spark has been ignited. How do we control the flames?"

LAILA HAJOO,
DIRECTOR OF ISLAMIC
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The killings of Rick Best and Taliesin Myrddin Namkai-Meche on May 26 on a Portland MAX train are the most recent acts of horrific violence in a country that is on the edge. In the wake of the attack, which also severely injured Micah David-Cole Fletcher, the Muslim community, already cautious of public spaces, is fearful of things to come.

Safety concerns on public transport are nothing new – for riders or for operators.

A June 10 rally that was organized to oppose Sharia Law was moved to Seattle, but Laila Hajoo, director of Islamic Social Services of Oregon State, or ISOS, remains concerned about the fallout. ISOS is a nonprofit charitable organization that serves people in need.

"It's a trickle effect," she said. "Things like this will be seen and can trigger violence at mosques, buses, schools, everywhere." Indeed, stabbing suspect Jeremy Joseph Christian had attended a free-speech rally in April, where video footage shows him draped in an American flag, performing Nazi salutes, shouting racial slurs, venting about "safe spaces," and threatening police officers. Almost

one month later, he would step onto the train to harass two young women, one of whom was wearing a hijab.

"It's not only dangerous to be a Muslim; it's dangerous to be in a public spaces with a Muslim," Hajoo said.

With protests organized by the grassroots anti-Muslim group ACT for America planned in 22 cities across the nation, Hajoo is deeply concerned for public safety.

"Minority groups are in jeopardy here," Hajoo said. "The spark has been ignited. How do we control the flames?"

Fear among Hajoo's community members has reached the point that they're advising female members not to go anywhere alone, especially if they are wearing a hijab.

"Public places don't feel safe anymore," she said.

The battle over safety in public spaces is not new, but with the heightened level of vitriol in Portland, the issue is creating more urgency. And people are starting to step up, from local shop owners creating "You are safe here" posters and hanging them in their windows to the Portland Police Bureau offering extra patrols for Muslims during Ramadan, which lasts until June 25, and working with local youth programs that provide safe spaces for young immigrants.

Portlanders rallied in strength on June 4, with counter demonstrators far outnumbering the crowd at a pro-Trump rally in Terry Schunk Plaza, which was organized by white nationalists outside of Portland.

Even if the flashpoints can be written off as the bad actions of a few, they are what Hajoo and others are fearful of, especially considering that when bystanders stood up to intervene, they were met with violence.

"People want to feel safe, and now they are shirking out of fear," Hajoo said. "Now, when people see harassment, they will remember those two gentlemen, and they