



Teens' Solution For Combating Youth Violence May Be In Our Own Backyard

By SENATOR GORDON H. SMITH

Today we celebrate the life of a man whose passion for equality has gone unmatched in the thirty years since his death. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a man of integrity and honor who lived and died in pursuit of his dream. He made tremendous strides to change the consciousness of Americans, and his efforts will be forever remembered and cherished. I think if Dr. King would have had an opportunity to write his own epitaph, he would have used the words he once spoke... "the believer in non-violence has deep faith in the future."

Just as Dr. King did, I firmly believe the key to creating a peaceful future for all Americans is in the hands of our younger generation. Unfortunately, there is often more focus on what kids are doing wrong, instead of the positive contributions that they are making to their families, their schools, their communities and their own lives.

I make it a priority to listen to what the young people in Oregon have to say and I recently met with a group of high school students in Portland to hear their concerns about youth violence and their ideas for safer schools and neighborhoods. I was impressed by their thoughtful solutions and their determination to create a safe haven within their own communities. I was even more inspired at how sensitive they were to the economic and emotional needs of their classmates.

They pleaded for adults to become more involved with kids, to focus on spending time with them rather than money, and reminded me that not all kids take guns to school, join a gang or defy their parents. The majority want and need adults to be involved in their lives, to serve as role models, offer advice and give them a voice in decisions that affect them. They also stressed the importance of having somewhere to go that would nurture these wants and needs. I was fortunate enough to visit such a place.

Following my conversation with the students, I had the opportunity to tour northeast Portland's Self Enhancement, Inc. (SEI) and was immediately struck by how this community center meets so many of the needs identified by the students. SEI's purpose is to help inner-city youth realize their full potential. They work with schools and parents recognizing that — despite the attention given to violence in schools — the majority of youth violence occurs outside the classroom. According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC), less than one percent of all homicides committed by school-aged children actually occur in school. This fact reinforces even more the necessity of after-school programs that provide safety, education, entertainment, aid and comfort to students. Everyone who participates in SEI's basketball camp or after-school program can find the companionship they may be seeking, improve their academic, athletic and artistic skills and establish mentoring relationships with adults.

Throughout the day, I talked with students and adults about how I, as their Senator, could help them achieve personal and academic success. Among other suggestions, they recommended placing more counselors in schools, offering anger management training before and during middle school, providing peer and adult mentoring, student mediation, more funding for arts programs, and making after school programs like SEI the norm, not the exception.

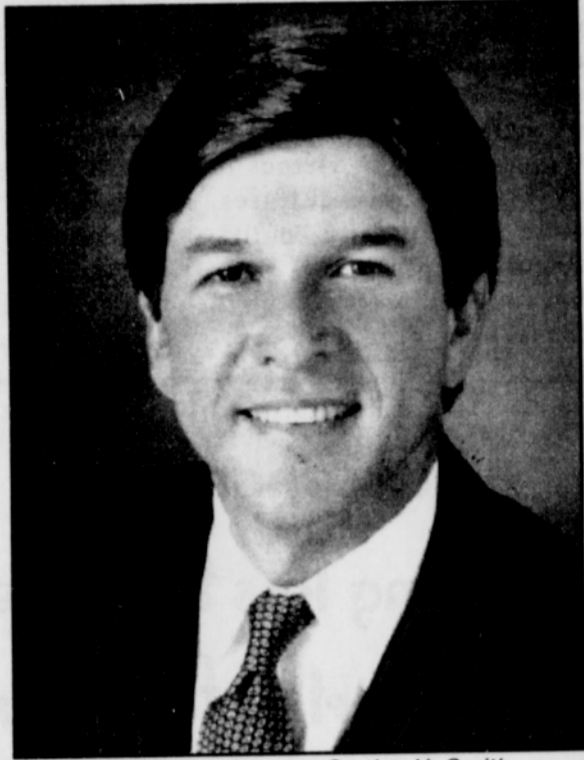
I took those suggestions very seriously and I am hoping to incorporate them into legislation that I am working on with Senator John Kerry

of Massachusetts.

Our plan to educate America's children would make available the tools for change so that every aspect of public education would function better and strengthen every element of the system.

If we do not want to lose a generation of Americans, we must demand nothing less than comprehensive education reform effort — one that will improve not only the lives of our children while they are in class, but out of school as well.

I am hopeful that as we continue to talk about treating one another with respect, providing the best opportunities for our youth, and finding our way to a community symbolized by peace and reconciliation, we will be guided by the hearts and minds of young people. Our role, as

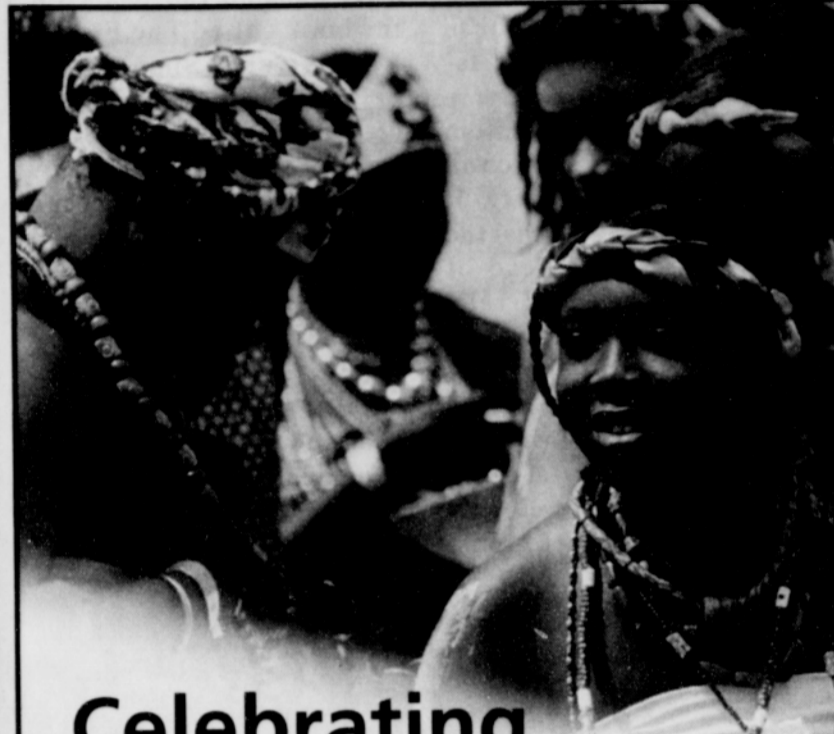


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community members, parents, and government is to provide them the tools for success and then let them, in turn, teach us. As Dr. King so wisely said, "It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Solutions To Create A Nonviolent World

- Listen with an open heart.
- Contemplate the Quiet of Nature.
- Meditate on Peace.
- Practice Non-Judgement.
- Take responsibility for my actions.
- Forgive myself and others
- Commit to serve the nature of Nonviolence.



Celebrating the spirit of the dream.

Brenda Addy takes part in the Homowo African Harvest Festival. PGE is a major sponsor of this community event.

When Martin Luther King, Jr. said "I have a dream," it was a challenge to each of us to join in making our communities better for all people. That's why you'll see Portland General Electric involved in many programs that help education, healthy families, arts & culture, the environment and diversity.

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