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The Portland Observer

EDITORIAL

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The Portland Observer

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Letter To The Editor:

"The Reality of Job Injury"

Senator Derfler's article on February 24, "Workers' Compensation (WC) Reform... Reducing on the Job Injuries and Deaths" shows a legislator's lack of understanding of the reality of being injured on-the-job in Oregon.

In citing \$61,000 as a possible significant "award" for losing a thumb and a finger, Senator Derfler falls prey to the idea of an injured worker "winning" something. Many people think of workers' Compensation as a game where one side wins and one side loses. Employers cheat a little on job descriptions to save money on premiums, doctors do a little over-billing and insurance companies delay and deny claims until the injured worker accepts a nickel on the dollar.

Imagine trying to drink a glass of water or combing your daughter's hair without a thumb and a finger. Is that worth \$61,000?

Imagine having necessary surgery for a job injury delayed because no doctor will touch you until the billing arrangements are made. Imagine then losing your job because you had the courage to file a claim when you were

injured at work. Imagine then being unemployed because of your disability. Imagine going into debt for years with no offers of retraining or "light duty" work. Imagine facing years of health problems, depression, anger and being ostracized by friends and coworkers. Imagine getting back to work on your own, in a new job that pays about 40% less than your preinjury job. These aren't imaginations, these are the realities of being injured on-the-job.

\$61,000 doesn't begin to help with what a maimed worker requires to resume an active, healthy and productive life.

After meeting with, and hearing the stories of many injured workers, I've learned that Oregon Workers' Compensation serves the business community and the insurance industry first and foremost. I have yet to meet the injured worker who wouldn't trade their "award" for being whole again. This may be a political game to some, but for most of the injured workers, Senator Derfler's Workers Compensation is a living nightmare.

By RON DANIELS

Caving into the conservative tide which swept across the country over the last two decades, even some democrats, including President William Jefferson Clinton, began to advocate the misguided policies which have fueled the disastrous crisis of police brutality and misconduct afflicting the Black community and communities of color. Indeed, it was Clinton's Omnibus Crime Bill of 1994 which provided the federal funds for 100,000 more police officers to be deployed in local communities nationwide. It is important to recall that President Clinton initially campaigned on a pledge to provide some 60 billion in funds for an "economic stimulus package" to rebuild and repair roads, bridges and infrastructure in urban areas. As the cam-

paign worn on, the figures for the stimulus package were reduced from 60 billion to 30 billion, 15 billion and finally to zero. Having promised a stimulus package which was in fact desperately needed to generate jobs in urban America, once in office, Clinton abandoned his promise in favor of debt control and deficit reduction—policies designed to have an immediate impact on the fortunes of those on Wall Street as opposed to poor and working people.

In effect the rich and the super-rich received debt control, deficit reduction and tax incentives while people of color and poor and working people, those at the bottom of the social and economic ladder in this society, received a "liberal" dose of social control and containment in the form of more police, tougher sen-

tencing, the death penalty and the prison-jail industrial complex. In reality the moderate-centralist "new Democrat" policies of Bill Clinton, which were calculated to steal the law and order issue from the Republicans, contributed to the stagnation and underdevelopment in the ghettos, barrios and reservations. These policies helped to spawn conditions for the illicit economy of drugs, with its attendant violence and fratricide, to explode within our communities. These policies coupled with the complicity of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the import of crack cocaine into inner-city urban areas had a disastrous impact on communities of color.

Having created the problem through political opportunism, misguided policies and the outright abandonment of

communities of color, the "War on Drugs" and aggressive policing methods became an integral part of the plan to control and contain our communities. Our communities were compelled to suffer "dreams deferred" while government policies aided the bosses and bankers on Wall Street to accumulate obscene levels of wealth. In this scenario legions of our young people were destined to become the human fodder for the prison-jail industrial complex. Our challenge, as we fight for police reform and accountability, is to attack the root causes of the crises afflicting our community. We must not only insist on new and more human paradigms of policing, we must demand a moratorium on the deployment of more police in our communities and an end to the construction of more prisons'

Weapons

By MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

In a recent paper written for a new group, Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities, Dr. Lawrence Korb, who was an Assistant Secretary of Defense under Ronald Reagan, tells us that the United States has spent over \$2 trillion on national security since the end of the Cold War. Korb estimates that we could cut \$40 billion a year from our defense budget and still maintain the most powerful military in the world. Can you imagine the weapons we could buy for \$40 billion? I can... weapons against preventable children's diseases and hunger, against poor education and substandard housing, and against violence and hopelessness in the neighborhoods, schools, and homes of this country.

Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities is taking its case to the people. With a 4-year, multi-million dollar national issues marketing campaign, they are seeking to redefine the national debate on federal spending priorities. The membership of this group includes businesses large and small, made up of hard-headed, bottom-line businessmen who recognize that America's national security depends on educating our children, making our communities safe, and providing health care for our families in addition to keeping our national defense strong. Companies such as Ben & Jerry's, Working Assets, Newman's own, banks, publishers, insurance companies, food manufacturers, and pharmaceutical companies, among others, have joined with retired admirals and generals in a campaign to bring the truth to you, the voting public, through radio and television advertising, talk shows, the Internet, and a nationwide bus tour. They hope to visit with unions, civic organizations, PTAs, youth, business people, social service advocates, and elected officials.

I agree with the group's Director of Constituency Group Relations Virginia Witt when she says that we must make certain "that every dollar spent on defending our country is spent wisely. In today's global economy, every dollar spent to educate American children and give them the skills they need to lead our nation in the next century is a dollar invested in keeping America strong and safe for the future."

This unique joining of American business leaders, who understand what it takes to run a profitable business and the foolishness of waste, with retired soldiers, officers, and senior military advisers, who know what is needed to maintain a strong national defense and take care of our

troops, has come together to make their case not only to the Congress and the policy makers who spend our national tax dollars, but also to inform you—the public—when and where we are failing as a nation.

A nation is no better, no stronger, and no more honorable and moral than its people. Remember, it is our money the Pentagon is spending. And it is our children who are facing the new millennium, far too many still not immunized against preventable disease and suffering from easily-curable earaches and toothaches their uninsured working parents cannot afford to treat. It is our children who are skipping meals and becoming homeless in greater and greater numbers

because of the new welfare legislation passed by the Congress we elected and signed into law by the President we elected. It is our children who are home alone or in poor-quality day care we can barely afford because quality, affordable child care is out of reach for too many working families. It is our children who are not prepared to learn and succeed when they enter schools staffed by teachers and principles who expect them to fail, and shrug when low expectations are fulfilled. And it is our children who are not safe in our schools, or on our streets, or in our homes.

It's up to us—each one of us—to stand for children and make our voices heard. It's time to say NO to

any more \$600 toilet seats and \$8,000 door hinges on the Pentagon's shopping lists. It's time to say YES to our children and to our future.

To find out when the Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities bus tour is coming near your town, you can call them at 202-543-1604 or visit them at virginia@businessleaders.org, and to find out what you can do today for children and to help realign our national spending priorities, call Stand For Children at 1-800-643-4032 or visit their Website, www.stand.org and the Children's Defense Fund's Website at www.childrensdefense.org. Stand with us on June 1, 1999, in your community to make sure every child is ready for school and ready to learn.

Yes! It's your time! You couldn't have dreamed it better if you'd tried. You've learned that hard work and long hours definitely pay off and that getting ahead is easier when there's family behind you. That's the way it is with American Family Mutual Insurance. Like you, we understand it's consistent performance that builds strong reputations. That's just one of many reasons why year after year, we're awarded an A+ (Superior) rating from the respected insurance rating authority, A.M. Best.

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Letter To The Editor:

The Multnomah County jurors who recently returned a punitive damage verdict against Phillip Morris reached their decision after very carefully weighing the evidence presented during the month-long trial. Critics of the verdict should acquaint themselves with some of the evidence, as described in many newspaper accounts. This courageous decision by twelve ordinary

citizens, representing the collective wisdom judgment of our community, demonstrates that our civil justice system is the greatest means ever devised for bringing about positive social change in the face of corporate refusal to accept responsibility.

As for the amount of punitive damages assessed, 60% of which must by law go to Oregon Crime

Victims Assistance Fund, the jury heard evidence that Phillip Morris' domestic tobacco business alone has a net worth of \$17 billion. The amount assessed by the jury is less than 1/2 of 1% of this value, which is equivalent to imposing a fine of about \$80 on someone who has \$17,000.

Sincerely,
Todd Bradley