

EDITORIAL

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

REV. JESSE JACKSON SAYS Louima Verdict Disappointing

• Regarding the verdict in the trial of four New York police officers in the Abner Louima police torture case, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, president of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition said the following:

"The verdict of the trial of the remaining four officers is disappointing. While we respect the jurors' decision, we do not agree with it. All four should have been found guilty as charged.

"The law must serve as a deterrent to these sorts of terrorists acts, whether they are by civilians or whether they are by police officers. Law enforcement officials have the extra burden to serve and to protect, but they also have the extra power to abuse innocent people, and in some cases take their lives, as we have

seen in the increase of police killings across the nation.

"Abner Louima deserves full justice, and only then will he begin to fully regain his dignity. He was entitled to equal protection under the law. These five New York police officers attempted to rob him of his humanity by violating his human and civil rights. If five officers accosted him-but only three held him down, while the two others performed the terrorist act—all five are equally guilty. They all must share the guilt, the burden and the responsibility for what they have done. Each one had the obligation to stop it. No one did.

"Those who were acquitted should have arrested Justin Volpe and Charles Schwartz. Instead they chose silence. Each had taken an

Working To End The Violence

By BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

There's a lot of talk about ending the violence in the schools and in our communities and there are some who are doing something about it. While the politicians are locked into debates, and the gun lobbies continue to hold conventions and suggest that the solution to violence in schools is to arm the teachers, there are organizations which have been quietly working for the past decade or more to end the violence. Here are two such organizations.

The Institute for Peace and Justice

This St. Louis-based organization is actually a network of organization working for peace in schools and in communities. It has designed a non-violence pledge for families, as well as books, tapes and other materials for parents, educators, youth and adults. It works on such issues as human rights, including the use of child soldiers; and economic injustice, including educating parents and

children about our culture of consumption. It has developed alternatives to violence church kits in English and Spanish to help local churches actively work against violence. One of its advocacy priorities is challenging the culture of violence and it conducts workshop around the nation on this topic.

Every year at its annual awards dinner, the Institute of Peace and Justice honors those grassroots community workers against violence. This year, for instance, they honored an interfaith partnership between a St. Louis temple and a local Roman Catholic church which together fought the state-wide referendum on carrying of concealed weapons. They also honored a Presbyterian church in Clarksville, TN which conducted a two-day anti-violence training for the community, bringing together police, parents, social service agencies and educators and a county violence prevention program in Santa Clara, CA. Other organizations received awards

for their collaboration on anti-violence projects and for education programs which seek to end violence.

Together, these thousands of individuals across the nation are working to stop the violence where they live. They're not just talking, they're working.

Conflict Resolution Education Network (CREnet)

This organization is a national and international clearinghouse for information, resources and technical assistance in the field of conflict resolution and education. Based in Washington, D.C., it works to promote conflict resolution education in all U.S. schools. Its program teach and model skills of mediation, negotiation and collaborative problem solving.

Indeed, the evidence shows that such programs do make a difference for our young people. For instance, a 1992 study in New York reported a 50% decline in student assaults after such education was included and stu-

dent peer mediation programs also reduce the incidence of suspensions and fighting among students. Today there are over 8,500 school-based conflict resolution programs in the U.S., but in a country with 86,000 public schools clearly there is much work to be done.

In July CREnet will hold its 14th annual conference on Education and Leadership for Safe Schools, which will be held in Boston and is being co-sponsored by a number of organizations. It will include dozens of workshops and much information.

(Note: For more information on the Institute for Peace and Justice and its parenting network and Families against violence network, write 4144 Lindell Blvd., #408, St. Louis, MO 63108 or call (314) 533-4445 or fax (314) 533-1017 or email: pppin@aol.com. to contact the Conflict Resolution Education Network, write 1527 New Hampshire Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 or call (202) 667-9700 or email: nidr@cernet.org)

For All Of Our "Private Ryans"

By BUTCH MILLER

"Earn this." That was the challenge at the end of the movie "Saving Private Ryan" from one hero of World War II to another. "Earn this." In the movie, the phrase means: Honor the sacrifices of America's combat veterans by living a truly good life.

For those of us in The American Legion who work every day with countless Private Ryans from every major conflict of this century, we know that the hardships and sacrifices of military service have earned America's veterans the right to a modern, accessible VA health-care system.

For the burdens of military service don't end when the battle flags are furled and this nation's Private Ryans take off their uniforms and return home. Wounds may heal and injuries may improve but many veterans leave the military with medical problems that stay with them the rest of their lives. Commonly, these problems worsen with age.

Fortunately, over the decades, this nation has built an impressive network of 173 hospitals dedicated to serving veterans under the Department of Veterans Affairs, still known as the VA. Unfortunately, the VA health-care network, by some standards the largest in the nation, where half of all physicians receive a portion of their professional training, is on the verge of collapsing through financial neglect.

The VA, you see, is in its third year of a frozen, no-growth budget. And Congress is in the process right now of putting together a VA budget that could guarantee a fourth year with spending locked at 1997 levels.

This sort of belt-tightening made sense in 1997 when a burgeoning federal deficit threatened to drag down our economy. Veterans have always been willing to share the pain during the tough times. But why, when the federal government estimates it will take in at least \$100 billion more than it spends this year, is anyone having any pain?

oath to serve and to protect, yet each decided to erode rather than enforce the law.

"We stand with Abner Louima and his family in their quest for full justice."

We can't freeze the medical needs of veterans. Our World War II veterans are making more demands upon the VA medical system. Newer vets are trying to enter VA hospitals and clinics every day with their own problems.

The VA's top doctor has estimated that he'll have to lay off 8,000 medical workers, reduce hours, eliminate programs and even consider closing hospitals if Congress does not remove the financial shackles of a non-growth budget.

To reverse this alarming trend, The American Legion has embarked upon a campaign to preserve the VA medical system from slow financial strangulation. We call it "Budget Warning 2000."

We're urging our 2.8 million members, their families, and the rest of

America's 26 million veterans to contact their members of Congress and insist that the VA's medical system received adequate funding. The American Legion has determined that less than \$2 billion, added to the \$18 billion now being considered in Washington for VA health care, would put the VA back on the right financial track.

I urge everyone who cares about veterans -- about the Private Ryans of this country -- to call or write the people who represent them in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

Members of Congress work for you. You're not stepping out of line by contacting them. Let them know what you want them to do. Tell them that you want them to increase the VA budget by \$1.9 billion over the President's proposed

recommendation. Tell them that if the VA is not properly funded, the VA may resort to the rationing of medical care with the possibility of eliminating care for non-service-connected veterans, treatment and screening of veterans with hepatitis C, termination of critical health care providers and the possible closure of medical facilities. Letters with details about the way you depend upon the VA -- and the effect upon you of future cutbacks -- are especially effective.

When America's private Ryans were called upon to serve their country, not one suggested that we take a non-growth approach to pain and suffering. They did what this country asked them to do.

Like Private Ryan, they earned it. Now it's our responsibility to honor that debt.

Oregon First in Nation

By SCOTT LAY

After I explain the program to people I sometimes hear them say, "What the catch? This sounds too good!"

This is the Response after I've told them how they can go to work, a goal they've had for years.

Allow me to explain. For decades, many people with disabilities have been economically discouraged from working. As surprising as it sounds, if they got even a low-paying job they would often lose needed federal disability benefits.

These include health and personal-care attendant benefits, without which these people couldn't survive.

So although vocational rehabili-

tation programs have done an excellent job of preparing people with disabilities to work, because they couldn't afford to. I know. I use a wheelchair as a result of a swimming accident in the 1960s. Some people were born with their disability; others have developed a disabling disease such as multiple sclerosis; other like me, were disabled in accidents.

For various reasons about 70 percent of the people with disabilities are unemployed. Yet a 1998 Harris Poll says the majority want to work. Oregon's new program aims to remove the loss of health insurance as a major barrier.

People with disabilities often receive a modest federal disability benefit, Income. But those on SSDI know

that if they regularly earn income, they may no longer be considered "disabled" -- and that spells a loss of health benefits.

We have changed this system in Oregon. People with disabilities can now share in working's self-esteem, income and ability to pay taxes. With federal approval, Oregon for the first time is signing up people with disabilities who want to work without losing their medical benefits. Of the first 60-plus people, the average monthly income is nearly \$1,000 or about double what some of them could safely earn before. These people have a variety of disabilities, range in age from 21 to 77, and hold jobs such as short-order cook, software engineer and nursing home

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