



Opinion

Articles do not necessarily reflect or represent the views of The Portland Observer

The Portland Observer

USPS 959-680

Established 1970

STAFF

EDITOR IN CHIEF,

PUBLISHER

Charles H. Washington

EDITOR

Larry J. Jackson, Sr.

BUSINESS MANAGER

Gary Ann Taylor

COPY EDITOR

Joy Ramos

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Shawn Strahan

4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.

Portland, OR 97211

503-288-0033

Fax 503-288-0015

e-mail

news@portlandobserver.com

subscription@portlandobserver.com

POSTMASTER:

Send address changes to

Portland Observer

PO Box 3137

Portland, OR 97208

Periodical Postage paid in Portland, OR

Subscriptions are \$60.00 per year

DEADLINES
FOR ALL SUBMITTED MATERIALS:

ARTICLES:
Monday by 5 P.M.

ADS:
Friday by noon

The Portland Observer welcomes freelance submissions. Manuscripts and photographs should be clearly labeled and will be returned if accompanied by a self-addressed envelope. All created design display ads become the sole property of the newspaper and cannot be used in other publications or personal usage without the written consent of the general manager, unless the client has purchased the composition of such ad. © 1996 THE PORTLAND OBSERVER. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED.

The Portland Observer—Oregon's Oldest Multicultural Publication—is a member of the National Newspaper Association—Founded in 1885, and The National Advertising Representative Amalgamated Publishers, Inc., New York, NY, and The West Coast Black Publishers Association—Serving Portland and Vancouver.

State officials urge community response to child abuse and neglect

BY GARY WEEKS AND RAMONA FOLEY
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Of all the tools we have to protect Oregon's children from abuse and neglect, information is among the most important. This month the Oregon Department of Human Services released its annual report: The Status of Children in Oregon's Child Protection System.

Although anecdotal accounts and media reports of child abuse and neglect can mobilize a community, influence policy and raise awareness, data yields a different picture. For example, each year we learn more about which children have died and who was responsible. We know that victims of abuse and neglect are younger, maltreatment reports are up and caseloads are climbing. What we must ask is, "Why?"

Why are children less than a year old dying at the hands of their caretakers? Why are more children coming into state care? Why does the state return children to homes where they were abused or neglected?

Last year the Child Welfare League of America, in cooperation with the state child welfare agencies, presented the nation's first comprehensive, interactive child welfare database: the National Data Analysis System. While a state-by-state comparison is premature because of variances in how maltreatment is reported and defined, the CWLA database is a starting place for gauging the status of children in the country's child protection system. A key factor in Oregon is a child maltreatment category called "threat of harm." Oregon is clearly among the states that have adopted a broader definition for child abuse and neglect, a reflection of the state's longstanding commitment to provide extensive protection to its children. Threat of harm includes all activities, conditions, and

persons that place the child at substantial risk of physical or sexual abuse, neglect or mental injury. For example, threat of harm could include children who are living with a convicted sex offender, children observing domestic violence in their homes and siblings of child maltreatment victims who have died or were severely injured.

While this category contributes to a higher rate of victim counts, it also puts child welfare workers in a position to identify early on those factors that will contribute to more abuse and neglect and calls upon us to apply creative solutions to complex problems.

Among the lessons we continue to learn from Oregon's status of children report is that government alone cannot meet the goals of child protection and permanence.

We know how important it is for communities to be involved in what we do. The people we help—children, the elderly and the disabled—are part of the communities where they live and part of the larger Oregon "family."

Increasingly we're asking counties, cities, schools, non-profit organizations, the faith community and other state agencies to help us. An example is the community safety net project that assists counties in organizing local resources to help children and families at risk so they don't have to become involved with state programs and services. It's all about the state and local governments working together to produce better outcomes for individuals and families.

We will continue to find ways for our various systems—courts, juvenile corrections, child welfare, adult welfare, mental health and public health—to work together in the best interest of our children.

Gary Weeks is the director of the Oregon Department of Human Services; Ramona Foley is the administrator of the State Office for Services to Children and Families.

A racial profiling bill cops can love

by Earl Ofari Hutchinson
for The Portland Observer

It was a bizarre scene recently in front of the California's State Capitol building in Sacramento. Hundreds of students, black and Latino community activists, and police reform advocates were holding a spirited rally to support a bill by Kevin Murray, a black Democrat state senator from Los Angeles, to compel the state to compile figures on the race, age and gender of motorists stopped by the California Highway Patrol. The CHP makes more traffic stops than any other police agency in the nation. The bill also would've required the CHP to tell why motorists were stopped, and whether a search and arrest was made as a result of the stop.

But midway through the rally the mood of the crowd changed from exuberance to shock and then anger not at Governor Gray Davis who vetoed an identical bill Murray introduced last fall but at Murray. The crowd turned on him when they got word that he had gutted the bill of the data collection provision to get Davis's signature. The amended bill required only that police hand a business card to drivers and undergo

more diversity training. The toothless bill was immediately hailed by Los Angeles County Sheriff and LAPD Chief Bernard Parks. Both have waged a personal crusade to torpedo legislation requiring their departments to keep racial stats on traffic stops.

But if Murray's original bill requiring data collection had become law it would've been a big step toward proving or disproving whether police departments use racial profiles to harass and intimidate blacks and Latinos on the highways. Since laws passed in California are closely watched and frequently emulated by officials in other states, Murray's bill might have spurred reluctant and timid officials in those states to pass a similar law. This would have been a crucial breakthrough for another reason. Many blacks and Latinos have long screamed that police target them for shake downs on the highways and streets. According to a Justice Department study, blacks comprise about 14 percent of the population, yet account for more than 70 percent of all routine traffic stops. Murray himself took up the fight against racial profiling because of a scrape he had with police. On election night in June, 1998, he and his wife

were returning home from his campaign headquarters when they were pulled over by a police officer in Beverly Hills. Murray was not speeding, or driving unsafely. He immediately identified himself to the officer as a state official and explained where he was coming from and going. This meant nothing to the officer who ran a complete check on him. Murray's title, position, and prestige as an incumbent state senator counted for nothing. He publicly protested that he was a victim of "driving while black and brown," filed a lawsuit against the police, and introduced his bill.

Beverly Hills police officials responded to Murray's complaint the same way most police agencies do to thousands of others who say they are victims of racial profiling. They say that it's illegal and they don't do it. But that's easy for them to say since other than anecdotal horror tales by black and Latino motorists of police mistreatment on the highways, there is no real smoking gun proof that the practice exists. To get that kind of proof requires state law enforcement agencies to keep hard numbers on the race of all motorists they stop on the roads.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Your children will probably be exposed to pesticides today, and you may not even know it. Pesticides are used pretty much everywhere our children go, in schools, playgrounds, parks, yards and even within our homes. It is unfortunate that in this age of nearly ubiquitous use, we don't have the right to know where or when we are being exposed to these potentially dangerous chemicals.

Anyone can be sickened by exposure to pesticides, but children, especially young children, are often the most susceptible. Exposure at a young age can wreak havoc with critical developmental processes. Increases in rates of childhood leukemias, asthmas and allergies have been linked to increased use of pesticides within the last 50 years. In 1996 alone, over 126,000 pesticide exposures were reported to poison control centers. Over a half of these were children under six who were poisoned within their own homes.

We need to know what our children are being exposed to, so we can have a chance of protecting them from these dangerous chemicals. Currently, Oregon has the second worst rate of exposure cases in our schools. A study done by Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides found that symptoms such as headaches, dizziness, nausea and rashes occurred in schoolchildren, even from applications following all safety measures. In September, the Oregon legislature passed a bill requiring disclosure of pesticide use in Oregon. Currently, the governor and the Department of Agriculture are working out the details of how this law will be applied and enforced. I urge anyone and everyone concerned about pesticide exposures to contact the governor or the D of A. We must have an effective tracking system for pesticides so we can have a chance of protecting ourselves and our children.

Sincerely,

Rigel Pearce

To the Editor,

Anne and Annette Kirkwood of Madras are my heroes. These two women used the civil justice system to hold General Motors accountable for the exploding side-saddle gas tanks installed on GM pickup trucks. If you don't recall the news coverage, Anne was horribly burned in the accident and shows her bravery every day, just fighting to stay alive.

Unfortunately, the Legislature put Constitutional Amendment 81 on the May 16 ballot to make it more difficult to hold big corporations accountable for faulty products. When you get your voter pamphlet, please read carefully the explanation of Amendment 81. If it passes, Oregonians will lose a basic right, the right to trial by jury. Let's protect our constitutional rights and vote "No" on 81.

A thinly veiled attack on injuries

BY GEORGE W. STARR
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Sound bites and negativism can be more persuasive than logic and objectivity. Emotions inhibit rational thinking. Take Constitutional Amendment 81. On May 16, Oregon voters will decide whether to amend our constitution to allow the Legislature to restrict the amount of money that a person may recover in any civil claim. The amendment was put on the ballot by the Legislature, acting at the request of powerful special interests, including HMOs, big insurance companies and the tobacco lobby.

In promoting the measure, the special interests who created it are trying to focus your attention on the supposed source of all evil: the dreaded trial lawyer. While the campaign for Constitutional Amendment 81 will attack trial lawyers over and over again, be aware—the true object of the attack is citizen juries.

The amendment would take away the effectiveness of a trial by jury, a basic right guaranteed in the Constitution. Politicians in Salem, who have not heard the facts of a case, not heard witnesses or a judge's instruction to a jury would be able to make one-size-fits-all decisions on civil court issues. Decisions by juries of 12 ordinary citizens that hear testimony, weigh evidence and make decisions on a case-by-case basis would be overridden by the legislature.

Sometimes the courts are the only way to make a bad company pay for its actions. This proposed change to our constitution would allow corporations who harm consumers with faulty and unsafe products to walk away with only a slap on the wrist, while the victims would have to pay their own medical bills. Irresponsible companies should be punished and faulty products should be forced off the market. Exploding gas tanks and faulty garage door openers have killed and yet only through civil action did the companies change those products and pay for their deception.

The effects of changing the constitution would not be limited to injury claims. The "civil actions" referred to in the measure include everything in civil court—contract disputes, patent infringements, hazardous waste claims, claims of corporate stockholders, fraud schemes, anything you can possibly think of, without exception. If you're seeking justice, who would you rather have deciding your case, a jury of 12 ordinary people or the politicians and lobbyists in Salem?

The proponents of 81 are referring to our right to jury trial as "the lawyers' loophole." Funny, we've had the right to trial by jury in our state constitution as a so-called loophole for the past 150 years. Common sense tells us that upholding the constitution will not create a loophole. Justice is not a loophole.

Before we get too overwhelmed at the sound bites and scare tactics, we should think about the philosophy of the politicians, insurance corporations, HMOs and tobacco companies who brought us Constitutional Amendment 81. They assert that we, as citizens, are not rational enough to make reasonable decisions when we serve on juries, and therefore we should give up our democratic right to decide what is adequate compensation for someone's loss. They say we should give up our most basic democratic right. It doesn't make sense to me, but the proponents of Constitutional Amendment 81 are betting hundreds of thousands of dollars they can overcome our common sense if they just say the right words.

When you hear the campaign for 81 attack trial lawyers, look for the substance. Read the ballot measure explanation in your voter pamphlet. The real target is juries and you, the citizen juror.

**EXPLORE YOUR FUTURE
COLLEGE PREP WORKSHOP
MAY 13, 2000**

High school students and their parents are invited to attend this free informative workshop on getting ready for college. Whether you are looking at eventually attending a community college, a state university, or a private college, this event will help bring your future into focus. You can attend sessions on:

- Benefits of a College Education
- Developing the Vision
- Understanding the Admissions Process
- Unlocking the Mystery of Financial Aid
- What Should I Know Now to Plan for College?
- Exploring the Options—Dispelling the Myths

This is a great opportunity to get a jump-start on your future. There will be door prizes and snacks provided for the day.

WHERE AND WHEN:

Maranatha Church of God
4222 N.E. 12th Avenue
May 13, 8:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

Sponsored by the African-American Alumni of George Fox University

TO RESERVE A SEAT, CALL 554-2253