

Opinion

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The Portland Observer

USPS 959-680
Established 1970

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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:

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Monday by 5 P.M.

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Civil Rights USDA: A success story in progress

BY U.S. SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE DAN GLICKMAN

Five years ago, when I became Secretary of Agriculture, I discovered that the department was still struggling — as much of our society still is — to make racial equality an institutionalized and unshakable principle, one that embedded in every decision and every program.

I immediately made it a top priority to make the U.S. department of Agriculture (USDA) a place where employees, customers and constituents are all treated with the fairness and dignity they deserve. It has been my goal to make USDA a civil rights leader in the federal government. One of our most important steps in that direction was the settlement we reached last year in a class-action suit brought by a group of African-American framers alleging discrimination by USDA. The settlement calls for debt forgiveness and payments to individual plaintiffs who can prove discrimination, even if it occurred as long as 1981. As of April 26, payments totaling \$206.5 million have been made to 4,130 farmers.

As important as the settlement is, our civil rights agenda includes more than reactively making amends for past injustice.

In 1996, I appointed a committee of USDA employees to examine the state of civil rights throughout the department and report back to me with suggested actions. After three months of exhaustive fact-finding, they delivered 92 recommendations covering everything from ways to save minority-owned farms to USDA hiring practices to disciplinary action for civil rights violators.

We have also established a new Office of Outreach, which will help get information about our programs to minority communities and socially and economically disadvantaged populations.

Often, these communities qualify for USDA assistance without even knowing it. The Office of Outreach will serve as a central repository for

information and assistance, helping ensure the fair distribution of USDA resources to people and places that have never before received them.

Internally, almost all USDA employees have now completed some civil rights training, where they learn about the particular sensitivities involved in working with historically underserved communities.

Many supervisors and managers have received additional training, to help them manage the diversity on their staffs. And our agency heads are now evaluated as much on their civil rights performance as any other of their job.

We have introduced accountability, so that those who do not follow civil rights guidelines can expect to bear the consequences. Over the last two years, we have issued 94 disciplinary actions, ranging from letters of reprimand to 14 dismissals. Overhauling an institutional culture is not an overnight job. It will take a sustained commitment and relentless vigilance over an extended period of time.

We have yet to reach the mountaintop, but we have begun the climb.

Abraham Lincoln, when he signed the legislation creating USDA, called it the "People's Department," because of its ability to improve the lives of so many different Americans in so many different ways.

With our vigorous civil rights agenda, we are beginning to live up to that name in its fullest sense. The "People's Department" is starting to make good on its obligation to serve all of the people.

The waist is a terrible thing to mind

BY JOE KLOCK, SR.
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A little over a half-century ago, I joyfully displayed on my Marine Corps uniform the "ruptured duck" pin, symbolic of an Honorable (and most welcome) Discharge.

At the time, that uniform encased only 130 pounds of me, including a fat content somewhat approximating that of the average bullwhip. On a recent morning, my avoirdupois hit a new high, when I recorded a startling "200" on the bathroom scale (after sucking in the locale of most of that poundage).

The weight gain we're talking about here is pure, uncut flab — not just the suet that accumulated on a once youthful, lithe and svelte frame, but the additional adiposity that filled in when, with age, my muscles, bones, height and other things atrophied. (Theoretically, I now have the same gross amount of blood and internal organs as in my salad days, right?)

Getting back (and front) to the 200 pounds that currently accompany me whithersoever I go, I have sworn to shed at least 10% of it before the Dolphins' summer training camp begins. (No, I won't be trying out for the team this year; that was just a test to make sure you're paying attention.)

The problem is that every weight-loss program I've investigated is tainted with flaws or side effects that have prevented me from getting under "weigh" with any of them.

One, I'm told, will merely wring water out of my system, reducing my measurements, but making me a human version of those dehydrated sponges that swell up like blowfish when immersed in water. This suggests that, for the rest of my dehydrated life, I would have to avoid ingesting fluids, bathing and going out in the rain. Other plans threaten to clog my arteries, destroy muscle mass, mess with my metabolism and/or turn my liver into a hockey puck. Long-range, these developments would only enrich some funeral director and lessen the burden of pall bearers — neither of which benefit would accrue to my favorite fat boy.

Kindly people have told me that my problem might be genetic — therefore, perhaps, unsolvable. I took refuge in this theory at first, given the fact that neither my parents nor their siblings ever had to await the late afternoon sun to cast an impressive shadow. I do, though, have a sister with the same genes, but a

remarkably lean profile. Ergo, no alibi there. I'm somewhat concerned about the psychological impact of dieting on a man of my septuagenarian vintage, who takes almost obscene pleasure in scarfing up almost every fattening food known to man, beast or pig farmer. Might the stress of deprivation drive me into a slough of despond, progressing to clinical depression and ultimate suicide? My otherwise loving and compassionate spouse greets this theory with a fit of derisive cackling, which I take to be reassurance that this is not a likely danger.

After sorting through all the drugs, deprivations, devices, dodges and dubious theories that abound in magazines, junk mail, TV ads and cocktail party chit-chat, I've discarded everything except these few unspectacular guidelines:

1. If I take in fewer calories than I burn up, I will lose weight and it won't come back.
2. If I exercise aerobically, I will burn calories, either torching stored fat or lean muscle mass.
3. If I engage in strength-building exercise, that muscle mass will be preserved and enhanced.
4. I will not enjoy any of these pursuits.

One more thing: I'll have to drink a lot of water — some say a couple of gallons daily — in order to carry off any tallow I might be shedding; almost all of the remedies for obesity mention the need for increased water consumption.

I'm reminded of a patent medicine, popular a number of years back, called Carter's Little Liver Pills, and touted as a miracle laxative. Its radio commercial included the admonition to "every day, drink eight glasses of water." Well, it turned out that those who drank the eight glasses of water needed those little liver pills like Old Faithful needs an alarm clock to ensure regularity — in addition to which Carter's had no more affect on the liver than the Sixth Commandment has on minks. Could be? (Naah!) So there it is: Fergie, the Duchess of York and Monica, the Sultana of Sleaze notwithstanding, I shall subscribe to no short-cuts, wacko schemes or group efforts in my campaign to get back into the wardrobe that lies a-molding in the back of my closet. I'll do it the hard way, as outlined above.

If it works, we'll market it as the Klockwise Kure. If it doesn't, it'll be a hot day at the South Pole before the subject is again brought up in this space.

I am, for now, my blubber's keeper, but — mark my words — not for long!

Statement from UO President Dave Frohnmayer

"Recent news reports may have given the mistaken impression that the University of Oregon has suddenly reconsidered its decision to join the Workers' Rights Consortium.

The UO is joining the WRC for one year. The university action has always included establishing a process for internal review in cooperation with the University Senate during the next academic year to evaluate what has already begun.

Our conditions include ensuring proper influence for university members and more clarity regarding selection of advisory board members; a membership balance that includes business and corporate participation; and ensuring meetings and outcomes are open to the media and non-member observers. Any decision on whether to renew our relationship will be made only after a scheduled review and consultation with the UO Senate. We are not looking backward at this point; we are looking forward."



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