



Opinion

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Keep the Peace in Our Own Backyard

In the wake of the Sept 11 national tragedy, many Oregonians are thinking about peaceful conflict in their own communities. You can be part of the peacekeeping effort locally by volunteering as a neighborhood mediator with the Neighborhood Mediation Center.

Mediation is a voluntary process whereby people with disputes come together, sit down with a mediator, and talk about ways to solve their dispute.

The mediation training is free in exchange for volunteering three hours a week for one year.

A series of 40-hour training sessions will be held Feb. 19, 20, 21, 26, 27, 28 and March 5, 6, 7 from 6 to 9 p.m. and Feb. 23, March 2, and May 18 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the Lovejoy Room at City Hall. You can earn up to 12 credits from Portland Community College for the training and apprenticeship year.

The Neighborhood Mediation Center—a program of the Office of Neighborhood Involvement under City Commissioner Dan Saltzman—has been helping the community resolve disputes since 1978.

Volunteer mediators assist residents with neighbor-to-neighbor concerns, landlord/tenant issues and interpersonal conflict. They also help with consumer complaints and group facilitations.

Call 503-823-3152 or stop by the mediation center at the King Facility, 4815 N.E. 7th Ave., for an application packet.

Racial Disparity in Lending Must Stop

The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) has released a study documenting continued racial and income disparities in the mortgage lending market.

The report analyzes data on a national scale and in 60 metropolitan areas, including Portland.

"Across the country low- and moderate-income and minority borrowers are being turned down for mortgages more often than other borrowers," said Maude Hurd, the group's national president. "Banks need to turn this situation around if we are going to have safe and stable communities."

The study found that in Portland, African-American applicants were 1.84 times more likely to be denied a mortgage than white applicants in 2000. This was a 5.75 percent increase from 1999.

Latinos were rejected 1.92 times more often than whites in 2000, a 7.26 percent increase from 1999.

When considering borrowers in the same income brackets, African-Americans earning more than 120 percent of the median income were denied home loans at a rate 2.51 times more often than upper income whites. Upper income Latinos were 2.16 times more likely to be rejected than upper income whites.

Portland had the 6th greatest disparity in any city studied between the share of loans going to African-Americans and African-Americans' share in the population.

The city had the greatest disparity of any city studied between the share of loans going to Latinos and Latinos' share in the population.

ACORN is the nation's largest community organization of low- and moderate-income families, with over 100,000 member families organized into 500 neighborhood chapters in 40 cities across the country.

Freightliner Decision Positive for Portland

Mayor Vera Katz issued the following statement regarding Freightliner's decision to retain corporate headquarters in Portland:

"Freightliner's announcement that they are going to retain their corporate headquarters in Portland and move their Western Star truck manufacturing operations here from British Columbia is good news—even if that news must be tempered with some layoffs here.

"This is ultimately a positive decision for Portland and our economy. It shows commitment to our community and to the more than 2,500 workers at the Swan Island facility. I appreciate the willingness of the Freightliner

management team and the company's workers to partner with us to save as many of these Portland-based quality jobs as possible.

"I also wish to express my appreciation to the Portland Development Commission under the leadership of Don Mazziotti, as well as our partners at the state level who provided valuable assistance, including Governor Kitzhaber and the Oregon Economic and Community Development Department.

"I look forward to a long relationship with Freightliner and wish the company every success in their corporate turnaround efforts."

Pakistan Expert Urges Caution in U.S. Response

Anita Weiss, a professor of international studies at the University of Oregon, worries about the results of U.S. military action in Afghanistan.

Weiss is an expert on Muslim societies and human rights, particularly in Pakistan, and recently co-edited "Power and Civil Society in Pakistan" published this year by Oxford University Press.

On the day of the terrorist attacks on the United States, Weiss was in Pakistan on a research trip that also took her through Malaysia, another largely Muslim country.

She says the current military strike on Afghanistan is an automatic reflex reaction that may accomplish short-term goals such as killing or capturing Osama bin Laden and destabilizing the Taliban regime, but won't stop the international web of terrorism.

"Ultimately, this will only fan the flames of anger among those in the Islamic world who are already angry at the U.S.," says Weiss. Any action that kills innocent Afghans—who had nothing

to do with the attacks on the U.S.—will reinforce the belief held in some countries that the U.S. targets Muslims with its own brand of terrorism, Weiss believes. She cites recent street demonstrations as evidence that the U.S. strikes are causing further anti-American resentment in Pakistan, which already is at odds with the U.S. position in the India-Pakistan dispute over Kashmir.

"Critical assessment of the situation in Muslim countries is crucial. We need to realize that Pakistan is a country with 160 million people and nuclear weapons, and we don't want to destabilize the government there," she said.

To effectively stop terrorism, Weiss suggests, "the U.S. must take a more proactive approach to mediating some of the concerns raised by the Muslim world in places such as Israel, Chechnya and Kashmir.

"We have to recognize the different points of view in the world and assess the implications of our actions around the world," she said.

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