



# Opinion

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The Portland Observer  
USPS 959-680

Established 1970

4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.,  
Portland, OR 97211



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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

503-288-0033 • FAX 503-288-0015 • EMAIL: news@portlandobserver.com subscription@portlandobserver.com ads@portlandobserver.com

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## An Ode To The Postal Workers

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

First, a disclaimer. I am not objective about postal workers. My father was a postal worker, and when he died nearly half a century ago, he was in charge of the state department's post office. Many of my uncles and cousins have worked for the Post Office and one of my cousins is still a letter carrier in the Washington, D.C. area.

Because of these family connections, I know firsthand how important the Postal Service is to our nation, and I also know how important it has been to the African American community in particular.

Indeed, during my father's time, there were many black men and women who worked in the post office while going to law school, divinity school or medical school. It was a job which had some flexibility in its hours, had good pay, benefits, and most importantly for them, it hired black people.

So, the recent events

with the anthrax going through the mail have hit home with me. And I understand the anger expressed by many postal workers in the Washington area as two of their co-workers died from inhalation anthrax. They were especially angry when they learned that the dogs of the Capitol police had been given Cipro for anthrax, while the human beings of the U.S. Postal Service had not even been tested for the dreaded disease. Only belatedly did the postal workers receive the tests and the medication. Too late for two men and their families.

Granted, public health officials seem to have had to go through a steep learning curve on anthrax and initially gave the postal service bad advice on how anthrax could be dispersed. But the same public health officials were advising all the government agencies. Capitol officials wasted no time in evacuating the office buildings on Capitol Hill or in providing them

with medication just in case they might have been exposed. They even protected their police dogs.

So two questions have been haunting me ever since. Why is it that we value the men and women who work for Congress and may or may not have come into contact with the mail more than those we know delivered the contaminated mail to them? Why is it that we value the police dogs of the Capitol police more than the human beings of the postal service?

Sometimes I am accused of seeing racism in everything. And perhaps that's because as an African American, I have seen so many instances where our nation has denied that race was a factor, when indeed it was at the bottom of it all. I don't know what the racial breakdown of the postal workers in the Washington, D.C. area is, but I would guess that most are African American. And I don't know what the racial breakdown

is of Capitol Hill workers, but I would guess that while many are African American or other people of color, most are not.

Did race play a conscious part in the decision-making about which government workers were expendable and which were not? No, I am sure it did not. Was it an unconscious factor? That would be my guess.

And, of course, there is the whole element of class in all of this. We Americans don't like to talk about class differences, but like it or not, they do exist. Did class play a role for the blue-collar postal workers who only received medication after two of them died? That would be my guess.

So, to my brothers and sisters in the United States Postal Service--thank you for continuing to deliver the mail during the most frightening of times. Thanks for being the everyday heroes and sheroes that you are. May God bless each and every one of you.

## "We Always Said That Enron Was Bad News"

BY LLOYD K. MARBET,  
UTILITY REFORM PROJECT

Contrary to the public statements of the chair of the Oregon Public Utility Commission, the imminent bankruptcy of Enron, the owner of Portland General Electric, does threaten the wallets of Oregon electric ratepayers.

The Oregonian on Nov. 29 reported that the chair of the commission, Roy Hemmingway, said "firewalls separating PGE's balance sheet from its corporate parent company are solid," referring to "rules governing the transfer of PGE's assets in any six-month period."

Public interest attorney Dan Meek has an opinion to the contrary.

He says the federal bankruptcy court will have broad power to determine how assets owned by Enron are sold, including PGE.

"If the court orders the assets sold in a way to maximize the money available to creditors, the result could

be significant additional rate increases for PGE ratepayers in Oregon," Meek said.

The bulk of the net value of PGE is its transmission lines and its hydroelectric generation. If these assets were sold separately to companies that are not regulated electric distribution utilities in Oregon, then Oregon ratepayers could lose the equivalent of over \$1 billion in value.

Since those assets would be worth far more in the hands of a non-utility company, the Enron creditors would argue for the court to order PGE's electric distribution, generation, and transmission assets be sold separately.

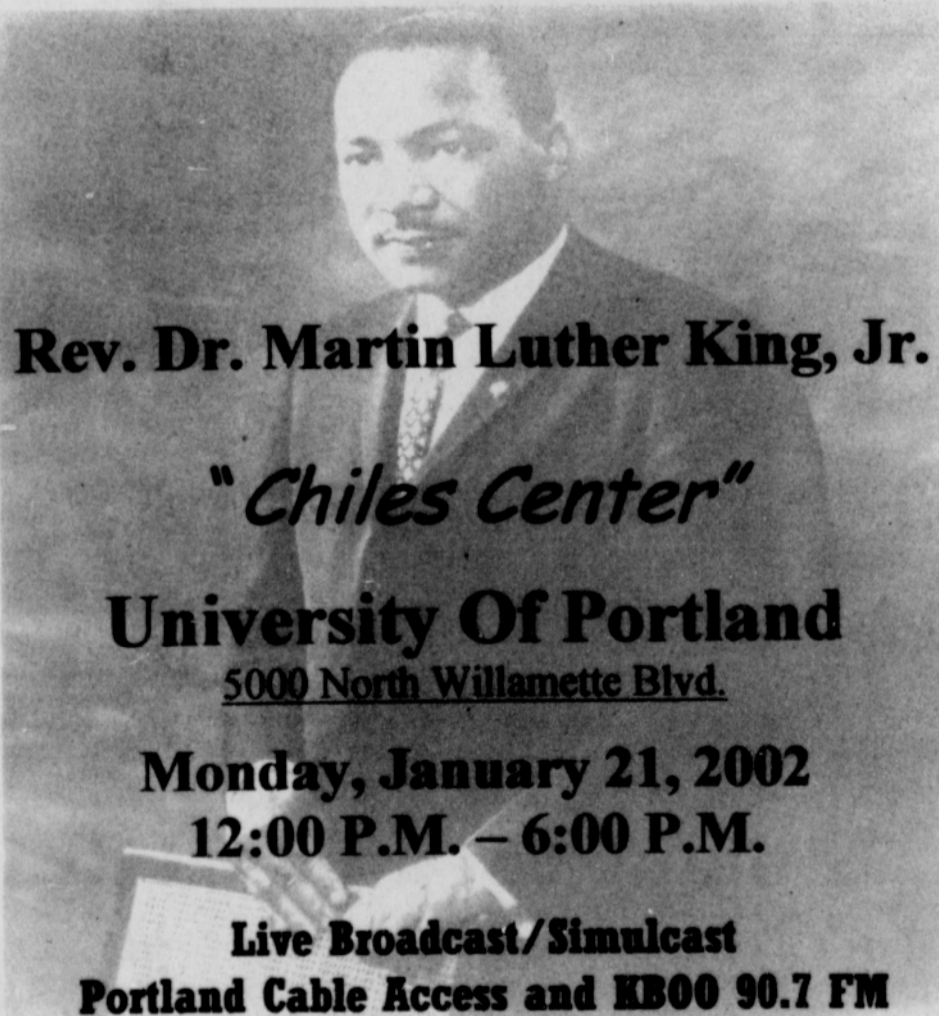
Enron's dealings in Oregon have been a major fiasco for Oregon ratepayers.

We tried to stop them, but they bought approval with money and big promises. Then they paid the Citizens Utility Board to get out of their promises. Now Enron's bankruptcy could end up costing us more and more.

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## I-5 Widening Would Hurt N/NE Neighborhoods

BY ROSS WILLIAMS  
CITIZENS FOR SENSIBLE TRANSPORTATION

A study considering future use of the I-5 corridor is of special interest to north and northeast Portland.

If I-5 is widened to three lanes at the bridge over the slough north of Lombard, all three lanes will be filled with Vancouver commuters in the morning. It's likely the timing of ramp meters on Lombard, Portland and Alberta will be lengthened to prevent congestion on the freeway and the traffic will eventually back up onto local streets.

Once again residents of north and northeast will get the short end when a regional decision is made.

The I-5 Task Force appointed by the governors of Washington and Oregon is nearing decisions on widening I-5. It's important that they hear from those of us who think we should invest in communities and transit -- not freeways. There is a good chance that a recommendation to extend light rail to Vancouver will come out of this group, but they need to hear there is support for that option.

Unfortunately, there is also a good chance that they will recommend widening I-5, including building a new bridge across the river. That will increase traffic on Portland streets and encourage further sprawl in Clark County.

There is a better alternative.

Many of the people crossing the river are just trying to get from local Vancouver neighborhoods to Jantzen Beach and jobs at the Port and along Columbia Boulevard. A local arterial bridge would serve those trips without forcing people to get on the freeway. It could also serve light rail, bicyclists and pedestrians. And it could allow port-to-port access for freight, avoiding I-5 entirely.

The task force needs to hear that you want light rail and a multi-modal local arterial, not another freeway bridge.

The task force has created a survey that can be accessed from their web site: <http://www.i-5partnership.com/survey/index.html>. This is the direct survey address: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=4021487919>.

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