

OPINION

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The Portland Observer

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Letters To The Editor Caregivers Need Relief

I am a live-in homecare worker who provides 24-hour care. I am a caregiver because I believe that the aging and disabled have a right to live as independently as possible in the comfort of their own home. I am allowed 24 hours of time off, or respite care per month. I only get paid \$4.26 per hour and I'm only allowed payment for 10 hours of work per day. My employer is considered to be my client, however my paycheck comes from the state.

Caregiving is rewarding, yet challenging, and I sometimes suffer burnout. But to take time off, I must find a respite care provider willing to work for \$4.26 per hour. I want to provide the best care for my client, and such a low rate makes it next to impossible to find someone to fill in for me.

According to the Dept. of the Aging and People with Disabilities, independence and quality care are the most important objectives of in-home services, but when the caregiver does not have proper time to himself or herself, how can they do the job to the best of their abilities? How can quality care be provided without the proper consideration of the caregiver's needs?

My performance not only depends on my training and compassion, but also the time I have to myself. Homecare Workers save the state approximately \$20,000 for each client every year who is not admitted to a nursing facility.

When is the state going to recognize this invisible workforce and convert that savings into recognition and relief for the caregivers, people who do so much for the aging and disabled in our state?

Larry Mudgett, Northeast Portland

Important Message Welcomed

We at the Community Energy Project want to thank "The Portland Observer" so much for the story on our Lead Poisoning Prevention Workshops.

The article was great and I think it will help spread the word about our services and get people talking.

Readers should also know that the City of Portland Bureau of Housing and Community Development and the Water Bureau largely fund our Lead Poisoning Prevention Workshop Program.

For more information about our weatherization or water conservation programs, call 503-284-6827. Thanks so much!

Stella Stadtherr, Project Coordinator for the Lead Poisoning Prevention Workshop Program

JOANN BOWMAN SPEAKS Progressive politics must come with diversity

"The Portland Observer" is proud to publish this second part of an interview with former state Rep. Jo Ann Bowman by our correspondent Yugen Fardan Rashad. Bowman remains active in the community, working with groups, agencies and organizations involved in political and social change.

Yugen: You've championed a number of issues that concern this community and receive media coverage. What do you recall mainstream media's reception to you when first elected to office?

Bowman: When I was interviewing with "The Oregonian" they kept saying to me, "As an African American, what are you going to go down and teach the legislative body about the AA community?" I said to them, "I'm sorry, in the district I represent, 94 percent are non-African American and the issues are the same: quality education, good after school programs, living in a safe community." The people that elected me were Latino, Asian, and African American, but the majority were white Oregonians and they voted for me because they know I was going to work on the issues that they care about.

Yugen: You and Senators Avel Gordly and Margaret Carter, and the late Gladys McCoy represent a very powerful aggregate in the realm of politics and history of blacks in this state. Elaborate a bit on the aesthetics of being a politically active woman of color in Oregon.

Bowman: The fact of how I look (hair dreaded), and that I wear African fabrics... When I first decided to run for public office, and I'll never forget this, a person said to me that I would have to straighten my hair, stop wearing ethnic jewelry, and be much more conservative, and these were people whom I had a lot of respect for and were experts on how to get elected to public office. I thanked them for the advice, but as I begin to think about it, what if I made all of these changes, and begin to sound like someone other than me, who would be the person being elected? I thought that if someone wasn't going to vote for me because of my hair or ethnic jewelry or my heritage line, that's their problem. I love myself.

Yugen: Yet Oregonians are considered diverse and pragmatic as a community.

Bowman: There's a perception in Oregon that this is a progressive state. In fact, most liberals will say

Oregon is one of the most progressive places you could live. I stopped someone the other day that said this to me and I said, "If you are a white male living in Oregon, you could live your entire life without interacting with people of color. So I conclude that in order to say a place is progressive, you must have diversity. If I was a white male and never had to interact with people of color, that's a very limited environment.

Yugen: Because African Americans represent a small segment of the state population, they face the unique challenge of adaptation to the prevailing cultural norms and speaking the language well.

Bowman: I talk a lot about the fact that African American are multi-lingual regardless as to whether English is their only language. What we learn at a very young age is how to interact with different

If I was a white male and never had to interact with people of color, that's a very limited environment.

—Jo Ann Bowman

people so that we have a totally different language when conversing with people of the same age, than with our elders. When out in the broader community, we have a different tongue with Asian, Latino and white Americans. Part of growing up African American in this country is that we have to use different languages to interact with different populations. We know if we do the 'patois' at the city council meeting, we wouldn't be perceived as "intelligent" or "articulate" or as aware of the issues as our white counterpart. And we know that unless we can clearly articulate English in a manner they're used to hearing it, the conversation will stop.

Yugen: You and your husband (Skip) travel often.

Bowman: I call them cultural trips I take three or four times a year to immerse myself in my culture. It's



Jo Ann Bowman

interesting living in Oregon because this is my first experience living in a town (Portland) with a very small African American population compared to my hometown of Baltimore, Maryland where 90 percent of the population is African American.

Yugen: Wouldn't you say there is enough cultural capacity and consciousness within the sparse numbers of black Portlanders to have entrepreneurialism that creates a strong community life and identity?

Bowman: The only way a business grows is when we support them. And so if we were going to grow businesses that will provide jobs and economic self-sufficiency, we have to support black businesses. I think the key thing missing is education among the generation coming up behind us. They don't know why they should support black businesses. The fact that a business is in their community, owned by and employs people who look like them, and give them an understanding of what kinds of opportunities are available...

Yugen: To sustain this idea, it seems a lot of overlap is required between business, community, education, politics, etc. From your perspective, I suppose you would point to the political process as a key component.

Bowman: I think we can go back to the (black) church. During the last election cycle was the first time the Albina Ministerial Alliance (AMA) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other groups came together in a voter registration campaign. The idea was to register and educate voters and make sure they're casting ballots on Election Day.



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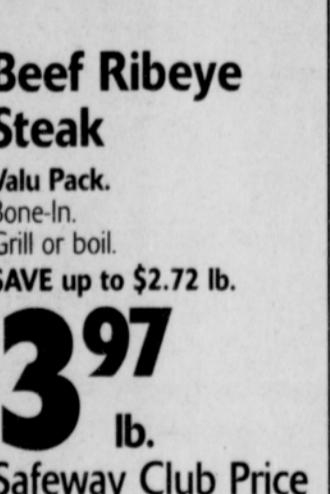


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