

# 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

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Roy Innis is chairman of the Congress of Racial Equality, a national civil rights organization.

## Health Plan Cuts Hurt Those Least Able to Pay

BY ROY INNIS

As managed care plans shift more of their costs onto the backs of consumers, minorities are on notice that they will face added burdens.

With rapidly rising health care costs, health insurers are launching new cost sharing initiatives. 'Cost-sharing' is code for uninsuring or underinsuring the poor and the sick. These health plans have devised new and insidious ways to shift costs by dropping coverage of an entire class of prescription drugs as soon as one drug in the class is taken over-the-counter.

The result: poor people and the chronically ill will have to buy these drugs out-of-pocket.

WellPoint Health Networks and Aetna have both stated they intend to drop coverage or raise co-payments of all prescription-only non-sedating antihistamines as a result of Claritin being approved for over-the-counter sale last month.

For African-Americans and other minority groups, where there are higher-than-average proportions of those with allergies and limited resources, this 'uninsurance' could have immediate and dangerous implications. For many minority groups, serious allergies interfere with work and school and, if not properly managed, lead to asthma and other severe respiratory diseases.

What happens when low-income families, sometimes struggling just to get by, are told they have to buy these drugs out-of-pocket? They either go without these medications or they buy cheaper, sedating antihistamines.

Minority children need every advantage they can get in and out of school. Their parents need every opportunity to get ahead in the work-

place. For an HMO to push these costs on to poor and sick members, causing them to not get the right medications and miss school or work, just to increase their own profit margin is reprehensible."

Health plans may save money in

national burdensome costs shifted onto the plans' enrollees, HMOs will force patients to self-medicate by buying their drugs over-the-counter, effectively severing ties between minority patients and their treating physicians.

*HMOs may be doing tremendous harm to families who need these plans the most.*

—Roy Innis, Congress of Racial Equality

the short run by cutting their antihistamine coverage. But in the long-run, HMOs may be doing tremendous harm to families who need these plans the most — those with chronic respiratory conditions or other illnesses. Not only are addi-

HMOs were created to help, not hinder accessibility to the best medical care possible for those in our society most in need. HMOs should not attempt to maximize profits by minimizing health care access for poor people.



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Letter to the Editor Please send your editorial material to news@portlandobserver.com

## Save Northeast Portland Programs

Dear Jefferson Caring Community At-Large:  
On behalf of our JCC Steering Team, I am encouraging you to email or call our Multnomah County Commissioners regarding the following proposed service cuts and your concerns.

The Jefferson Schools Uniting Neighborhood Center at Jefferson High School may be eliminated. Three Touchstone Program positions throughout the county may be eliminated.

The very effective Diversion Program and the Youth Investment Program may be drastically cut or be eliminated. This will effect the Northeast Community and Family Service Center Programs located at Self-Enhancement, Inc.

North and Northeast Portland will be disproportionately hit hard by these cuts if they are passed in relationship to other parts of Multnomah County.

There is still time! We encourage you to write email and/or hard mail letters to Chair Diane Linn, Commissioner Serena Cruz as well as all other commissioners.

Below are the websites where you can weigh in and comment on the above mentioned:

- Diane Linn: diane.m.linn@co.multnomah.or.us
- Lisa Naito: lisa.h.naito@co.multnomah.or.us
- Lonnie Roberts: lonnie.j.roberts@co.multnomah.or.us
- Maria Rojo deSteffey: district1@co.multnomah.or.us
- Serena Cruz: serena.m.cruz@co.multnomah.or.us

Please Respond Today!

Donna Purdy, coordinator of Jefferson Caring Community Steering Team

## Forced Sterilizations Bring Apology

Governor declares atonement for law that stood for 66 years

(AP) — Gov. John Kitzhaber formally apologized last week for the state's past eugenics laws that led to the forced sterilization of hundreds of Oregonians.

"To those who suffered, I say the people of Oregon are sorry," Kitzhaber said during a ceremony

Virginia Gov. Mark Warner in May erected a memorial to the first woman sterilized under eugenics and he apologized for Virginia's participation in eugenics, calling it "a shameful effort." Kitzhaber served on the joint committee that helped repeal the

"The time has come to apologize for misdeeds that resulted from widespread misconceptions, ignorance and bigotry," said Kitzhaber, who also proclaimed Dec. 10 as Human Rights Day in Oregon.

The law was based on the pseudoscientific movement called eugenics that sought to prevent people considered "unfit" or "defective" from having children. After 1967, the Oregon law was chiefly used to sterilize those with mental illness or mental disability. The goal of the eugenics laws was to eventually weed out anyone considered "feebleminded, insane, epileptic, a habitual criminal or sexual pervert who is likely to become a menace to society."

*The time has come to apologize for misdeeds that resulted from widespread misconceptions, ignorance and bigotry.*

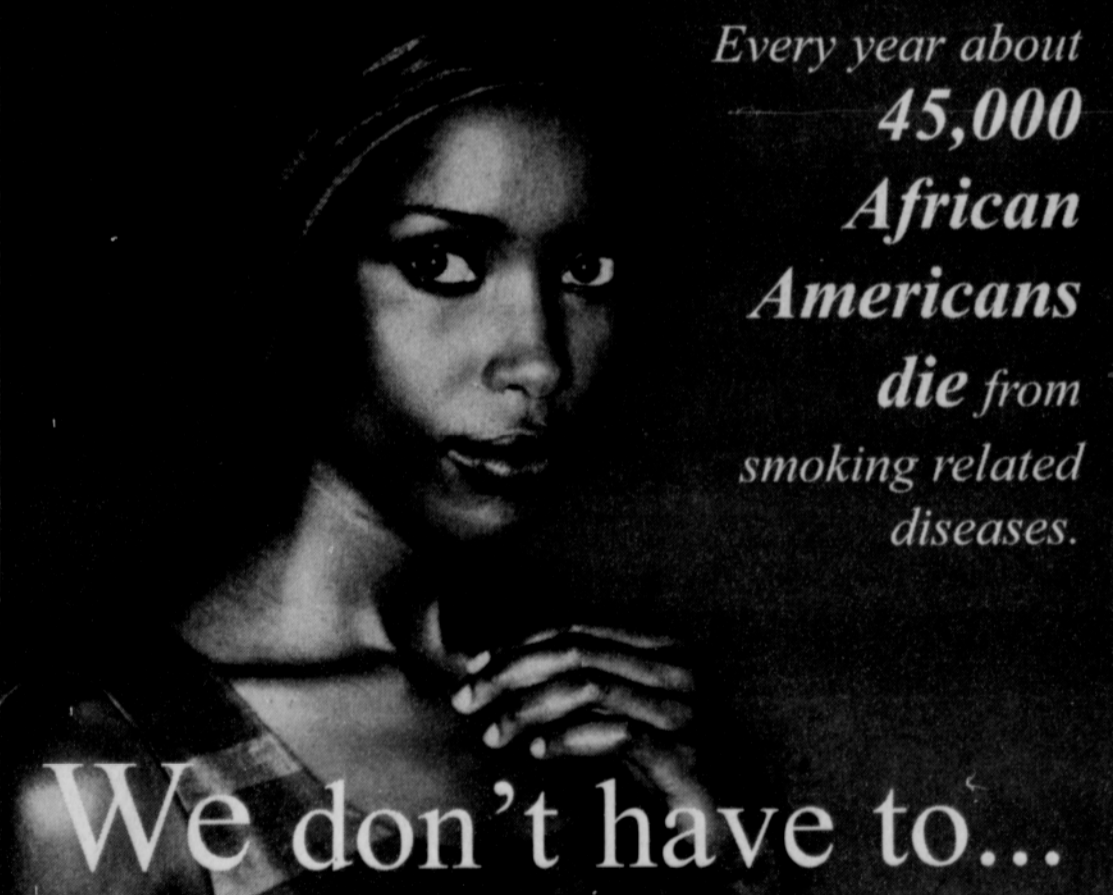
—Gov. John Kitzhaber

Oregon law in 1983, when he was serving in the Legislature.

Dozens of people crowded into the governor's ceremonial office, including several who had been the victims of forced sterilization, to hear Kitzhaber acknowledge the events that "darken the history of our state institutions."

The apology by Kitzhaber makes him the second governor to atone for a state's eugenics laws.

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