

OPINION

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War and the Big Bully on the Block

BY RON WEBER

FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

High up in the air in a small guard tower, I pondered why I was here. At 19 years old, I stared across a rocky terrain and straight into the face of a North Korean soldier about my age. We passed our eight-hour shifts by yelling profanities in both Korean and English. When we got bored we would point our rifles at each other. While the Korean War was over and the Vietnam War was in full swing, I stood in this four foot square tower, some 30 or 40 feet off the ground, wondering why I sat here guarding my little corner of the Demilitarized Zone. What was the purpose of war anyway? I wanted to be home in college with my friends. In my off guard duty time I had a second job. If the North Koreans were to come across the DMZ, my secret clearance "allowed me" to open the safe and start burning sensitive documents until I was killed or taken hostage. Clearly that never happened.

Since the 1960s, wars have taken on a new meaning to me. The world wars seemed, unfor-

unately, inevitable. But now it seems like every time we turn around, America is once again refereeing problems or fighting in some small corner of the globe.

We have poor, sick, and starving people right

It is a terrible thing to see men, women and children dying over politics.

here in our country. We are on the verge of a depression. Unemployment among African Americans is shameful. Shouldn't we take care of our own first? Why do we have to anger the United Nations and go it alone (or with Britain) and once again show our position as the big bully on the block?

As a writer and speaker on black history, I

sometimes have trouble reading books on the history of man. I see so much barbarianism it makes me sick. What gave us the right to murder scores of innocent American Indians just so we could have "The land of the free and the home of the brave?" And thank you to the millions of Africans who died while building a place where "All men are created equal," even though the Bill of Rights said you weren't.

War may be, unfortunately, necessary at times. God bless all the soldiers who fight for their countries and die in war. It is a terrible thing to see men women and children dying over politics.

I really do like America and I'm "Proud to be an American." I just don't like the fact that we became so powerful and affluent by "removing" the Indians and enslaving Africans whom we referred to as "three-fifths" of a person.

If nothing else, I hope we learn from our mistakes.

Ron Weber is a retired electrician and frequent writer and speaker on African American history.

Support the Armed Forces

Dear Portland-based members of the U.S. Armed Forces:

As members of the Portland City Council, we would like to express our whole-hearted support as you bravely set out to serve in the United States Military.

We are aware that the President has activated and deployed numerous men and women of the Armed Forces from Portland and Oregon to assignments and missions related to the ongoing global war on terror and the current crisis in Iraq.

Regardless of our own personal views of the impending war with Iraq, the Portland City Council and the citizens of Portland have the deepest respect and concern for those service men and women who are willing to risk their lives to protect the United States of America.

The residents of this community have a deep awareness and appreciation for the unique personal pressures facing friends, families and loved ones when military personnel are activated.

In the days to come, we want you to know that our thoughts and prayers will be with you, the members of our Armed Forces who will be called into action and your families.

The Portland City Council wishes you a safe and swift return from harm's way.

Vera Katz, Jim Francesconi, Randy Leonard, Dan Saltzman and Erik Sten.

We Must Safeguard the Minimum Wage

Stop the attack on our lowest-paid workers

BY DAN GARDNER

OREGON LABOR COMMISSIONER

The State Legislature recently heard testimony on a bill to cancel the annual adjustment in the minimum wage that voters just approved in the last election. What part of "yes" do they not understand?

Our lowest-paid workers are also under attack from legislators and business interests that are proposing laws to allow employers to count workers' tips in eating and drinking establishments as part of the minimum wage, allow minors to get a sub-minimum wage and lower employment protections and pay for farm workers under 18 years of age.

Passage of Measure 25 gave Oregon's minimum wage workers their first raise in four years. The law increased Oregon's minimum wage from \$6.50 per hour to \$6.90, requiring the Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor and Industries to calculate an annual adjustment based upon any increase in the Consumer Price Index. If the CPI does not change, the minimum wage will remain the same.

Currently, with Oregon leading the nation in unemployment and hunger rates, this modest increase is being challenged by a coalition of legislators and corporate-backed special interest groups. If they have their way, the annual adjustment to the voter-approved increase will be overturned, and more low-income working families will once again be forced to choose between rent, food and other basic necessities as their hourly wages fail to keep pace with

inflation rates.

According to the Oregon Center for Public Policy, 60 percent of minimum wage workers are women, 73 percent are 20 years or older and 25 percent are single parents.

Minimum wage workers include Oregonians who take care of our elderly and disabled, provide childcare to our children, work in eating and drinking establishments and harvest the crops that we eat.

Raising the minimum wage with annual adjustments will by no means eradicate poverty across the state, but it will help tens of thousands of low-wage working families put food on the table, pay rent and cover basic essentials.

Without this annual adjustment, these families will be forced again to rely on the food banks (whose supplies are quickly diminishing),

churches and government programs.

Minimum wage increases for low-income workers have always been a political football. Unlike skyrocketing energy prices and healthcare costs, which drastically and unexpectedly increase the cost of business, indexing provides small and predictable increases for businesses.

We live in a consumer-based economy, and businesses are dependent on the purchasing power of minimum-wage workers. When the minimum wage increases, businesses experience higher profits because workers have more money to spend. Low-wage workers pump every dollar of their pay checks directly into the local economy by spending their money in their neighborhood stores, local pharmacies, and corner markets on food, medicine and clothing for their children.

Given our state's economic crisis, protecting this

Given our state's economic crisis, protecting this voter-approved increase is especially critical.

—Oregon Labor Commissioner Dan Gardner



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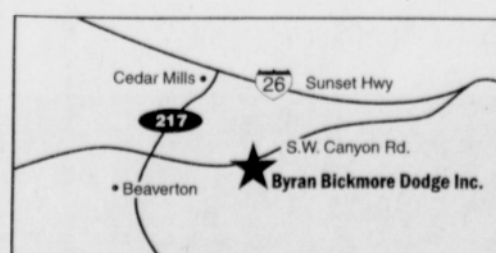
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