

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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EDITOR
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DISTRIBUTION MANAGER
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REPORTER
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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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Electing an American President - 2004

Politics must speak to the center of people's lives

BY CONGRESSMAN
ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS



People yearn for a 'politics of the center,' the late Senator Paul Wellstone counseled before his tragic death in a Minnesota plane crash last year, "not 'the center' so widely discussed by politicians and pundits in Washington, but, rather, a politics that speaks to the center of people's lives.

I am convinced that President Bush is losing popular support because of his failure to heed Paul Wellstone's admonition.

Spurred in part by recent public opinion polling that confirms that more Americans now oppose his reelection than support it, George

Bush is now out on the campaign trail. He has the power of incumbency behind him, as well as a world-class "spin machine." Nevertheless, he must be finding it difficult to look the American people in the eye and answer some very troubling questions about his stewardship of the White House.

The national unemployment rate is now over six percent. Joblessness in African American communities is twice that appalling figure. How will the President explain the reality that, since he took office in January of 2001, the U.S. economy has lost over three million jobs?

How will he attempt to justify rejecting Democratic proposals that would have stimulated the national economy by providing meaningful

tax cuts to middle-income Americans and small businesses? Why did his Administration ram through more than \$1 trillion in tax cuts that principally benefit the wealthiest one percent of our citizens while at the same time, denying a child tax credit to the families of 12 million American children (2.4 million of

wealthy, we could have assured high-quality health care for every American child up to age 18—and have given a defined, guaranteed prescription drug benefit under Medicare to every senior.

Why has his Administration not provided the federal funding that would have given the four out of

financial aid and starving historically black colleges and universities?

Why—while the Bush Administration is spending billions each month in its attempt to "go it alone" in Iraq—has it not yet provided the states and our major cities with the federal support that would allow our "first responders" to more safely defend our ports, our railways and other public infrastructure against the terrorist threat?

Since this Administration and their congressional allies talk endlessly about "defending our freedom," why have they asserted the most extreme assault upon our civil liberties that I have witnessed in my lifetime? How could they have the hubris to call the centerpiece of their challenge to our fundamental freedoms the "Patriot Act?"

Why have they nominated federal judges with no demonstrated commitment to our civil rights or liberty?

Why, when the Congress passed sweeping election reform legislation to address the 2000 presidential election debacle, have the President and Republicans in Congress not yet provided the cash-strapped states with adequate financial support to implement these reforms? Why has this President failed to keep the solemn promise to govern from the center that he made to us after the contested presidential election of 2000?

Centrist talk is not enough for a people who need jobs, education, health care and housing—a people who deserve freedom, as well as security. We are living through a time of crisis—a time that cries out for a president who will defend this country while also advancing the policies that will bind us together even more firmly as a nation.

U.S. Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, D-Md. serves as chair of the Congressional Black Caucus.

In the most affluent country of the world, how does the President reconcile the fact that more than 44 million Americans still have no health insurance?

whom are African Americans?)

In the most affluent country of the world, how does the President reconcile the fact that more than 44 million Americans still have no health insurance? How does he rationalize this reality when, for a fraction of the Bush Administration's generosity to the

every ten children who are eligible, but do not yet receive, the Head Start that they need and deserve in life? Why are the President and his Republican allies shortchanging federal aid to public education to the tune of 9 billion dollars—underfunding the No Child Left Behind Act, freezing the level of student

Redouble Efforts at Police Reform

BY KRISTIAN WILLIAMS

When I heard of Mark Kroeker's resignation my first response was simple disbelief. Then, I cheered. And then, I started to worry.

The labor movement has a maxim, "A bad boss is the best organizer."

Kroeker's time ran out as his credibility took one hit after another. His career as police chief is best summarized by a long list of scandals and controversies—May Day, hazing rituals, anti-gay speeches, the cover-up of an off-duty beating, the Mejia shooting, the Hammick shooting and the Kendra James shooting.

He faced a lawsuit for brutality against anti-war protesters; his civilian review board suffered a complete meltdown when a majority of its members resigned and denounced the oversight process as a sham; and an independent report found the police bureau's investigations of officer-involved shootings to be lacking in every way.

It was in this context that Kroeker finally announced the suspension of Scott McCollister, the cop who shot and killed the

unarmed James fleeing a traffic stop.

The tension surrounding the case, highlighted by demonstrations involving thousands of people, put Kroeker in an impossible position. He could either capitulate to the public and lose the support of his officers or he could defend the police and face

Civil rights advocates cannot afford to relax their scrutiny of the police bureau or delay their prodding for change.

mounting opposition from the community.

In earlier police-public battles, Kroeker had always backed his troops, regardless of the evidence or the demands of common decency. As a consequence, we saw an increasingly arrogant police force, an increasingly skeptical news media and an increasingly angry public.

Obviously, the police bureau could not continue down this path and retain any claim to legitimacy. So, by suspending McCollister for five and a half months, Kroeker offered the public a partial concession. But the effort backfired. The police union felt betrayed, and critics felt the discipline too weak. And both sides blamed, to greater or lesser degrees, the chief's personally. This gave the mayor an easy out. She asked for his resignation.

We can, and should, celebrate the end of Kroeker's ugly tenure. But civil rights advocates cannot afford to relax their scrutiny of the police bureau or delay their prodding for change.

Now is the time to amplify our efforts.

If we want to see real change, we need to bring intense pressure to bear while the crisis persists. It was true when Frederick Douglass said it, and it's true now: Power concedes nothing without a demand.

Kristian Williams is a member of Rose City Copwatch and the author of *Our Enemies in Blue: Police and Power in America* (Soft Skull Press, 2003).

Revenue Fix Falls Short

Seniors still impacted by service shortfalls

BY FRAN LANFAIR, ELDERS IN ACTION

After witnessing the longest legislative session in Oregon history and enduring a rancorous, nearly two-year debate on how to cover our state's revenue shortfall, it is tempting to breathe a sigh of relief after Gov. Ted Kulongoski signed the temporary revenue package, on Aug. 27. However, for thousands of seniors and other vulnerable citizens in our state it won't be that easy.

The revenue package is only a temporary solution to the state's budget crisis. The \$792 million—raised mostly from taxes paid by higher-income households and businesses—is a fair and balanced approach to recovering some of the revenues needed to keep schools open, keep our communities safe and maintain services for the elderly, poor and disabled.

However, anti-tax extremists, with no real solution on how to fund these basic quality of life services, have vowed to obtain the necessary number of petition signatures to force a referendum on the tax package in a Feb. 3, 2004 special election.

People need to realize, even with this partial revenue fix, some of our state's most vulnerable citizens will still be without essential services. For instance, Oregon Project Independence is a program of in-home services designed for low-income seniors who have difficulty with the basic activities of daily life, and who do not qualify for Medicaid, yet need services to prevent more costly institutional care.

OPI was formerly funded at \$17 million. It is now listed in the remaining state budget for 2003-05 at \$6.5 million. Last year, approximately 4,000 Oregon seniors were served in their homes through OPI. At this greatly reduced funding level, the program will serve far fewer clients at reduced levels, leaving more seniors vulnerable to declining health and safety issues.

Since February, more than 6,000 seniors and persons with disabilities—most of whom live in their own home—have lost state provided in-home care services. In spite of this new revenue package, more than 2,500 clients will still lose these critical services. The saying, "penny wise and pound foolish" rings in my head. The average cost per case for in-home care under OPI is about \$250 per month. By comparison, nursing home care costs about \$3,000 per month.

What can concerned citizens do to help our state's most vulnerable? First, find opportunities to volunteer in your community. For more than 35 years, the not-for-profit Elders in Action has worked to improve the quality of life for older adults. The organization represents the interests of seniors in the Portland metropolitan area through its volunteer Ombudsman Service that offers assistance, advocacy and emotional support to seniors and persons with disabilities in the areas of housing, health care and elder crime abuse.

The services we offer run the gamut from helping to solve sticky housing issues, helping sort through the complexities of getting prescription medication,

and helping seniors who have been the victims of crime and abuse, including the rampant problem of identity theft. Since state budget cuts began impacting social services for seniors this year, Elders in Action has experienced a near 40 percent increase in requests for assistance. All we ask is that you donate a mere 8-10 hours per month to helping those in need. Call us at 503-823-5269 or visit us online at www.eldersinaction.org.

Finally, make state government officials more accountable for creating a fair, equitable and balanced tax system. No other state in the nation is more reliant on a single tax than Oregon is on the income tax. Contact your legislators to encourage them to create tax reform that is not as vulnerable to fluctuations in the economy, that creates a rainy day fund, and that is less dependent on income taxes. Learn more about the state budget and how our system of taxation works, and most importantly, help others to learn more too

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