

OPINION

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Make a Kwanzaa Pledge for 2004

Protect our children from tobacco

BY DR. NATALIE JOHNSON

The week after Christmas, African-Americans begin celebrating a festival honoring faith, unity, heritage and values. It's called Kwanzaa, which translates to "first fruits of the harvest" in Swahili.

One of the principles of Kwanzaa is purpose, or *nia*. This year, my purpose is devoted to protecting our children. And as a physician, I see no threat greater than tobacco. Building and developing our community starts with children. They need our protection.

I urge all Oregonians – not just African Americans – to take up this cause of shielding our children from the extensive marketing machine of the tobacco industry. The industry

spends \$100 million a year advertising in Oregon alone. It breaks my heart to know these ads are working. More than one in four African Americans smoke in Oregon.

The tobacco industry is crafty with its marketing tactics. It exploits themes of liberation and success in its advertising, themes that strike a chord with young people.

Pick up a women's magazine and flip through the pages. The ads promote cigarette makers as sponsors of college education, the arts and women's sports. Don't be fooled by these ads. They are trying to position the tobacco industry as an ally by using language of empowerment.

We must remember that ciga-

rette profits are generated by people becoming addicted to nicotine.

I treat cancer patients every day who spent much of their lives under the influence of tobacco addiction. Lung cancer may be the most painful and unbearable disease of all. Sometimes I wish I could invite

all started smoking without much thought to the consequences. We can save our young people today by reminding them of those consequences: Low birth-weight babies; early sexual impotence; throat bladder and cervical cancers; heart attacks and strokes. Are there any

Each year more than 6,000 people in Oregon die from tobacco-related diseases. This is more than aids, drugs, car crashes, murders and fires – combined.

You may not smoke. But chances are you know someone who does. Spread the love of Kwanzaa this year and do what you can to protect children from smoking. You have the power. And maybe this is your purpose.

It takes courage to act. Rosa Parks didn't just think about becoming the symbol of the Civil Rights movement. She actually did it, by refusing to give up her seat and go to the back of the bus.

Another Kwanzaa value is unity, or *Umoja*. If we act in unity to keep our children tobacco free, we can change lives the same way Rosa Parks changed society.

It will take courage and a sense of *nia*.

Dr. Natalie Johnson is medical director of Legacy Cancer Services.



"If we act in unity to keep our children tobacco free, we can change lives."

—Dr. Natalie Johnson, Legacy Cancer Services medical director

young people into the cancer ward at the hospital. They would see the frail bodies of people whose dependence on tobacco now require their dependence on breathing tubes and medical technology. This is how smoking empowered them. They were all young once. They

benefits to smoking that outweigh the hazards?

We will never match the media machine of the cigarette companies. But these are our children and we are their mothers. If we don't have the will or the courage to stop this machine, who will?

USE
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Our Party Values are Sound

Democrats should articulate principles

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

In the wake of the November elections, pundits, pollsters and politicos have all suggested that the Democratic Party needs to change – it needs to move its "principles" more in line with those of the "majority" voter. Sound bites about religious and moral convictions ruling the mindset of the American public have thrown the party leadership into a tailspin.

I don't think that the core principles of the Democratic Party have ever been in doubt. Indeed, it is the party's unwilling-

ness to maintain these principles that accounts for the biggest problem within the party and the chief issue the incoming chairman of the party must address.

Democrats have long been the party that strives for social and economic justice. While other parties claim to be "right" religiously, the Democratic National Committee's right hand has been the African-American church.

Democrats must stay true to their base and their foundation. There is no sense in attempting to beat Republicans at their own game. If voters have to choose between a Republican and a Republican wannabe/Democrat they will choose the real thing.

Instead, the game needs to have new rules; the game needs to have more players. There are plenty of voters the DNC can attract that are close to or members of its core audience. The DNC does not need to change its message in order to possibly attract conservative and independent voters.

There are plenty of Americans who have been left behind educationally, with respect to health care and job opportunity. If these constituents are ministered to and experi-



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ence a DNC that responds to their needs, the DNC will experience a great surge in voters, supporters and its base.

By being the party that stands for socioeconomic justice and equality, and not blindly following poll trends, the DNC will easily experience the rebirth it has long needed and anticipated.

The next chairman of the DNC should stand for principle. The party should clearly articulate principles. Those principles,

however, should fall in line with affordable health care, equal educational and job opportunity and a reduction in poverty.

By giving elbow grease rather than lip service to the true ills of our society, the DNC can, once again, become the party of elected majority, rather than the silent one.

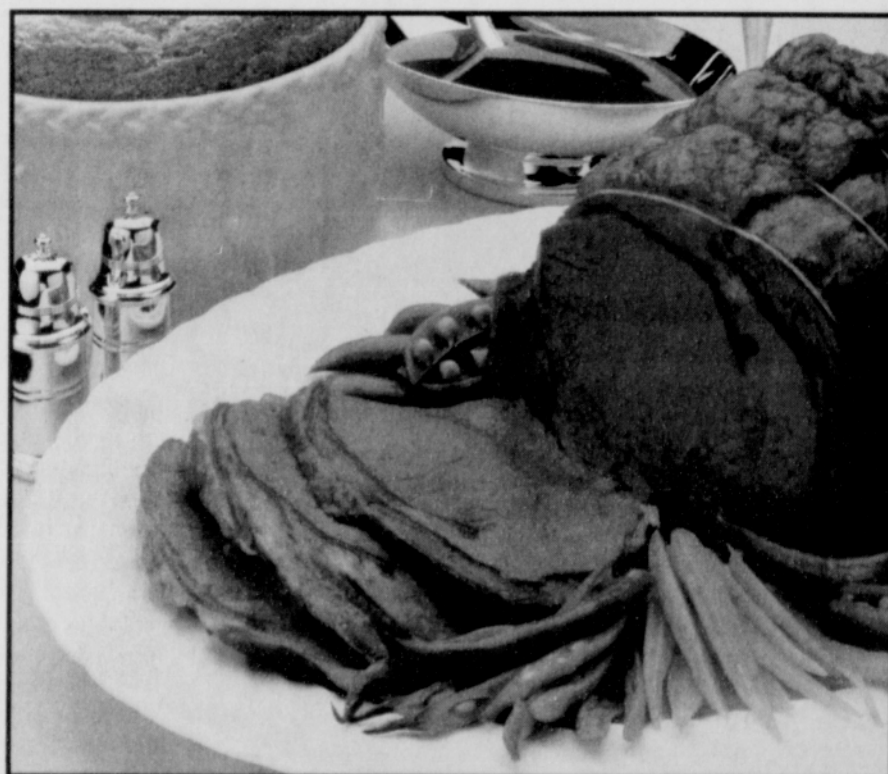
Judge Greg Mathis is chairman of the Rainbow PUSH-Excel Board and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

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