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# OPINION

## Death and Carnage

### Attorney General is silent on guns

By JUDGE GREG MATHIS

In two days this month, gun violence killed over a dozen people inside two of our most sacred and safest institutions, the courthouse and the church. Everyday, nine youths are killed by gunfire in America.



how we can end the culture of violence in this country that has America standing as the world's leader in deaths by gunfire among all industrialized countries.

As you can imagine, one of the primary solutions suggested at such a conference would be to curb the availability of guns. That is the only solution that has worked in Canada and other countries where death by gun violence is a rare occasion. As such, three powerful words would probably prevent such a conference from even taking place. Those words are National Rifle Association.

It is well known to anyone who follows public policy that the NRA has a choke hold on state and federal officials who dare not advocate more gun regulation. The powerful association is so adamant about gun rights that they are even against prohibiting people on the terrorist watch lists from buying guns. That is precisely why we have a ridiculous policy that bars those on the government's terrorist list from boarding an airplane but permits them to purchase guns.

Now that gun violence is occurring inside the courtroom and the church, maybe we can revisit the issue.

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

With such death and carnage occurring as a result of gun violence, why haven't we heard from the United States Attorney General Gonzales, the highest-ranking law enforcement officer in the country? He is ultimately responsible for enforcing federal laws and implementing policies to prevent crime.

Attorney General Gonzales has only recently replaced John Ashcroft, and perhaps he needs more time to gather a strategy. As such, maybe he is open to some advice from taxpaying Americans. My suggestion is that he convene a national conference on gun violence allowing input from every sector of our country.

The public and private sector should come together with religious groups, community organizations, law enforcement, gun dealers and media owners who produce violent content in movies and video games. The conference should focus on



## Local Schools Left Behind: Small savings will be offset by future losses

The following is an open letter from the Neighborhood Schools Alliance to Portland School Board members, Superintendent Vicki Phillips, Mayor Tom Potter, and the Portland community:

The Neighborhood Schools Alliance is a new coalition of parents, teachers and community members. This is the first time people from many schools and all areas of the city have organized together on behalf of neighborhood schools.

We believe our neighborhood schools, the "crown jewels" of Portland, are gravely threatened by

Portland Public School's favoring focus options over neighborhood programs, by closures without adequate community input and by recent pronouncements of 350 to 450 students as an "optimal" size for elementary schools.

We urge the Board to vote "No" on the current proposals and to postpone any decision to close/consolidate neighborhood schools and put 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders at Jefferson.

We believe the relatively small potential cost savings will be offset by a loss of enrollment to charter schools, home-schooling,

and private schools and loss of community goodwill and voter support for PPS, due to a hasty process that has pushed through these proposals without genuine community input.

A data-driven process should provide such basic information as a cost and benefit analysis of closures. If cuts must be made, announce them in October so that there is time to build support for newly formed schools, and parents can make informed choices by the transfer deadline.

We recognize that PPS is facing enormous funding problems.

But closing neighborhood schools should be a last resort. At a time when PPS desperately needs to retain families, why drive away your best customers? Parents and non-administrative staff must be included in a truly collaborative process, or these actions will result in the total failure of this urban school district. We are at a turning point with PPS, and true community input is a key component of any solution.

We believe that equivalent if not greater cost savings can be achieved through cuts to administration, rather than in the class-

room. We urge you to consider the following cost-saving measures: Ask PPS administrators to work 10 days without pay, as teachers have already done. Reduce PPS central office administrators' pay by 5 percent.

Eliminate or reduce an unneeded extra layer of administrators: the Directors of Student Achievement.

Accelerate the planning process for renting or selling PPS headquarters; relocate administrators in schools with excess space

We are willing to work with PPS toward additional solutions

and to help raise money. Any of these cost-cutting measures would demonstrate to Salem and to Portland taxpayers your ongoing dedication to cutting costs, while avoiding short-sighted and hasty closures of our precious neighborhood schools.

Community contacts in the Neighborhood School Alliance are Nancy Smith of north Portland at 503-285-0500; Darian Fuller of northeast Portland at 503-516-5152; Anne Trudeau of southeast Portland at 503-228-6384; and Ruth Atkins of southwest Portland at 503-358-1376.



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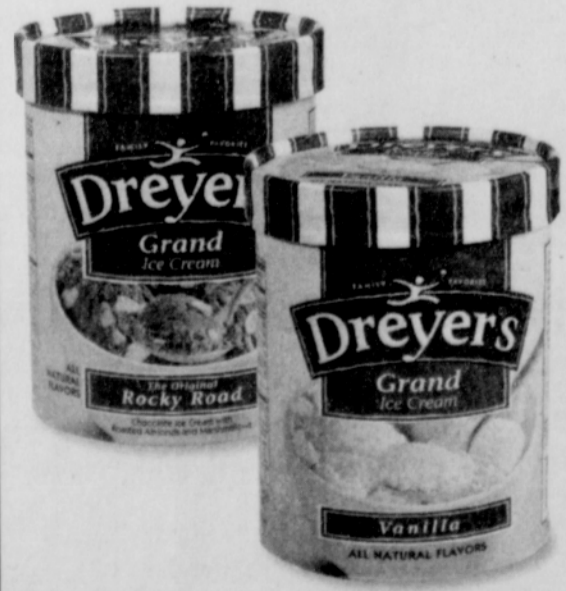
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