

OPINION

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Police Brutality Settlement was Justified

But serious concerns continue

BY ALEJANDRO QUERAL

The Northwest Constitutional Rights Center is pleased with the city's decision to settle a lawsuit filed by the family of Raymond Gwerder who was killed in cold blood by Officer Leo Besner in 2005.

The rights center remains deeply concerned however, about the continued pattern of excessive use of force and the city's inability to conduct impartial and effective investigations of allegations of excessive force and

constitutional rights violations by some police officers.

We call on Police Chief Rosie Sizer and Mayor Tom Potter to fully and impartially evaluate the fitness of Officer Besner to continue serving our community.

As described by Portland attorney Tom Steenson, there appears to be a significant pattern of abuse by Officer Besner that cannot be overlooked. We are confident Chief Sizer will make every effort to ensure the continued integrity of the Police Bureau.

We also call on the Independent Police Review division to conduct an evaluation of every officer in the Bu-

reau who has been the subject of two or more complaints of excessive force within the last two years to be presented as soon as possible to Mayor Potter and Chief Sizer for their evaluation in order to prevent future tragic incidents.

These measures are necessary in order to have a police department that is more effective and trustworthy within the community.

Until the community feels like individual officers who engage in this type of abuse will be held accountable for their actions, lawsuits like these will continue to plague the police bureau and cost the city millions of dollars.

The rights center also applauds the work of Portland attorney Tom Steenson, whose zealous representation of the Gwerder family has brought to light the importance of having a system of accountability that will protect the rights of citizens while at the same time make the police bureau an institution that is respected and recognized as a national model for other law enforcement departments when it comes to protecting the civil rights of individuals.

The need for a truly independent and impartial police oversight system is imperative in light of this and other recent cases of misconduct by police

in order to prevent such tragedies from occurring again and again.

Police already have a very difficult and dangerous job. Community support of law enforcement will increase when the community is secure in knowing that an effective mechanism is in place to deal with patterns of abuse before they become tragic incidents.

Alejandro Queral is the executive director of the Northwest Constitutional Rights Center, founded in 2004 to safeguard the rights of people of color, immigrants, political dissenters and other vulnerable individuals from government abuse.

Justice Department's Record of Failure

Enough is enough

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

Over the last several months, a number of incidents have occurred in this country, sending waves of shock, concern and fear through African-American communities.

The common denominator in all of these is the federal government which has done little, if anything, to assure the black community that it cares about our civil rights and our safety.



On Friday, Nov. 16 hundreds of thousands of African Americans will join the nation's civil-rights leaders in Washington, D.C. to say 'enough is enough' and to demand that the U.S. Department of Justice make immediate changes. A national protest day is in needed to show this government that we refuse to take this neglect any longer.

The hangman's noose has been in the news a lot lately, showing up on a high school campus in Jena, La. and college campuses in New York and

Maryland. Parents fear for the safety and emotionally well-being of their children while community leaders demand that those guilty of this act of violence and terrorism - be charged with hate crimes.

But the Justice department hasn't been listening. The department prosecuted just 22 people with hate crimes last year, a 71 percent decline from 10 years ago.

Hate-crime prosecution is not the only area where the Justice Department has failed African Americans. John Tanner, who heads the Justice Department's voting section, re-

cently made several racist comments in defense of the law that would require minorities to have a photo ID in order to vote.

Tanner suggested, among other things, that black people would already have an ID, because they use it when they go to check-cashing stores. Tanner's comments undermine the generations of work the Justice Department has done to protect the civil rights of African Americans. Anything short of his full dismissal is a slap in the face of the legacy of the civil-rights movement.

Under this current administration,

the human and civil-rights gains made by blacks have taken a hit. Without a mass demonstration, the government may not realize just how committed we are to ending these assaults against our very rights.

This is a crucial moment in history; the human and civil rights of African Americans are being threatened. The Nov. 16 march is key to putting the Justice Department on notice.

Judge Greg Mathis is national vice president of Rainbow PUSH and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

War is Not Normal

BY M. LINDA JARAMILLO

Several years ago, I watched a television series entitled "Violence: An American Tradition." The series looked back into history and provided insight into all the international and

domestic conflicts in which this relatively young nation has been involved.

It made me realize how many of the last 230 years we have been involved in some kind of



armed conflict somewhere in the world. Generation after generation of Americans have come to know war as normal in their lifetime. We have

come to expect it and seem powerless to find another way.

The television series ran during the time that the United States was engaged in a war in Southeast Asia. Thousands of

U.S. troops died or were injured during the conflict; the intent of which we were told was to stop the spread of communism. We will never know the actual number of Southeast Asian lives lost

What began as an action against Iraq to stop the reign of terror became the massive destruction of an entire society.

Stop this American tradition

or disrupted forever. Thousands spoke out in opposition to this war; they were highly criticized and labeled unpatriotic. Many others said nothing because they felt powerless

were on -- the people or the powerful. We will never know how many lives were lost in places like Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. Thousands in the United States provided sanctuary and found ways to oppose our nation's actions. Others said nothing because there seemed no way to stop it.

Today, we are engaged in a war that is centered in Iraq, but it spans throughout the entire region. We are now in the fifth year of a war that we were told was to end the oppressive government led by dictator Saddam Hussein and locate weapons of mass destruction that were stockpiled there. The weapons were never found.

What began as an action against Iraq to stop the reign of terror became the massive destruction of an entire society. Iraqi parents are now afraid to send their children to school. They are afraid to leave their homes even to go to the doctor

or to the grocery store.

Thousands around the world have joined in the protest against the initial launching of this war and its continued escalation. We now must do more than simply pull our troops out of Iraq, we must find another way to end this deadly conflict and rebuild a society that has been destroyed.

Our democratic principles protect our right to speak out, but it seems that we have chosen to be silent rather than be labeled unpatriotic. I believe the most patriotic thing to do is exercise our freedom of speech.

We must use our voices in nonviolent protest and action that shows that there is another way. We must find a way to be heard in this nation that seems to view war as a normal part of life.

The violence of war is not normal and must stop being an American tradition.

M. Linda Jaramillo is the executive minister for justice ministries in the United Church of Christ.

to find another way.

During that same era, a number of Central and South American governments were being taken over by military dictatorships. United States warplanes and helicopters were deployed to areas in support of those dictators, under the guise of stopping the spread of rebellious actions.

Some of these countries had democratic societies that were governed by electoral processes, so I wonder whose side we

Letter to the Editor Interstate Alternative

Most people in Portland have watched, heard or read the ongoing saga of Interstate Avenue. Some people in the Latino community want to change the name of the street to honor national community activist and labor leader Cesar E. Chavez.

Portland's political leaders are up the air and jockeying for what they hope will be a compromise to what has been a flawed process in naming the street. Well hold on to your seat belts, here is the solution that everyone should be happy.

Rename the north portion of Waterfront Park to Cesar E. Chavez, Waterfront Park. What a great testament. The other part of the park would continue to honor the late Governor Tom McCall and is bordered by Southwest Natio Parkway. Talk about being culturally inclusive.

Here is an opportunity for everyone to buy into this. It will not impact businesses; nobody

will have to change letterhead, business card or any brochures.

Many years ago, the citizens asked to have Union Avenue changed to honor Martin Luther King Jr. Today, politics and bureaucracy have simply reduced the memory of this great leader to nothing more than "MLK" Blvd. Even young African-American kids are not really sure what it means.

Latinos are in a good position to make sure that the memory of Cesar Chavez is kept alive since Cinco de Mayo, Rose Festival, The Bite, Blues Festival, Beer Fest and many other events will help propel the name of Chavez.

This is just a suggestion, but it is up to the city leaders and the Latino community as to what they want to do. I believe my suggestion would serve all.

Roy Jay, president of the African American Chamber of Commerce and Oregon Business Network

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