

# Obama Reaches Out to Muslims

## Tells Arabic network US is 'not your enemy'

(AP)—President Barack Obama chose an Arabic satellite TV network for his first formal television interview as president, part of a concerted effort to repair relations with the Muslim world that were damaged under the previous administration.

Obama cited his Muslim background and relatives, practically a taboo issue during the U.S. presidential campaign, and said in the interview, which aired Tuesday, that one of his main tasks was to communicate to Muslims "that the Americans are not your enemy."

The interview on the Dubai-based Al-Arabiya news channel aired as Obama's new envoy to the region, former Sen. George J. Mitchell, arrived in Egypt on Tuesday for a visit that will also take him to Israel, the West Bank, Jordan, Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

Obama said the U.S. had made

mistakes in the past but "that the same respect and partnership that America had with the Muslim world as recently as 20 or 30 years ago, there's no reason why we can't restore that."

Obama also emphasized the importance of engaging with Iran, a country the Bush administration often singled out as the most dangerous in the region.

Obama condemned Iran's threats against Israel, pursuit of nuclear weapons and support of terrorist organizations, but said "it is important for us to be willing to talk to Iran, to express very clearly where our differences are, but where there are potential avenues for progress."

Obama's predecessor, former President George W. Bush, launched wars in Iraq and Afghanistan which prompted a massive backlash against the U.S. in



President Barack Obama is interviewed in Washington, D.C., Monday, by the Dubai-based Al-Arabiya cable network.

the Muslim world.

Hady Amr, director of the Brookings Doha Center, an arm of the U.S. think-tank in the Qatari

capital, described decision to make the first presidential interview with an Arabic news network as "stunning."

"President Obama has made it absolutely clear ... that a central priority will be repairing America's relations with the Muslim world,"

he said. "If that's his objective, I'd say he's been hitting home run after home run."

In the interview, Obama called for a new partnership with the Muslim world "based on mutual respect and mutual interest." He talked about growing up in Indonesia, the Muslim world's most populous nation, and noted that he has Muslim relatives.

Obama's Kenyan father was born Muslim, though a self-described atheist, and many of his relatives in Kenya are practicing Muslims. As a child, Obama lived for a number of years in Indonesia while his mother was doing research there.

This appeal does seem to have struck a chord among many Muslims.

"He's different from the previous presidents, perhaps because of his color or his Islamic background. My views of America are different now than they were during the Bush administration," said Youssef Ali, 45, who works for the Iraqi Electricity Ministry in Baghdad.

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The Portland Observer

## Emergency Declared in Turndown

### Oregon braces for more assistance, food stamps

As Oregon unemployment figures rise and the demand for temporary economic help such as cash assistance and food stamps hit record levels, the Oregon Department of Human Services is calling the situation an emergency.

New figures show the jobless rate rose to 9 percent in December, with the deepest declines in the leisure and hospitality and construction sectors.



Erinn Kelly-Siel

Over the same period, requests for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, which provides emergency cash and job training to low income parents, have in-

creased 16.4 percent from a year ago for a total number of 21,633 families. The number of people receiving food stamps benefits also continued to climb, increasing 15.5 percent statewide for a total of 520,650 people.

"We're treating this huge increase in client need as an emergency. That means we are redeploying staff to the areas of the state with the greatest need so we can take care of the new clients coming through the door," says Erinn Kelly-Siel, interim director of the Children, Adults and Families division of the Department of Human Services.

To better serve the new clients, the division is also hiring 60

additional staff to help cover rising need.

Also starting next week, the division will roll out an improved intake process for food stamps and other benefits designed to provide same-day service, instead of wait times of a week or more for intake appointments.

Regionally, Washington County residents were hit hard in December, with 30.6 percent more people receiving emergency cash assistance over last year and 16.5 percent more requesting food stamps. Clackamas County had a 23.1 percent increase in cash assistance recipients and 18.1 percent for food stamps.

"We have incredibly dedi-

cated staff working really hard, and we're doing everything we can to find better ways to meet demand and get people the services they need right now," says Kelley-Siel.

One thing clients can do to speed the process of receiving assistance is to make sure to bring all necessary identification and paperwork. For most services a photo ID, Social Security number and proof of recent income are enough to start the process.

DHS also partners with SafeNet to help people to find local resources such as local food pantries or other assistance. The number is 800-SAFENET (800-723-3638).

## Extensive Layoffs at OHSU

Oregon Health & Science University says it is cutting at least 500 and as many as 1,000 more jobs.

OHSU President Joe Robertson told employees Thursday that investment earnings have dropped and revenue is growing more

slowly than expected.

He says the cuts would reduce costs by \$30 million to \$35 million in the current financial year.

In December, the Portland hospital and medical school complex announced hiring and salary freezes, cuts and delays in capital

spending, and other measures to deal with the deteriorating economy.

The institution describes itself as Portland's largest employer and the fourth largest in Oregon, excluding government, with 12,400 employees.

## Town Hall on Economic Crisis

Economists, labor leaders and community activists will share their perspectives on the economic crisis during a town hall meeting, Saturday, Jan. 31 from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the First Unitarian Church, 1011 S.W. 12th Ave.

The meeting is sponsored by a

coalition of individuals and organizations, including Jobs with Justice and Oregon Action.

"Community and worker advocates are fed up with an economic stimulus plan that has reaped benefits for billionaires but has left workers and low in-

come families behind," said Greg Margolis, a spokesperson for the group.

Margolis said the Town Hall will serve as a forum to educate one another about the crisis and to create alternatives for a more just economy.

## Police Officer Rescues Woman

A Portland police officer went into a burning home Monday and pulled a 44-year-old woman to safety.

Gedemynas Jakubauskas spotted the fire near Southeast Division and 113th Avenue while on patrol.

After residents told the officer someone remained inside, he managed to crawl into the house and find Jana Meyers lying at the top of basement stairs.

Meyers was taken to a hospital, where she was treated for smoke inhalation and possible burns.

The officer was treated for smoke inhalation at Portland Adventist Hospital and released.



Gedemynas Jakubauskas rescued a local woman from a fire.

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—Rosa Parks

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