

# Tepid Reception for Racial Impacts Proposal

Sponsor finds unease when 'race' enters fray

BY JAKE THOMAS  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

When Oregon voters jumped on the "get tough on crime" bandwagon in the 1990s by approving Measure 11, they might not have fully understood where it was headed.

Measure 11, which removes the sentencing leeway a judge can give a defendant and imposes mandatory minimum prison terms for certain crimes, has caused Oregon's prison population to swell.

The Department of Correc-



Chip Shields

tions estimated that inmates in Oregon prisons will grow by 41 percent because of the measure. This has been particularly hard for Oregon's minority

population. African Americans make up nearly 10 percent of the state's prison population, even though they are about 2 percent of the population. Hispanics make up over 12 percent of inmates, while making up only about 10 percent of the general population.

Rep. Chip Shields, D-Portland, hoped to shine light on the issue this year by introducing House Bill 2352, which requires the state to issue a racial and ethnic impact statement any time voters or legislators consider a change to sentencing policy, like Measure 11.

Such a statement would be similar to an environmental or fiscal impact statement, which use existing data to predict how

pending legislation will affect the natural world or the state's coffers.

Shields hopes that the bill will make lawmakers and the public aware of the potential for unintended consequences from a change in sentencing policy.

The bill has received a tepid reception so far, which is surprising for a state that prides itself for its tolerance and progressiveness, and recently gave the Democratic Party super majorities in both houses last election.

It passed the House Rules Committee without a recommendation as to passage, with an amendment from the Oregon District Attorneys Association, which would require an addi-

tional statement detailing how minorities might be disproportionately affected by a certain type of crime.

"I've got to do some more educating of the body on the bill," said Shields.

One of the issues he says he has encountered has been his fellow legislators' unease with the phrase "racial impact statement."

"You throw the word 'race' around and it freaks people out," he said.

With the legislature set to adjourn later this month it's dubious that Oregon will join four other states that require racial impact statements.

Iowa, a state even more lilywhite than Oregon, passed

similar legislation last year, which was championed by the state's only black legislator, Rep. Wayne Ford (D-Des Moines.).

Ford said that Oregon is in a similar situation with Iowa having most of its minority populations in its urban centers. This arrangement might make rural legislators less sensitive to the issue.

But Ford overcame this by calling enough attention to the fact that people of color make up 37 percent of the prison population, although they are less than 8 percent of the general population.

"I think many politicians on both sides of the aisle got sick of this," he said.

# Lents Outrage Kills Proposed Stadium

continued from Front

structure with the aim of attracting private investments.

In 2008 alone, over \$5 million generated from the Lents urban renewal area has gone toward bolstering businesses in the area, and hundreds of thousands of dollars have gone toward loans to first-time homebuyers, landlords who wanted to fix up their properties, and affordable housing providers.

Had the stadium deal gone through there would have been \$42.3 million less money in the urban renewal pot for these projects.

Last week, during a public hearing before the Lents Urban Renewal Advisory Committee - whose input on the plan was considered critical by City Hall - public outrage over the proposal boiled over.

Before the meeting protesters shouted "1-2-3-4, Paulson wants to rob the poor," in reference to Merritt Paulson, the son of former Bush Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson and Beavers owner who has been negotiating with the city to bring a ma-



PHOTO BY JAKE THOMAS/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Sia Sellu was one of hundreds of voices who attended a rally and public meeting last week to kill a proposal to use southeast Portland's Lents Park for construction of a new home for the Portland Beavers.

major league soccer franchise to Portland.

At the beginning of the meeting Paulson was booed before speaking to a crowd of about 250 people.

Commissioner Randy Leonard, who represented Lents in the Legislature in the

1990s, couldn't make it through his pitch before the crowd without being viciously heckled, with epithets like "traitor" hurled at him.

Leonard attempted to direct his pitch at the image problem Lents has grappled with over the years. He mentioned nega-

tive portrayals of the neighborhood in the media, and how a new stadium would cement Lents' status as an up-and-coming part of town.

But Leonard was also booed, causing him to storm out with a scowl on his face and his fists clenched.

Afterwards, the crowd was polled on their support for the stadium. Seventy percent opposed it.

Then came 45 minutes of testimony, where residents bashed the proposal on grounds that it would flood the neighborhood with noise and people, encroach

on a cherished park in a part of town already lacking open spaces, and rested on shaky financials.

The next morning Paulson withdrew his offer to put the baseball stadium in Lents, citing the lack of community support.

Tuesday, Lents Park was formally out of the running and the city said it would take the next month to find a third site to build a minor league baseball stadium.

The list includes vacant land along the Willamette River that was Terminal One for the Port of Portland, Delta Park, the Portland Expo Center, Portland Meadows Gateway and property currently used as administration offices for Portland Public Schools next to the Rose Quarter.

Adams has announced that the city would vote on the proposal to bring MLS to Portland as a separate issue Wednesday, meaning that the Beavers will need to find a home if city council approved the deal that would put the soccer team in PGE Park, the Beavers' current home.



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