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OPINION

A Good Investment for Our Community

Diversity training is a step we should embrace

BY ROY JAY

Most recently, there have been articles and comments about Mayor Charlie Hales, Chief Police Mike Reese and other police officers attending a race diversity conference for white men in Welches that cost an estimated \$56,000.

Now there two sides to this coin. Critics complain that taxpayer's money was spent for a few days to have a select group of white men, in a remote location, hear and feel the message of being comfortable with diversity. On the other side, there are some people of color in an uproar as to



why the conference only included white men.

Let's face facts, Portland and Oregon are known as the whitest city and state on the west coast. It's nothing to be ashamed about nor nothing to brag about. The secret here is how both public and private sector leadership know how to be inclusive rather than exclusive.

But the demographics of Portland and the entire state is changing. This is not your grandfather's state. You can't use the same methods in today's game. By learning about diversity, Mayor Hales, Chief Reese and others have taken some important steps in a journey that will help make our entire community better.

Many people do not realize that diversity in your workplace and neighborhoods affect you in many different ways. A well-known Portland law firm told me several years

ago that one of the reasons that they were able to land a huge national retailer was simply because they had a diverse workforce including women, gay, lesbian, African American and Latinos. They went beyond traditional "good faith" hiring efforts and decided to walk the walk and talk the talk. It paid off in big dividends.

When strategic evaluators are looking at cities and regions for business expansion, investment and other opportunities they look far beyond the customary facts and figures. Is your company, your city, your organization a leader or a follower?

So let's get back to the \$56,000, a drop in the bucket and good investment for the future of our community. After all, I have seen charity golf tournaments that cost five to ten times more with little if any benefit for the end user.

A retreat to help you become a

better leader and grasp issues of race with a much clearer understanding and appreciation speaks volumes.

Please do not think that Chief Reese and Mayor Hales are taking bold steps. Simply go to DiversityInc.com and read the articles entitled "Ask the White Guy." This website, magazine and blog were started well over 30 years ago by a white guy who recognized the need and benefit of inclusion. He simply decided to take it to the next level and has millions of readers and partners.

It is important for everyone to try and have an understanding of our neighbor's culture. Every day you need to put on a jacket to embrace others of different genders, cultures and lifestyles.

Portland is changing and the old system will kill us all and put us further behind other cities that are not drinking the same old Kool Aid. At the same time, hopefully,

the next step is to have a diversity workshop retreat in which people of color can also sit and become more informed and educated about how to live in a more harmonious atmosphere.

This cannot be a one day street. Anyone that simply tells you that it's all the white man's fault has the same dumb mentality as the person that points to African Americans and Latinos and want to label them all as "less than."

Yes, Portland has many Donald Sterlings in our community. They are in all colors, shapes and sizes. It is our community responsibility to help remove the cancer of racism before it spreads to our children and grandchildren. A weekend retreat on diversity for city officials is just a start, but commended.

Roy Jay is President and chief executive officer of the African American Chamber of Commerce as well as the Alliance of Minority Chambers.

A win in the Long Struggle for Urban Jobs

Bipartisan coming together for progress

BY MARC H. MORIAL

Just when it seemed Congress was no longer capable of working together on any level to serve the best interests of the American people, on July 9



members of both parties in the House of Representatives joined forces to pass a new bipartisan jobs bill, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

With the passage of this legislation, millions of unemployed and under-employed workers and urban youth of color can now receive the job and skills training, as well as the support services they need to chart a path to a better future. The vote in the House was 415-6. The Senate passed the bill in June with a 95-3 majority, and it is now headed to President Obama's desk for signing.

The decade-plus struggle for Congressional renewal of the nation's preeminent job training legislation was finally won thanks in large part to the tenacity, commitment and leadership of Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York and Rep. Chaka Fattah of Pennsylvania.

As co-sponsors of the law, a bill advocated and championed by the National Urban League, they helped craft bi-partisan legislation that responds to the education, skills, and employment needs of millions of individuals who are unemployed or under-employed and face multiple barriers to employment.

The advocacy work by the National Urban League and its affiliates was the impetus for many of the local youth provisions that are part of the law, as well as provisions for funding to non-profit organizations that operate effective workforce training programs. These include a focus on the needs of youth, aged 16-24, including high school drop-outs, and individuals with multiple barriers to employ-

ment, such as ex-offenders, youth who are in or have aged out of the foster care system and the long-term unemployed.

Passage of this legislation represents a special victory for communities of color where unemployment continues to outpace the national average. In June, overall unemployment fell to 6.1 percent and the rate for whites is now at 5.3 percent. But African American unemployment remains in double-digits at 10.7 percent. The rate for Hispanics is 7.8 percent. Most disturbingly, African American and Hispanic youth continue to experience extremely high rates of unemployment.

The job provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act will help reduce youth

unemployment, strengthen our economy and give millions of young people of color access to the education and skills needed for success in work and in life.

The legislation also complements the National Urban League's extraordinary \$100 million, five-year Jobs Rebuild America initiative, which is bringing together resources from the government, business and non-profit sectors to help bring jobs and hope back to hard-pressed communities—reducing unemployment, creating jobs and expanding economic opportunity in 50 communities throughout the nation.

The reauthorization of the law also a victory for bipartisanship and

responsible government action, two things that have been lacking recently in Washington.

As President Obama commented, "Today's vote helps ensure that our workers can earn the skills employers are looking for right now and that American businesses have the talent pool it takes to compete and win in our global economy. I look forward to signing it into law and hope Congress will continue to come together to make progress for America's working families."

We intend to keep up the fight to see that they do.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

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THE LAW OFFICES OF
Patrick John Sweeney, P.C.

Patrick John Sweeney
Attorney at Law

1549 SE Ladd, Portland, Oregon

Portland: (503) 244-2080

Hillsboro: (503) 244-2081

Facsimile: (503) 244-2084

Email: Sweeney@PDXLawyer.com