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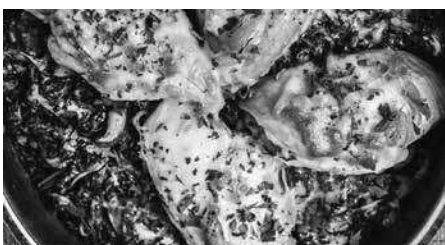
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What's on your list today?®

LOCAL NEWS

Measuring and Measuring Up Racism in Multnomah County's justice system

A new report on racial and ethnic disparities (RED) in Multnomah County's criminal justice system has been attracting plenty of attention in the last couple of weeks. The RED report, using data from agencies such as the police, the district attorney's office and the courts, shows that at every stage on the journey through the justice system alarming disparities are either produced or perpetuated for most people of color.

To put it another way, the report clearly concludes that the justice system in Multnomah County is not equal and punishes you more severely if you are black. That information will not be a surprise to many, particularly not to communities of color, but it is helpful to quantify the extent of the problem.

Problems demand solutions, and while there's been acknowledgement for some time by many of those who work in the local justice system that discrimination and disparities are part of the system, there hasn't been much action. This is not – in the main sense – the overt racism of a few bad apples who openly admit to treating certain individuals differently because of race. This is not the old Jim Crow laws that explicitly discriminated against people of color. This is systemic; it is an unconscious bias, based on stereotypes and assumptions that impact the hundreds of decision made by justice system actors. Fixing this problem will take time and effort, but fundamentally it needs to start with our city and county leaders taking ownership of the problem



Pursuing Justice

BY BOBBIN SINGH

and making a commitment to address systemic racism. This has yet to occur in any meaningful way.

Last week saw the closing of the filing period for candidates who plan to run in the upcoming election. Sixteen people are asking for you to vote for them as mayor of Portland, 13 want your support in the race for three seats on the Multnomah County Commission, and the district attorney is running unopposed. There's been a shocking lack of public comment from many of those running for office in Portland and countywide about the racial and ethnic disparities report and how they plan to go about eliminating the inequities it identifies. Without energy and willingness to drive change on the part of those who are elected there's a grave danger that the RED report is shelved and nothing is done.

That's not to say that county and city leadership have all the answers. Addressing racial and ethnic disparities in our justice system requires not only engagement by elected officials with communities of color but genuine community oversight of the process of reform. Those who oversee the

system and those who work within it have to carry their share of the blame and the responsibility for change. But it would be a mistake to think that they can produce all the answers when they were part of creating these disparities in the first place.

The conclusions of the RED report should make you angry. It is the first time that we have a report that clearly shows disparities and discrimination clear across our criminal justice system. It is an indictment of that system. The best thing you can do during the next two months of the campaign season is to help raise the issue. If you meet a candidate, ask them about the report. Have they read it? What do they think we should do about racism in our justice system? What meaningful steps do they suggest? Their answer – or their silence – will speak volumes.

Here's a link to a backgrounder on the RED Report: static1.squarespace.com/static/524b5617e4b0b106ced5f067/t/56bd23abd210b88e65ae07b1/1455236012080/RED+Report+Backgrounder+Up-

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Oregon Removes Confederate Flag

Leaders of the Oregon Legislature have followed up on their promise to take down a symbol of the Confederacy from outside Oregon's Capitol in Salem.

Rep. Lew Frederick, the only black lawmaker in the Oregon House and a representative of north and northeast Portland, proposed removing Mississippi's state flag last year after a picture of the man charged in the South Carolina black church massacre showed up with him posing with a Confederate flag.

South Carolina later voted to remove the Confederate flag from its Capitol after a prolonged controversy, but Mississippi's state flag is unique as the sole remaining state flag which still depicts the Confederate emblem in its design.

Frederick, who grew up around the Confederate Flag in the South, said he saw the symbol as a way to taunt African Americans and remind them of the racism and attachment to racism that still exists for those who carry or

display the flag.

Oregon Legislative leaders first wanted to give the state of Mississippi a chance to change the flag on its own sometime this year. That didn't happen and the flag was taken down on March 4 after the state Legislature adjourned.

The action was taken by Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, and House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, whose House district is also in north and northeast Portland.